

# **The Authority of the Boot-Maker**

**Why I am an Anarchist**

Mal Content

2014

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**For my dad, who once said: “You give anarchists a bad name!”**

This book is made entirely from recycled surplus-value the bourgeoisie carelessly left lying about.

# About the author

Mal Content has got a job and doesn't need a wash or a haircut, thanks, but the world does owe him a living.

“Does it follow that I reject all authority? Far from me such a thought. In the matter of boots, I defer to the authority of the boot-maker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or the engineer. For such or such special knowledge I apply to such or such a savant. But I allow neither the boot-maker nor the architect nor the savant to impose his authority upon me. I listen to them freely and with all the respect merited by their intelligence, their character, their knowledge, reserving always my incontestable right of criticism and censure. I do not content myself with consulting a single authority in any special branch; I consult several; I compare their opinions, and choose that which seems to me the soundest. But I recognise no infallible authority, even in special questions; consequently, whatever respect I may have for the honesty and the sincerity of such or such an individual, I have no absolute faith in any person. Such a faith would be fatal to my reason, to my liberty, and even to the success of my undertakings; it would immediately transform me into a stupid slave, an instrument of the will and interests of others.”

— Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*

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# 1. Content warning.

As I'm in the business of setting the world to rights, it's been necessary to refer to just about every way in which humans are habitually miserable to each other, and hopefully the chapter headings will give the reader a fair idea of what to expect. I've tried not to be gratuitous or graphic but if something especially nasty is coming up you may see this: *(C.W.)*

I'm truly sorry the world is such a fucking awful place, we're working on it; give us a hand if you can.

## 2. Introduction.

“The authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual.”

— Galileo Galilei.

There are many different strands of anarchism with different emphases on individual versus collective responsibility, and varied models for the allocation of resources and division of labour in a free society. Analysis and comparison of these is outside the scope of this work but all stress self-government, equality and solidarity; I don't believe any of them are mutually exclusive but might comfortably co-exist and complement each other. The theory and practice of anarchism has evolved with the experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the challenge of technology, it must continue to do so.

There are however, two oxymoronic labels in widespread use today (but mainly on the internet) that are not part of the anarchist tradition at all but manifestations of the far right. ‘Anarcho-capitalism’ is a plea for privatisation of all state functions, allowing completely unregulated capital accumulation while retaining property, wage labour, usury and all the evils that we as anarchists despise. Insofar as all the privileges of property are guaranteed by the threat of force it just boils down to breaking the state's monopoly on violence.<sup>1</sup> ‘National anarchism’ is nothing more than a front for a few fascist splinter groups, exploiting the muddy waters of cyberspace to ingratiate with naïve elements of the counterculture. Both of these tendencies are drowning in their own contradictions; trust me, anarchists need capital and nation like a mongoose needs an inkwell.

Anarchists are argumentative critters and will not necessarily agree with anything I have written; I don't claim to represent the position of any group or current, nor is this aimed at people who post on Libcom, but rather at those who, having realised that everything they've been told about society is false, are still looking for explanations as to how we got here and what we can do about it. Most of it came straight out of my head and on to the page, so I've done my best to check dates, facts and figures but I welcome corrections. As I'm never entirely sure how things get into my head in the first place, it's highly likely I've unintentionally plagiarised a sentence or two. If you find one of these please get in touch and I will insert the appropriate attribution.

Freeing yourself from cultural hegemony sometimes leaves you feeling as if you've swum too far from shore. I've escaped from a cult into which I was born, they would like to bring me back no doubt, but there isn't anything to go back to. I'm no longer capable of viewing the world through their manufactured conceptual framework. I don't consider myself remotely idealistic either; having rejected the status quo I'm looking for the most practical route to a benign, libertarian socialism that leaves every individual free to develop their full potential and gives humanity as

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<sup>1</sup> States already sub-contract much of their violence to private corporations, which provide security guards, refugee holding facilities, prisons, mental hospitals and other forms of involuntary detention.

a whole the best opportunity to advance. I am an anarchist because there's nothing else I can be without resorting to hypocrisy or self-delusion; because all ideologies which give one person power over others are fundamentally flawed and thoroughly discredited; because it's the only philosophy and social theory I can derive from logical first principles.

If you don't actually know any anarchists yet, don't be shy, enter an autonomous space or project and the chances are you will be treated with kindness and respect, feel right at home and want to get involved.

“Historically, all changes in civilisation have happened when the regular people just turned their backs on what was normal the day before”

— Grant Sharkey: ‘Ignoramus’



### 3. A word about terminology.

I use the word ‘bourgeoisie’ a lot; I refer to the class that controls the means of production and profits from the labour of others. If this term seems a bit old fashioned, what do *you* call them? Just substitute your own synonym and we’ll understand each other.

By ‘means of production’ I mean not just the production of things, but the production of value. I refer to commodities as ‘things’ whose primary purpose is exchange, but of course they may not be actual things — such as a pair of Doc. Martens — but ephemera such as a tune or a massage, whose value in exchange is relative to the exchange-values of things.

By ‘Working Class’ I don’t imply that a person is currently engaged in waged labour, nor do I consider any cultural factors; I only mean an individual with no direct access to the means of production, who has nothing to sell but herself. Such people might consider themselves ‘middle class’,<sup>1</sup> be employed in unpaid domestic labour, caring for dependants, belong to the unemployed pool of reserve labour, be dependant on the state in its attempts to humanise capitalism, or be of the underclass, whose function is to terrify the workers into scurrying about their business. I also include sole proprietors, peasant farmers, artists, artisans, self-employed service providers, academics, medical professionals and so on; as these folk must submit their produce and services to the capitalist market and in most cases pay rent to landlords, interest to banks and taxes to the state. I do not subscribe to the Marxist concepts of ‘petty bourgeois’ or ‘lumpen proletariat’; I will argue that anyone who is not extracting value from capital is engaged in adding value and power to it, visibly or invisibly. It is here that the lines of class struggle are drawn.

There is a special category; those whose purpose is to hire, fire, impede or constrain us against our will: politicians, judges, political appointees, managers, cops, screws, fascists, grasses and scabs. These are the proxies of the bourgeoisie and they come very cheap, as without such people the exploitation of billions of their fellows would be impossible. Whatever their origins or motives, they have chosen their side.

“I have made the point many times — if you cannot see what side you’re on, from the wrong side of 20,000 riot shields, going to work in a bus covered with wire mesh, all the ballots in the world are not going to convince you.”

— Dave Douglass: to the March 14 Communist Forum.

Before the 1917 Russian Revolutions,<sup>2</sup> the terms ‘socialism’, ‘communism’ and ‘social democracy’ were used more or less interchangeably by Marxists and anarchists alike. They represented a proposed model of social organisation which did not actually exist anywhere at the time, and most of the arguments were about how to get there from here. All three terms have since been

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<sup>1</sup> This just means they haven’t made up their mind which side they’re on. They’re compelled to look up to some people and down on others — sounds awful, I’m sorry for them.

<sup>2</sup> The February popular revolution and the October Bolshevik counter-revolution.

bandied about with equal conviction by our allies, our worst enemies and all stations in between; they should be treated with the utmost suspicion, and never taken alone as a description of any ideology or political praxis. I realise this could get incredibly confusing, so when I describe something as 'communist', I mean exactly that, but I capitalise the word to refer to any organisation with 'Communist' in its title. Personally I like the ambiguity, labels are nothing, you can think for yourself.

I define 'liberalism' as the philosophy which professes to support a formal equality and freedom under the law, whilst allowing actual inequality to perpetuate itself. It takes no account of existing class antagonisms, the historical origins of inequality or the intersecting structural forms of oppression that deepen it. It holds that structures designed to oppress and exploit can be reformed through oversight and political representation.

## 4. Awakening.

“Thought is revolutionary: it breaks down barriers, transforms institutions, and leads onward to a larger life. To be afraid of thought is to be afraid of life, and to become an instrument of darkness and oppression.”

J. T. Murphy — ‘The Workers’ Committee: An Outline of its Principles and Structure’: Sheffield Workers’ Committee, 1917.

For some of us it starts as a cop-out; appalled at the things that are done in your name, and insulted by the bullshit spouted in justification, you gradually work your way through all the political alternatives and find them wanting. Come election time you realise that there isn’t a candidate whose platform you can condone, much less endorse, which creates a dilemma. We are reminded that people died to get us a vote and some parties will seem, on the surface, much worse than others. You might vote tactically, but once you’ve endorsed a candidate with your little X, you can hardly complain if they do precisely as they have promised (it does happen occasionally) and much of their programme will be hateful to you. Calling yourself an anarchist at least saves you from participating in the tedious discussions of whether one politician is more or less of a crook than another, while swerving the charge of apathy.

I started spoiling the ballot in 1997 in protest against this failure of political representation. Rather than just apathetically staying away I participated in campaigns to promote mass spoiling, in the hope that one day ‘none of the above’ might be the overall winner. It’s a short jump from there to the realisation that ‘the representation of the people’ is an impossibility, that the existence of a political caste with no qualification to do anything but govern is part of the problem, that the state is an institution that exists purely to sustain a hierarchy of power relationships, and that these are mediated through the soulless, inhuman mechanisms of economics.

All any democratically elected government can do is manage the economy to the convenience of its investors or it will very quickly be replaced. What is the economy for anyway? To balance production and demand, channel human effort and technology in beneficial directions, preserve the environment, distribute resources to where they are most needed and generally keep everything running smoothly? It does none of these things; the world’s oldest and most developed economies can’t even feed and house their own people. The economy is not functional but political, its sole purpose is to maintain the dominance of the few over the many, and this it manages extremely well. By guaranteeing title to land and enforcing debt, by maintaining the twin fictions of private property and the public<sup>1</sup> interest, the state holds one life more important than another, this I find morally unsupportable.

Now I like truth, I like it a lot; it serves no-one but those who seek it for its own sake. Any involvement with political parties or ideological tendencies inevitably leads to forsaking truth in

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘public’ as in -interest, -property, -safety, -ownership, etc, means nothing more than ‘state’; in practice, the narrow range of interests the executive serves (yes, it’s the bourgeoisie!)

favour of manoeuvring your party ahead of the others, or presenting your ideology in a better light, exaggerating its strengths and concealing its weaknesses. Why would you want to do that?

## 5. Anarchy and human nature.

‘Human nature’ is the concept that all people are the same at some fundamental level, so that they will tend to react similarly and predictably to any given stimulus. Not only does this fly in the face of everyday experience, it turns out that everyone who believes in human nature has a different idea of what it amounts to.

- If you believe as some do that people are fundamentally bad: selfish, lazy, dishonest, aggressive, you could make a very good case for not giving them power over each other.
- If I have to play this game I’d rather give people the benefit of the doubt and believe they are fundamentally good: that their first inclination is to be honourable, sociable and co-operative and to rise to any challenge. Therefore they require no more supervision than they would voluntarily request from someone they felt had their best interests at heart.
- If you’re hedging your bets and believe that some individuals are fundamentally bad and others fundamentally good, then you would expect that it would be the bad ones who would seek power most eagerly and always rise to the top in competitive and hierarchical environments.
- If you believe that people are neither good nor bad, but shaped by their environment and experiences, the very worst thing you could do to them is give them incentives to look down on others or defer to those they have no other reason to follow.

In all cases, anarchy is the only logical conclusion.

The myth of human nature paves the way for essentialism. This is a logical fallacy that categorises humans according to relatively trivial distinctions: observable physiology, such as skin colour or reproductive biology, cultural factors like religion and language, even sexual preference or musical taste.

Once people have been arbitrarily sorted into groups, the error is compounded; each member is supposed to possess other innate characteristics common to that group. Although these groups don’t actually exist, except in individual and collective consciousness, people are just as likely to identify themselves as a member, as to be seen that way by others.

Essentialism is very deeply ingrained,<sup>1</sup> “it seems to make sense”, not least because we are so used to it. Pattern recognition is a useful social and survival skill: remembering faces and voices, learning a dance, or being able to tell a shark from a dolphin, so if you’ve often observed certain patterns of behaviour in, for example, B.M.W. drivers, you might conclude they’re all like it.

Essentialism forms the basis from which racism, sexism, nationalism and homophobia are constructed, for political reasons I shall explore.

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, not everyone does it.

## 6. The Nation-State: holding the lid on Class War.

If it were possible to persuade people that the geo-political boundary surrounding their birthplace enclosed some special quality lacking in other regions, and that its language and history raised them above their fellow beings, then they might be further misled that they shared common interest<sup>1</sup> with all those equally blessed, regardless of position; that they had better throw in their lot with their rulers and exploiters than with those toiling under similar conditions elsewhere.

No nation ever came into being because a mass of people got together and recognised a common identity. To the best of my knowledge there has never been a demand for a gay state, or a state for stamp and coin collectors, though the latter would enjoy obvious benefits. Historically constructed cultural identities such as Scottish, Kurdish, Basque and Catalan seek a state from time to time but soldier on without one. The Irish, Jewish and Romani Diaspora have existed as distinct communities across borders for centuries. The Zionists got their way thanks to the strategic interests of pre-existing states.

A nation-state is rather established when a small group of people, with the intent to become a ruling class, wields sufficient power to dominate all the others within a territory, and exclude competing interests. What then defines 'nationals' of that domain is the simple fact of being ruled by that elite. It will make their task easier if they can portray their rule as benign, with a constitution conferring freedoms and privileges on the ruled, then stitch together a group identity that cuts across the classes, drawing on linguistics, folklore, historic battles and the scribblings of more or less romantic intellectuals.

The state would like everyone to identify with the nation, an entity that covers both the wealthy and the destitute, so that they accept its acts as their own. It is *our* army that must go to war for the bosses, and *our* economy that benefits when my governor declares a profit. It is *us* that become more competitive if I take a pay cut or lose my job. When a government takes upon itself draconian powers of surveillance, arrest and detention it is protecting *our freedom*. The substitution of this mirage for the aspirations of the individual citizen allows individuals in turn to substitute for the nation. Every so often eleven footballers or a single Olympian will be *us*; Churchill, Hitler and Stalin all became the living embodiment of their respective nations.

The state seeks to persuade each of its subjects that they have at least one enemy in common with it, which they fear more. The enemy has ranged from Communists to drug barons, gang members, paedophiles and terrorists, latterly 'Islamists'. The enemy will be fearsome, alien and ill-defined. Nationalists make no distinction between the state's competing interests, internal and external, and that which they personally fear. Sometimes the state even claims to be waging war on an abstract noun: drugs, terror, knife crime etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Mutual dependency, which can exist alongside class conflict, is not the same as common interest. To confuse the two is a terrible mistake.

Here I'm accepting the legal fiction of 'the state' as a convenient shorthand for the regime of politicians, bureaucrats and their sponsors, being no more than people motivated by material self-interest, vanity and other psychology.<sup>2</sup> The state can be either subject or object depending on whether a politician wants to sound campaigning or authoritarian. A species of conservative politician in the Western world sets up the state as an 'Aunt Sally', blaming it for limiting their freedom to exploit whilst freely using all its coercive apparatus to that end. The reforming politician can only demand that the state rectify or mitigate the injustices thrown up by class antagonism — it will disappoint them because that isn't what it's for. Both varieties posit nation simultaneously as competing interest to the state and client of it. The nation is then a mythical consensus in which property, patriarchy, wage labour and class are taken as read. It requires a fiercely revisionist view of history and assumes the superiority of its culture.

Where a region is deprived of economic investment, where an indigenous ethnicity is persecuted and its culture suppressed there will be a demand for 'home rule', but seldom a call for the abolition of property or for workers' self-management. All demands for regional self-determination amount to appointing locally-sourced bosses who exploit regional tensions to recruit followers, offering a more homely form of exploitation. If a sub-nation seeks independent statehood on the grounds of cultural difference, the parent state may gamble on a referendum, where it wishes to emphasise its democratic credentials, otherwise there will be a crude test of force, and no need to list here the bloody wars democratic states have waged on discontented sections of their populace. No state voluntarily cedes territory it can hold, because the smaller it becomes, the less credible its sales pitch.

Patriotism and nationalism are always invoked by a ruling class realising almost too late that it has squeezed its subjects a little too hard, they will now be asked to further sacrifice in the interests of the nation. Even the great religions, with their emphasis on universal values and the common origins of mankind, are nothing but vehicles for grubby tribalism, the elders of each sect rallying its adherents to help put their man in charge. It's nearly always a man, we'll examine that in due course.

Incredibly they are still able to pull off this trick in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although the present day nation-state is in thrall to the common interest of the bourgeoisie, whose reach is global. It is in the interests of that class for these entities to compete for its favour and it is content to let them go to war with each other, as it profits from both the means of destruction and reconstruction, both are good for business. Advocates of capitalism need nationalism and patriotism, they need borders to keep the Working Class from moving about and looking for a better deal, whilst capital flows freely around the globe. Borders allow differentials in prices and wages that keep raw materials cheap and boost the mark-up on manufacturing. They are well aware of its cyclic nature and periodic crises, they accept the inevitability of war, to destroy surplus production and test new technology; they know their economy would not last long without defence industries.

"This ideological construct of a unified "national interest" includes the fiction of a "neutral" set of laws, which conceals the exploitative nature of the system of power we live under. Under corporate capitalism the relationships of exploitation are mediated by the political system to an extent unknown under previous class systems. Under chattel slavery and feudalism, exploitation was concrete and personalized in

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<sup>2</sup> In fact many people appreciate this and will say as much, but it doesn't stop them identifying with their nation

the producer's relationship with his master. The slave and peasant knew exactly who was screwing them. The modern worker, on the other hand, feels a painful pounding sensation, but has only a vague idea where it is coming from."

— Kevin A. Carson: 'The Iron Fist behind the Invisible Hand — Corporate Capitalism as a State-Guaranteed System of Privilege'.

Socialists who reject 'trickle down economics' must also reject national interest. Whoever controls the means of production will be at odds with those who operate it, as the strength of the nation-state rests on getting them to do more for less. Its most important function is to prevent all the producers from recognising their common interest and acting together as a class; the disastrous Bolshevik experiment and all subsequent attempts to create socialism in one country have proved beyond doubt that there can be no such thing as a 'workers' state'.

"They (anarchists) say: 'abolish the state and capital will go to the devil.' We propose the reverse."

— Friedrich Engels 1867

Chillingly prophetic, but not in quite the way he intended.

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or sub-nation.



## 7. Freedom, equality, and the law.

The base myths on which the class system rests are those of ‘freedom of choice’, and ‘equality under the law’.

“The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”

— Anatole France 1894

Almost all political groupings these days claim to represent freedom and most promote equality. The states they manage are held to account and found wanting in practice — hardly surprising as capitalism won’t work without careful management of human activity, and unequal access to the produce thereof. So what do they, and we, mean by freedom and equality?

Each method of production creates the legal<sup>1</sup> and political<sup>2</sup> framework best suited to it, so as Feudalism once gave rise to the Manorial system, capitalism has given us liberal democracy, one adult one vote. Just as you have your few pounds/Euros to spend in the marketplace on your preferred brand of mobile phone or breakfast cereal you’re allowed to choose between a couple of interchangeable management styles. It won’t make any difference, the market will decide, now if instead of a few pounds you had a few billion to invest in the market, you would have the management’s ear.

It is a plank of bourgeois ideology that equality of means and freedom of choice are incompatible. The market is an exchange of commodities<sup>3</sup> by individuals, whose freedom is defined by liberal democracy. The infrastructure that maintains liberal democracy depends for its survival on the market. Governments are custodians of the market, being their guarantee of the survival of liberal democracy. They can only allow such freedoms as are compatible with the functioning of the market, as determined by bourgeois economics. That market, in turn, requires that such freedoms as liberal democracy allows must compete in the market, as commodities, subject to the relative purchasing power of those who desire them. Therefore the freedom of each individual must remain subject to the purchasing power of that individual. It follows that political democracy precludes economic democracy, and economic freedom negates political freedom. Like a perverse *Yin-Yang*, the free market and liberal democracy are embedded in each other, grow out of each other, and defeat one another.

The producing class had to be freed from all obligations to and rights over the means of production<sup>4</sup> before they were free to sell their labour on the open market. By the same token, the

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<sup>1</sup> If you plan to exploit a particular group, enshrine their oppression in law.

<sup>2</sup> Where everyone works for the state as in the former U.S.S.R., in effect a giant corporation with a monopoly on production, the workers don’t need a choice of parties, only an administrative ladder to climb.

<sup>3</sup> Social labour and its produce.

<sup>4</sup> In the process they were effectively freed from obligation *to each other* belying their existence *as a class*. The bourgeoisie knows bloody well that it’s a class and so does everyone else, because it always acts as one.

employing class had to be freed from all responsibility for the producers' welfare, beyond paying their due wages.

Thus the two parties to the contract come together of their own free will, as equals. A benign state ensures agreements are adhered to and debts are paid, using a set of laws that apply equally to everyone, and elected representatives run the infrastructure for the benefit of both groups.

Most readers will already appreciate what a load of crap that is but if you're new to this, a simple thought experiment may help:

Imagine I'm crossing a barren terrain on foot, and come to a small trading post; I'm exhausted and can go no further without food and water so I ask for help to be on my way. The trader offers me a deal; in return for food, water and a bed for the night I must walk back across the desert at dawn and fetch as many such supplies as I can carry from his stores. When I protest the trader is indignant; from the goodness of his heart and for the benefit of others he's brought provisions to this desolate place at great inconvenience to himself, I can take it or leave it.

I have a choice, either to return whence I came, or press on into the desert and certain death; the law prohibits me from either taking what I need, as it belongs to the trader, or remaining and cluttering up his premises with my corpse. The following day I return with more food and water, it turns out I can carry enough for three days. I am again hungry, thirsty and in need of rest, I will have to make another deal or perish, the choice is mine. The law holds me to my bargain; so I eat, the trader eats, and retains enough surplus to entrap another weary traveller.

Before long there will be many of us making the trip back and forth, too many, the surplus is piling up so our work is less valuable and we have our rations cut. Although we are equals in the eyes of the law the trader insists we treat him with deference and pretend gratitude; he hints darkly that we may have to provide further services. None of us are going anywhere, we make the same journey every day to pay for that first meal, the law makes us totally dependent on someone who gives us nothing, and eats for free.

In this simple metaphor our desert trader's wealth is limited by the number of travellers he can enslave, and his capacity to store or utilise perishable goods. There is always the possibility one of us will break the law and cut his throat, he might select a few of us to protect him from the others, but he has a serious problem — we're all in the same position. What he needs is a means to create hierarchy, and accumulate not just wealth, but power, he needs an abstract measure of value.<sup>5</sup>

The 'father of liberalism' John Locke is credited with the concept of Social Contract, whereby people consent to be governed, giving up part of their liberty in return for a measure of security and utility. He considered that an implied or tacit consent could be assumed when a citizen utilises the products of social labour — by using the roads for example — or acquires property, given of course that property is guaranteed by the state. Locke correctly identified civil society as a mechanism for the protection of property, in which he included one's own life and labour. He believed the rights of property derived from labour (not necessarily your own) and had no problem with accumulation and the resulting inequality, since *the invention of money allowed for the accumulation of value* without waste. The Labour Theory of Property proceeds from the idea that since you own your self, you own the products of your labour. Common property — such as unenclosed land or minerals in the ground, is converted into private property by the addition of labour.

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<sup>5</sup> By this I mean a scalar quantity defined without reference to the usefulness, virtue or desirability of any act

Locke expanded this to justify conquest and slavery; he invested heavily in the transatlantic slave trade and co-wrote the constitution of Carolina, which enshrined human chattel slavery in law for the first time. Article 110 stated that “Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his Negro (*sic*) slaves, of what opinion or religion soever.” Other articles created hereditary nobility and serfdom, and a hierarchical voting system based on land ownership. Clearly the Social Contract was not construed on equal terms.

Some variant of Locke’s confused liberalism survives to this day. It’s accepted that life isn’t fair, that some of us are born disadvantaged: physically, mentally, socially or materially, yet fairness only requires that we are given the opportunity to play on the same field, by the same rules.

In ‘A Theory of Justice’ (1971), the Philosopher John Rawls postulates fairness in terms of a society of unequals, in which the rules were constructed as if by a hypothetical population who fully understood human affairs but did not yet know what place they would occupy in the pecking order. Of course this has never happened, rules have always been made by people who have already reached the pinnacle of advantage within their society. Nowadays those who define the principles of social justice and energetically sell them to the rest of us, in practice wield executive power over masses of their fellows that would have been unimaginable even to the absolute rulers of former times. Is there a society anywhere in the modern world where you can claim with any conviction to own your self?

Legal freedom is simply a license, granted by the state, to acquire and dispose of property in ways permitted by the state,<sup>6</sup> this is precisely the right the chattel-slave was denied.

Property is the option to restrict access to something, whether or not you have a use for it, and to be indifferent to the needs or wishes of others. It is a barrier: a fence, a lock, a software licence, a copyright, a parking meter. The value of a loaf of bread to the trader is not its capacity to satisfy hunger, but its capacity to put that hunger to the trader’s use. It fulfils its function, not by being eaten, but by sitting on a shelf until it rots or someone bargains for it.

In the Lockean sense that the self is property, it applied to a slave’s own flesh, time, their productive and creative abilities. Since the slave could not own or dispose of property, they could not enter into agreements, make contracts or keep promises, where they were permitted to marry, their families could be divided at their master’s convenience.<sup>7</sup> Although Locke defined the status of slaves, the same principle had always applied. In all states that practiced slavery hitherto, the definition of a ‘free man’ (*sic*) was in relation to less exalted individuals, the operators of the prevailing modes of production, who were assumed by default to be bonded. Women and children were invariably at someone else’s disposal.<sup>8</sup> ‘Liberty’ in Roman society meant absolute mastery over your estates — called *dominium* from *dominus*, meaning ‘slave-owner’.

Roman law evolved into feudalism; the mediaeval state didn’t grant rights so much as it recognised power, so property rights were indistinguishable from political power. Manorial liberty or ‘lordship’ included the right to set up your own gallows and conduct executions; it was obtained

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or thing. The good, the bad and the ugly find equivalence in exchange.

<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the bilge spouted by ‘freemen on the land’ and proponents of ‘lawful rebellion’, this is the only right states grant, and they do so by virtue of wielding sufficient force to withhold it. In almost every case, states claim sovereignty over property within their territories, including the people. Your right to dispose of your property remains at the state’s discretion, and can be overridden by the state’s (the ruling class’) interests, any of it can be expropriated by an act of the executive. All states reserve the right to enforce involuntary servitude on citizens convicted of offence, and many require involuntary military service at the end of their formal education.

<sup>7</sup> As in the poor-houses and prisons.

<sup>8</sup> And remain so over much of the world.

and maintained by force of arms. During the mercantile era, where the means of production was a captive person, their bondage granted freedom to the owner or their proxy to indulge every depravity, nothing that could feasibly be done to a human body was out of bounds, and contemporary accounts confirm this.

Locke has cast a long shadow; the line between legal slavery and legal freedom is in the subtle distinction between power based on a right to take life, and that deriving from the capacity to deny access to the necessities of life. The advocates of chattel slavery understood this all along, perhaps even better than their opponents:

“Mr. President, if we recognize no law as obligatory, and no government as legitimate, which authorizes involuntary servitude, we shall be forced to consign the world to anarchy; for no government has yet existed, which did not recognize and enforce involuntary servitude for other causes than crime. *To destroy that, we must destroy all inequality in property*; for as long as these differences exist, there will be an involuntary servitude of man to man. ... Your socialist is the true abolitionist, and only he fully understands his mission.”

— Virginia Senator Robert M.T. Hunter, March 25, 1850

My italics.

The modern state maintains social relations by putting the means of production, and thus all the products of social labour, behind the barrier of private property. All citizens have the same rights to acquire and dispose of property, but having the legal right to do something does not give you the means to do it. The state decrees that the barrier may only be accessed by exchanging its currency for the property-right, and that its subjects must compete for this social access by excluding others. The state would be in serious trouble if people stopped competing for its currency. The money economy is not concerned, as economists often claim, with allocation of scarce resources, but with the regulation of human activity by limiting access. The ‘laws of supply and demand’ may be illustrated with extreme examples such as sapphires or Stradivarius violins,<sup>9</sup> but capitalists manipulate scarcity and abundance to maximise their profit.

So workers and capitalists alike undercut each other, so that money comes to them rather than to someone else, then they outbid each other for things they want access to. Those who have the most money use their purchasing power to raise the barrier — e.g. when a district becomes ‘fashionable’ the rich will exclude the poor by paying over the odds for housing, then for goods and services. A capitalist’s investment in the latest production technology is a weapon to drive other capitalists out of the game. The reduction of all human relations to relative (purchasing) power means that no one can ever have enough, the barrier can never be too high for the richest, or too low for the poorest. The compulsion to inequality is endless. As abstract property, money

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<sup>9</sup> Only one of these examples has limited supply. Supply and demand do not simply determine price, because price also determines supply and demand. It may have been scientific curiosity that prompted 19<sup>th</sup> century chemist Edmond Frémy to synthesise rubies from molten alumina but they were commercially available by the 1880s. Today high quality sapphire is manufactured using the flame fusion process devised by his colleague Auguste Verneuil. The optical and electronics industries have created ever-expanding applications for such materials stimulating mass production. On the other hand, most gem-quality diamonds mined today go straight back into the ground, heavily guarded, to keep the price up.

is both the means of access and exclusion;<sup>10</sup> as abstract power, it is the ‘liberty’ of former times, freedom that can only be exercised by denying it to someone else.

So money turns freedom into a commodity. Without the means to realise it, freedom remains an abstraction, and many depravities can still be indulged for a price, or as agent of the state that claims sovereignty over your self. Freedom of movement, of association, of speech, access to the law, all these are for sale. A great deal of social unrest does not take place simply because the angriest people can’t afford to move around, have dependents to care for or are just too exhausted to fight. I’ve worked in factories where workers were not allowed to speak between breaks; and seen them visibly shrivel when some vindictive manager enters the room, no one speaks their mind to these people: “got kids to feed, you know”. The bourgeoisie are as dependent on us as babies at the breast, but would have it the other way round, and berate us for our dependency. Those who have direct access to the means of production are free, the rest get told what to do, seldom politely.

“The chief act of coercion by which the state exploits labour, ... is by restricting, on behalf of a ruling class, the labouring classes’ access to the means of production. By setting up such barriers, the ruling class is able to charge tribute in the form of unpaid labour, for allowing access on its own terms.”

— Kevin A. Carson: ‘Studies in Mutualist Political Economy’.

So the producing class having nothing to sell but themselves — their liberty — by the hour, are compensated with a portion of the total social product than they create, in the form of currency, just sufficient to reproduce the energy they have expended. The remainder lends the capitalist sufficient purchasing power to further bar access to the means of production and purchase ever more of the producers’ freedom. The pound in your pocket is not a reward for what you did yesterday, but a guarantee you will do it again tomorrow, as it represents a tiny fraction of the social product appropriated by the capitalist class.

“... it is evident that the laws of appropriation or of private property, ... become by their own inner and inexorable dialectic changed into their very opposite. The exchange of equivalents, the original operation with which we started, has now become turned round in such a way that there is only an apparent exchange. This is owing to the fact, first, that the capital which is exchanged for labour-power is itself but a portion of the product of others’ labour appropriated without an equivalent; and, secondly, that this capital must not only be replaced by its producer, but replaced together with an added surplus. ...

... At first the rights of property seemed to us to be based on a man’s own labour. At least, some such assumption was necessary since only commodity-owners with equal rights confronted each other, and the sole means by which a man (*sic*) could become possessed of the commodities of others, was by alienating his own commodities; and these could be replaced by labour alone. Now, however, property turns out

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<sup>10</sup> Tony Blair, on his election as the first Labour Prime Minister for 18 years, was immediately summoned to the other side of the globe to suck Rupert Murdoch’s cock, whereas a vagrant in the street will struggle to get a fair hearing from a passer-by.

to be the right, on the part of the capitalist, to appropriate the unpaid labour of others or its product, and to be the impossibility, on the part of the labourer, of appropriating his own product. The separation of property from labour has become the necessary consequence of a law that apparently originated in their identity.”

— Karl Marx: ‘Capital: A Critique of Political Economy’, Volume 1.

The inheritance of property perpetuates Locke’s hereditary nobility and serfdom. In July 2017 a mere five individuals<sup>11</sup> controlled as much of the world’s wealth as the poorest three and a half billion, with 1% of the population owning more than half of everything that is owned. It’s hard to ascribe meaning to wealth on this scale, but suffice it to say there are more slaves alive today in Europe, North America and the developing world, than at any time in human history.

“Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times — times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation — that they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils,”

— Nelson Mandela.

Half the world starves not because there is any shortage of food or resources, but because it lacks purchasing power, and it is maintained in that condition by the bloated purchasing power of the miniscule fraction of humanity that controls the economy. Property is not merely theft, it is slavery and murder.

So-called human rights, which supposedly limit the freedom of the state’s agents and proxies, are not really rights at all, just things we do anyway: live, speak, move or associate, which nevertheless the state can prevent us from doing at its discretion. This is the only reason the state mentions them, in granting the right to do this or say that, it reminds us it possesses the means to withhold such rights. In theory they apply to everyone but in practice the ability to enforce them will depend on your position in the pecking order. All are equal before the law, but some are before the law more than others.

‘Equal rights’ or anti-discrimination laws serve the state in three ways:

- Cooling unrest and heading off insurrectionary tendencies in super-exploited sections of the population. Rights are granted in response to violent disorder, civil disobedience, labour stoppage or other interference in production.
- Lending it political legitimacy in terms of the prevailing (capitalist) mode of production, the opening premise of this chapter. States will sometimes reform themselves to fall into line with other states, to attract foreign capital and stimulate commerce.
- Confirming its dominance within its territory. Rights can only be had with domination; in subjecting everyone to it equally, the state establishes its monopoly on direct coercion and the primacy of its professed values. It recognises only such categories of people as suit its purpose: citizens and non-citizens, adults and minors, police and public, prisoners and

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<sup>11</sup> When I started writing this it was about two hundred.

screws, employers and employees, landlords and tenants, mentally competent and incompetent, judges and defendants, directors and shareholders, doctors and patients, wives and husbands. The law, before which all are equal, grants each category a degree of liberty in respect of the others. The state allows no competing values, such as sexuality, religion or race.<sup>12</sup> It discarded these when they interfered with the prevailing mode of production.

If you find this cynical consider the function of the state's legal system — to maintain a monopoly on violence within its territory. To this end it creates a platform for commerce:

- Against which it can borrow money and levy taxes to fund its infrastructure and defence.
- Which regulates the activity of its citizens so that they are nearly all occupied in prescribed tasks.

The well-being or happiness of any individual citizen is of interest to the state only insofar as it serves these goals, and that applies to all states whether they present themselves as capitalist or socialist, liberal or authoritarian. Rights that forbid abuse of power serve to legitimise the exercise of power. That isn't to deny that human rights and equality legislation save lives, just to emphasise that they are only a temporary remedy — as illustrated by the resurgence of racism and homophobia in Eastern Europe and the U.S.

With the dissolution of the British Empire in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, its former colonies (also called Dominions) now independent were incorporated into the British Commonwealth of Nations formally declared as "free and equal" by the London Declaration in April 1949. The British Nationality Act of 1948 created the status of 'Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies', which gave more than a quarter of the population of the planet equal rights to live and work in the territory of the former imperial power. Technically as 'British subjects', they had always had this right, but never the means to do so, but as global travel was becoming cheaper and easier, it was a mere fourteen years before the British state went back on its word and passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962. This, and subsequent immigration legislation, linked an individual's right to enter the U.K. to the anticipated exchange-value of their labour-power.

In our colloquial usage the concept of liberty remains ambiguous. We speak of 'diabolical liberty', a self-described 'libertarian' could be an anarchist-communist or a selfish right-wing sociopath. It is the most repressive states that take the greatest liberties with the bodies of their subjects. We lament the flouting of human rights, but legal guarantees are criticised as a charter for criminals.

Suppose I have the right to own a gun, a right that could only be withheld by those with more or better guns. What prevents me from shooting someone? Only my personal morality and empathy — or maybe other folk similarly armed, if they're likely to take an interest. Whenever

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<sup>12</sup> That's not to say that its proxies, having internalised the prejudices on which the bourgeois state was founded, do not continue to apply them when acting under its authority. This doesn't bother the state much, as long as the primacy of its values is not challenged.

With Western interests now under threat from the ultra-conservative strand of Islam they cultivated during the Cold War, freedom of religion is becoming highly conditional — on demonstrating acceptance of the primacy of the state's professed values.

States that were founded on racism forbid discrimination on grounds of race, thereby maintaining this political concept as an objective category — hedging their bets, maybe?

states proposed disarming their subjects to prevent them killing each other, we would argue firstly that the decision to take life was a bigger one than the decision to defy the state,<sup>13</sup> and second that an individual bent on mass murder could just run *amok*<sup>14</sup> with an axe, or mount the pavement in a vehicle. The response was that no-one would have the stomach to be so mired in gore, but the gun makes it easy. Well actually no, it doesn't, but firearms were seen to be somehow less messy, maybe because it looks that way on the telly.

All that's come back to bite us in the arse, the modern self-styled jihadi is desperate and reckless enough to do any of that. Motivated by the most authoritarian and prescriptive ideologies, they grant themselves absolute liberty to do what others cannot contemplate.

This has been an argument that meaningful liberty and equality can only be achieved collectively, defined by consensus. I don't believe in rights, I believe in boundaries between individuals and agreed codes of conduct within a group. When I choose to abstain from behaviour harmful to others, I'm not giving up my own freedom, just renouncing my claim on anyone else's.

“We are convinced that liberty without socialism is privilege and injustice; and that socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality.”

— Mikhail Bakunin: ‘Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism’ September 1867.

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<sup>13</sup> The state could never admit such a thing.

<sup>14</sup> In the Malay world, someone who felt disgraced or dishonoured could redeem themselves by dying in battle. If there wasn't a battle handy, they would draw their weapon in public, cry “*Amok!*” and take on all comers until slain by the mob. Muslim Filipinos combined this ancient custom with Islamic *Jihad*, in *Juramentado* against occupying Spanish, American and Japanese forces. The aim was to kill as many infidels as possible, whose ghosts would be enslaved and would have to wait on the warrior in the afterlife. After much god-bothering, the body was tightly bandaged to hold the organs in place and slow blood loss, lastly their bollocks were bound with rawhide, so there was no turning back ...



## 8. Money: power from debt.

“... Naturally, we live in harmony,  
Rightly, I only kill the things I need,  
I am one with everything around me,  
I am one with everything that’s around me.

Kicking back, I decide to dig a hole,  
Rummaging for stuff to eat amongst the soil,  
What’s this? A rock of shiny shining rock,  
Oh my! I really feel like I’m in love,  
FUCK YOU — you can’t have my shiny thing,  
FUCK YOU — you can’t have my shiny, shining thing.

Now I’m king — I have the shiny thing,  
My people sing ‘All Praise the Shiny Thing!’  
They will do anything I ask,  
For a piece of my shiny thing,  
Take a stick — and draw a circle in the sand,  
Take a stick — and defend my sacred land,  
I am God of everything around me,  
Now I own everything that’s around me.”

— Grant Sharkey: ‘URSS!’

Money is a concept so familiar it’s rare to hear anyone question what it actually represents; it is casually regarded as a measure of relative value or a reward for activity, I contend that these are incidental to its main purpose. Fixed measures of relative value were never needed in stable societies where production and consumption were balanced, but were necessary to keep track of the consumption of those who did not produce — priests, rulers and soldiers, so temple money and royal treasure-houses served to define the paradoxical power of the non-producer. Coinage originated from bits of precious metals that soldiers carried for trade, having nothing else to offer, so the use of such tokens as currency by ordinary folk was associated with the expansion of empires. Once the population had been subdued they fed the army in return for tokens, circulated them in commerce and eventually paid them back as tribute or taxation, a sophisticated form of pillage. If you were using the tokens of an imperial power it gave you not only a stable exchange rate but also a measure of military protection. The acquisition of precious metals therefore became both the means and the motivation for imperial expansion. The Chinese empire was the first to be powerful enough to persuade people that lumps of base metal and paper, ‘cash’ could actually be worth something, by reserving the cruellest punishments for forgery.

The other reason for fixing relative values is of course for exacting penalties, states define their moral code in terms of a scale of wrongs bearing obligations to repay under physical coercion. Any and all wrongs may be committed at the bidding of the rulers but they generally impose a tax on freelance criminality. The anthropologist David Graeber in his book 'Debt: The first 5000 years' postulates that a social or moral obligation only becomes a quantifiable debt with an arithmetical value when the threat of violence is available to enforce it.

As war became more costly it became customary for states to borrow from the means of production to fund it, and allow tokens of this debt to circulate as currency. The fortunes of states now fluctuate with the value of that debt to others, the desirability or otherwise of holding a given state's markers. Some of the tokens are paid back to the state in tribute, in return for not locking you up or killing you. However hard up the state may claim to be, it always has money to spend on weapons, for reasons I will elaborate on in a bit. So the pound in your pocket is the material embodiment of the state's monopoly on violence and its guarantee of the status of the non-productive, a pawn ticket for your freedom. Once currency exists as a measure of indebtedness, the power imbalance can be deepened through compound interest, or sold on to disinterested parties who recognise only the size of the obligation and not its relevance.

Wages are also called 'compensation' — for the lost portion of your life and liberty. To survive by wage-labour you need to take at least as many of the debt-tokens as it costs to reproduce the labour you have expended: the cost of your food, clothing, transport, accommodation, leisure, also a share of the infrastructure you inhabit: roads, railways, communications, providers of healthcare, clean water and electricity, those who maintain your environment and take away your waste — in fact everything necessary for your survival and fitness to labour further, and don't forget the cost of raising and educating your children who must replace you when your labouring days are over. Any surplus tokens you've acquired after reproducing your own labour represent a debt that must ultimately be met by some of those who help you on your way. So far so good; if all we did was exchange our labour for the necessities of life, using the little pot of tokens to keep tally of what we produce and consume as they circulate endlessly between us.

I note an interesting trans-Atlantic semantic differential; whereas the English speak of 'earning' money (perhaps a relic of our Protestant heritage, as if money were such a holy thing one must be worthy of it) Americans tend to refer to 'making' money, which is more honest, though they may have been deceived into believing they are making their own living, rather than being compensated for making somebody else's, at the expense of third parties. So how is money made?

As we have seen the state and the capitalist market are interdependent. The state maintains its monopoly on violence, excludes the working class from the means of production, and thereby facilitates capital accumulation. Its power to do this is in turn proportional to the amount of capitalist activity that occurs on its manor. It has to do a few other things beside defend itself from its citizens and other states. It has to provide a serviceable environment in which capitalist accumulation can take place, which includes keeping enough of the Working Class fit to do all the work.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2010, when the German state was busy kicking the Greek one, the former's sovereign debt was running at over eighty percent of G.D.P. the latter's twice as much. The Japanese state owed well over two hundred percent, most of it internally; this doesn't matter much as the state is master over its dominion. The U.S. has averaged sixty percent since the Second World War.

It can fund its coercive apparatus by levying tribute on this economic activity, but nowhere near enough. Since pools of capital must grow to compete and survive the money supply must continually expand and too much tax would stunt its growth. The state therefore has to borrow money from the capitalist class, lots of it. All successful states have vast debts,<sup>1</sup> typically more than ten times their annual tax return, so it is neither feasible nor desirable to pay them.

Incumbent politicians usually refer to sovereign debt as 'national debt'; their critics will call it 'government debt'. Using some facile analogy our class may be told that "we" owe some money or have been "living beyond our means" as if money were somehow finite and could simply run out. This is of course utter cobblers; we have not borrowed anything, the state has contracted debt in the interests of the class it serves. Unlike us the state decides its own income and gambles that its tax and borrowing rates are optimum to grow the economy, and its future tax return. Elected politicians that preside over a period of capital growth are usually rewarded with an honorary position, such as a seat in the House of Lords, the European commission, or directorship of an arms company or consultancy.

States borrow by selling bonds that promise a fixed return in a fixed time, but have different maturity periods so they are not all redeemed together. Government bonds are bought by financial institutions licensed by the state to provide banking services, by other states, and by their more prosperous citizens in pension funds. This does not imply that their creditors have to wait for their money. Sovereign debt bonds are regarded as assets with a fixed value and traded on the 'secondary market', so lenders can spend them as if they were the money they just lent the state. They are considered a safe investment provided the interest is reliably paid on time, and provided there are enough of them to stabilise their market price.

If a state has too few bonds, they will be subject to fluctuations in supply and demand, causing the price to go up and down for reasons other than the health of the state's economy, making them unattractive to investors who want an asset of fixed value. Only a high volume of state debt regularly traded provides this confidence, and the willingness of a state to enter into new loans denotes its success in multiplying capital. Balancing the books, in the state's terms, means contracting enough new debt each year to service its existing loans and repay those that fall due. Economic health means a predictable level of growth, two or three percent, say, so the state must borrow more year on year.

A state is in trouble if its debts trade at below face value, because they then return a higher percentage of the investor's money, making future borrowing more expensive. Suppose a billion pounds Sterling worth of British Sovereign debt is due to pay 5% on maturity, i.e £1.05 billion. If it can be had for £990 million, it will yield £60 million, a little over 5.7% of this, and so long as that return is available on the secondary market, the British state will need to offer at least this rate to future investors to service its existing loans.

Along with funding its own agenda, the state is keen for the financial sector to lend against the bonds it sells them to create enough capital so that capitalists do not have to wait until they have earned the money to finance their schemes (called liquidity). Banks are allowed to lend many times more than their deposits and capitalists return most of their profits to the bank to be lent in turn; this practice of fractional-reserve banking multiplies the money supply far beyond the pot of government-backed tokens which originally lay behind it. This is not delinquent behaviour by rogue bankers, it is exactly what states require of them.

“It is well enough that people of the nation do not understand our banking and monetary system, for if they did, I believe there would be a revolution before tomorrow morning.”

— Henry Ford.

The work of the bourgeoisie is not only the reproduction of capital, but its accumulation, the concentration of other people’s debt-tokens in progressively fewer hands. Reproduction is an easy task since the producers must buy their means of subsistence at a premium, from the same class to whom they sold their labour at a loss,<sup>2</sup> but capitalists must compete with other capitalists, as their capital, taking on a life of its own, competes with other pools of capital for room to accumulate. If they fail to compete in this way, their capital will be accumulated by the capital of others. As capitalists compete to maximise the rate of accumulation, they must either increase the yield from the labour they buy, or reduce its price.

The ‘kind-hearted capitalist’ as Tressell called him, protests that his investment in the means of production creates employment<sup>3</sup> so that his expanding wealth will spill over and trickle down, keeping us all fed.

The only value the tokens have is the expectation that someone will be compelled to labour to acquire them. Money is therefore a token not of past but of *future* labour. The process has continued to the point that the overwhelming bulk of this money isn’t even circulated in token form but exists only in computer files, an abstract tally of the indebtedness of all those the capitalist considers owe him their right to survive.

So the validation of these ever-multiplying tokens of debt requires the perpetuation of need, the creation of want, no one must ever be satisfied with their lot. The survival of the economy rests upon the perpetual expansion not just of debt but of indebtedness, of dependence on wage labour and commerce.

One of the features of the neo-liberal phase of capitalism has been the burgeoning of private debt. The Thatcherite concept of home ownership almost defies parody — sell off public housing and encourage the residents to take out loans to pay for it. Where once the council owned your home, now the bank owns it, and when you can’t keep up the payments, you end up paying rent to some grasping landlord instead of to a body which had at least a nominal obligation to house you. You are now one payday from the pavement.

“Finance has created some of the most complicated financial instruments in order to extract the meagre savings of modest households by offering credit for goods they may not need, and, even more serious, promising the possibility of owning a house. The aim is to secure as many credit-card holders and as many mortgage holders as possible, so that they can be bundled into investment instruments. Whether people pay the mortgage or the credit card matters less than securing a certain number of

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<sup>2</sup> The ‘money trick’ from Robert Tressell’s ‘The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists’ remains the most beautifully simple explanation of capital’s natural tendency to accumulate once the means of production are in private hands. You can find it online — or read the book.

<sup>3</sup> Think about this for a moment: he makes work for us, how kind, as if we didn’t have enough on our plate navigating the wasteland he has made of our world. There is plenty to be done for sure, preserving the environment, teaching and learning, eradicating poverty and disease, but the only kind of activity that will earn you a qualified right to exist in his society is that which enriches him.

loans that can be bundled up into “investment products”. Once thus bundled, the investor is no longer dependent on the individual’s capacity to repay the loan or the mortgage. Using incredibly complex sequences of “products”, investors have made trillions and trillions of profits on the backs of modest-income people. This is the financialisation logic that has become so dominant since we entered the neoliberal era in the 1980s.”

— Saskia Sassen: ‘The Return to Primitive Accumulation Using Complex Financial Instruments’  
Transform! Issue 4, 2009.

Since the crash of 2008, the financial institutions who begged the state to cover their obligations with taxpayers’ money have been demanding the exercise of state coercion to enforce the debt of the same folk who bailed them out. It should be obvious that the money is incidental; the state’s function is to guarantee the dominance of one class over another, come what may. Money is nothing more than a fetishised power relation; debt is but a sanitised form of slavery. Wealth does not trickle down as the capitalist would have you believe, it rather congeals, leaving pockets of poverty. Poverty is often represented as a misfortune, brought on by bad luck, carelessness or laziness, but in fact it is essential to the workings of capitalism and where it does not exist, the state will take steps to create it.

“Everyone but an idiot knows the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious”

— Arthur Young 1771

This brings us to the unemployed, the chronically ill or disabled, the elderly and infirm, those ill-served by the education system, the feckless, confused, damaged and addicted. Notice I make no distinction between ‘deserving and undeserving’, because capitalism doesn’t either. The point is that this population does not make money and consumes very little but its importance to the bourgeoisie is incalculable. Neo-liberal economists speak of a natural rate of unemployment, sufficient to prevent wage-inflation; heaven forbid a worker should ever be in a position to pick and choose her employer; that would utterly disrupt the power relation. Since the engine of capitalism is want, everyone must have someone to look down on and something to fear. Aspiring middle class take note: the derelict who throws up in your garden is performing a function far more vital to your masters than you are; they’re helping to hold down the price of labour.

## 9. Private property: ‘The subsidy of history’.

“Accordingly, the single biggest subsidy to modern corporate capitalism is the subsidy of history, by which capital was originally accumulated in a few hands, and labour was deprived of access to the means of production and forced to sell itself on the buyer’s terms. The current system of concentrated capital ownership and large-scale corporate organization is the direct beneficiary of that original structure of power and property ownership, which has perpetuated itself over the centuries.”

... “The investment capital available for the industrial revolution was the accumulated loot from centuries of previous robbery by the ruling class. It was accumulated by the merchant capitalist oligarchies of the late Middle Ages, that took over the democratic guilds and robbed both urban craftsmen and rural peasants through unequal trade. It was accumulated by the mercantilists who carried out a similar policy of unequal exchange on a global scale. It was accumulated by a landed ruling class of capitalist farmers who expropriated the peasantry and became the Whig oligarchy.”

— Kevin A. Carson: ‘Studies in Mutualist Political Economy’.

The idea that you could own something other people require to live would have seemed very strange to our ancestors. The wealth of the kind-hearted capitalist, which he so generously invests in the means of production, was obtained by the process of primitive accumulation — theft and murder. The economic dominance of Europe and the United States was achieved through the pillage of Latin America and the Indian Sub-Continent, the enclosure of indigenous lands and the transatlantic trade in Africans.

A few centuries ago in England, the birthplace of capitalism, the majority of people lived off the land as they had done since prehistory. Under the open field system the land was ploughed in strips as a collective effort using teams of oxen, which would have been beyond the means of individual peasants. The Saxon townships allocated a few strips of each field to every household so as to give everyone a share of good and bad land, and to allow for crop rotation. Arguably the land owned the people rather than the other way round, the land gave them sustenance, they had collective stewardship of it and were occasionally required to fight for it.

The legal fiction of title to land originated as a contingency measure to maintain food supply in the declining Roman Empire. It came to Britain with the Norman Conquest as ‘Manorialism’, this being the administrative structure of the feudal mode of production. Essentially one branch of a ruling clan usurped another; and though they were all related, they differed in their concepts of Roman and Saxon law. Feudal titles were granted to mercenary nobles for their military service, giving them an unearned income from their Manor — we’ve always carried a layer of parasites. The superimposition of feudalism on the Saxon village system meant the people were technically no longer tied to the land itself but to the Manor, an entity that owned both; this institution was

called serfdom. Nevertheless the peasantry retained their rights over and duties to the land and most of it remained in common ownership. There was still no economy as we know it, because each Manor was self-sufficient; production and consumption were the same, if unequally distributed. Had anyone tried to sell 'their' land from under the people living on it, they would probably have been burned at the stake.

Nothing much changed until the 14<sup>th</sup> century; serfdom having virtually died out the peasantry was as free as it had been in Anglo-Saxon times. Largely self sufficient on their own allotments, they worked for the landlords for pay at their own convenience and held rights of 'usufruct' of the common land, which allowed the grazing of livestock, taking of fish and small game, coppicing, cutting of timber and turf, gathering fruit, fungi, fire-wood and so on.

As society evolved towards both agricultural and industrial revolutions, the pre-capitalist ruling class sought to consolidate its position; land and labour were becoming all-important and it set about acquiring both at a knock-down price. The first task was to separate the two; the feudal ties that bound the labourer and the land must be broken along with their attending rights and privileges. With this a Working Class would be created, the dispossessed being free to sell their labour, and obliged to do so in order to survive.

"Hence, the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-workers, appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and this side alone exists for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire."

— Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy', Volume 1.

The growth of the Flanders wool industry was the impetus for large tracts of arable land to be turned over to sheep grazing. The effect on the peasantry was devastating; villages were destroyed by the hundred, facilitated by legislation as wool exports were at first heavily taxed to pay for the state's military adventures, then banned outright as the domestic industry got off the ground. This would later become the spur for the industrial revolution. I can't resist including Thomas More's rant from Utopia:

"Your shepe that were wont to be so meke and tame, and so smal eaters, now, as I heare saye, be become so great devowerers and so wylde, that they eate up and swallow down the very men them selves. They consume, destroye, and devoure whole fields, howses and cities ... Noble man and gentleman, yea and certeyn Abbottes leave no ground for tillage, thei inclose all into pastures; they throw down houses; they pluck down townes, and leave nothing standynge but only the church to be made a shepehowse."

—Thomas More: 'Utopia:'

The next great land-grab came with the Reformation and dissolution of the monasteries; the Catholic Church being feudal proprietor of a fifth of the arable land of England; about 50,000

of its retainers and tenants were, like their manorial predecessors tossed into the ranks of the proletariat. Those lands, as well as supporting the Church, had been the main source of funding for poor relief; the loss of that support mechanism led to the original Tudor Poor Laws.

The process gathered pace with the progressive enclosure of common land; fens were drained, forests fenced, and finally by some 4,000 acts of parliament, between 1760 and 1870, another 7 million acres (nearly a quarter of England) were lost to the use of the people. As Simon Fairlie writes in *The Land* magazine:

“Over the course of a few hundred years, much of Britain’s land has been privatized — that is to say taken out of some form of collective ownership and management and handed over to individuals. Currently, in our “property-owning democracy”, nearly half the country is owned by 40,000 land millionaires, or 0.06 per cent of the population, while most of the rest of us spend half our working lives paying off the debt on a patch of land barely large enough to accommodate a dwelling and a washing line.”

—Simon Fairlie: ‘A Short History of Enclosure in Britain’.

In Scotland the communal ownership of land had been central to the culture since Celtic times and had largely survived the imposition of feudalism. The 1707 Act of Union with England opened the way for the highlands in their turn ‘to be made a shepehowse’. The highland clearances and resulting Scottish Diaspora amounted to what would today be called ethnic cleansing; the Scots were driven and burned out of their homes and deported en masse to the colonies, or the barren coastal region.

None of these assaults by the ruling class on its subjects went unchallenged, from the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 to the Dean Forest Riots of 1831 there were hundreds of valiant attempts by the people to take back the means of production; some were localised, as in the Forest of Dean, some, like the Luddite and Swing uprisings, spread like wildfire across the country. In every case the full weight of state power was brought to bear in defence of the newly acquired private property and the regime of wage labour.

“Laws and government may be considered in this and indeed in every case as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the attacks of the poor, who if not hindered by the government would soon reduce the others to an equality with themselves by open violence.”

—Adam Smith: ‘An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations’

One of Smith’s best-known admirers was the late Margaret Thatcher. (I pause for a moment to savour the pleasure of writing ‘the late’.)

The history of the twentieth century is of the emergence of popular movements which threatened to shift the balance of power between capital and labour; the bourgeoisie were sometimes forced to compromise with the workers until such time as they could re-jig their modes of production to reclaim their dominance. The reason they have always been successful in this is that they act coherently, with common purpose, whereas we do not.



“The masters, being fewer in number, can combine much more easily; and the law, besides, authorises, or at least does not prohibit their combinations, while it prohibits those of the workmen. We have no acts of parliament against combining to lower the price of work; but many against combining to raise it. In all such disputes the masters can hold out much longer. A landlord, a farmer, a master manufacturer, a merchant, though they did not employ a single workman, could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they have already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year without employment. In the long run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate.”

—Adam Smith: (*op.cit.*)

The Second World War prompted a truce in the Class one; with the economy centrally planned, capital and labour were both marshalled in defence of the Empire, using a Keynesian economic model that roughly mirrored that of Nazi Germany.<sup>1</sup> This became the blueprint for reconstruction in the post-war period, and is known as the Post-War Consensus or Social Democratic Settlement. The workers and their unions were absorbed by the Labour Party into the corporate capitalist state and some of the infrastructure was taken into public ownership, unhealthy slums were cleared and council houses built, to be let to workers at an affordable rent. As trade unionism was formalised and legislated for, so the self-help and mutual aid mechanisms our class had relied on for its survival were subsumed into a welfare state, managed from the top down. Along with the other public-owned utilities, these mimicked the hierarchical command structure of bourgeois enterprises, in effect creating state-run businesses, which could be sold off at the first opportunity.

My personal experience of this history spanned the brutal dismantling of the Social Democratic Settlement wreaked by Thatcher, and was characterised by the sale of public utilities and housing. In a little over a decade, these fixed assets, representing the life's work of four generations of Working Class people, were converted into capital and concentrated into the hands of a few close associates of Thatcher herself. In 2014 roughly a third of former council houses were owned by commercial landlords, rising to 46% in the London borough of Kingston. One of the worst culprits is the son of Thatcher's Housing Minister Ian Gow, who alone holds 93 leases in Wandsworth. The asking price of one of these assets would be far beyond the lifetime earnings of most Londoners.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century the practice of squatting unused residential property, which has always provided a safety valve in times of chronic pressure on housing, (immediately after WW2 for example) has been made a summary criminal offence. Even tenants who default on the rent can now be prosecuted as 'squatters'. In true robber-baron tradition, the clause was appended to a bill in its third reading,<sup>2</sup> by a government stuffed with millionaires and landowners. Fixing the maximum penalty at six months imprisonment guarantees the case will always be tried by a magistrate's court, also known as the police court, or 'rubber stamp'.

This section would not be complete without a word about military expenditure. War involves a fair amount of primitive accumulation, at least for the winning side; but the capitalist class

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'corporatism' coined by Mussolini was being used without irony by social democratic politicians well into the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill; one of the periodic chunks of composite legisla-

always wins. Even the threat of war stimulates demand for fabulously expensive manufactured goods, which have a strict shelf life and are equally expensive to decommission. Sorting out the mess they make is even more lucrative, and usually involves the opportunity for another land-grab. They have no need to compete on the market as the decision to buy them is political, and they are easy to borrow against as they are underwritten by taxation, the bulk of which will come from the Working Class. Expense is no object then.

“Suppose the government decides to make some missiles. It has a fund of money, some from taxes (ultimately from the pool of surplus value) and most from borrowing (selling bonds). It pays a capitalist firm to make them (including what the firm counts as profit). The firm buys necessary material (constant capital), such as steel and machines. The firm hires workers (variable capital) to make the missiles. At the end of this process (1) the government has gone deeper into debt, (2) but the buyers of the government bonds count themselves as having new wealth, (3) the firm has profits which it pays out to its stockholders and/or saves for further investment, (4) the workers have their wages which they spend on consumer goods, health care, and sending their children to college. BUT while all this paper (bonds, stocks in the arms company, money) has increased and continues to circulate, there are no new products on the market! The paper wealth which is circulating is what Marx called “fictitious value” or, when used as capital, “fictitious capital.”

It is sick enough to think of an economic system which sustains itself (in large part) by preparing for mass nuclear death. It is even sicker to have an economy which sustains itself by effectually producing... nothing. This is the epoch of capitalist decay.”

—Wayne Price: Marx’s Economics for Anarchists.

War can be effective at reviving a stricken economy or an unstable political situation, as in Hitler’s fatal appropriation of ‘military Keynesianism’. Putting the state on a war footing gives everyone something to do, and a reason to do it, discontent over wages and conditions can be deemed unpatriotic. Capitalism insists that the worker must labour to survive, but war gives her a cause more important than her own survival, the survival of the capitalist nation-state. Surplus production is consumed or destroyed so the ratio of fixed to variable capital is re-balanced, arresting the falling rate of profit.<sup>3</sup>

Research and development are heavily subsidised by the state; the results end up in private hands protected by patent law, and continue to profit the capitalist for years after the conflict is over. This is how we paid for virtually every technological innovation in the modern world; the post WW2 arms race gave us communications and global positioning satellites, jet airliners, nuclear energy, the Internet and put men on the moon. It concentrated virtually all the wealth of the world into an oligopoly of huge corporations with more economic (and political) clout than most nation-states. We could have developed all this (and far more beneficial) technology without our warring governments; after all we did the work.

“The jumbo jet industry would never have come about without continuous Cold War levels of military spending. The machine tools needed for producing large aircraft

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tion made to tailor our existence to the needs of the bourgeoisie.

<sup>3</sup> See the next chapter.

were so complex and expensive that no “small peacetime orders” would have provided a sufficient production run to pay for them. Without large military orders, they would simply not have existed.”

—Kevin A. Carson: ‘The Iron Fist behind the Invisible Hand – Corporate Capitalism as a State-Guaranteed System of Privilege’.

I’ve laboured the history somewhat just to emphasise the point that private property has never arisen through the diligence of the capitalist class or the fecklessness of the lower orders, nor was it the result of natural selection or the operation of free markets, but was in every case engineered and guaranteed by the ruling elite. When anarchists say: “Property is theft” we mean it literally. Yet still the myths and fables persist to the present day, feeding aspiration and blunting class-consciousness. Like original sin, the grotesque disparity in wealth and power originated in some fantasy world of long ago when there were hard-working people and lazy people and the Good Lord rewarded the hard-working people, and told the rest to go and fuck themselves.

“The rich man in his castle,  
the poor man at his gate,  
God made them high and lowly,  
and ordered their estate.”

—Cecil Francis Alexander: ‘All things Bright and Beautiful’.

There are no self-made millionaires, for me, Kropotkin deconstructed this over 100 years ago in ‘The Conquest of Bread’. It is impossible to separate any act of social labour from the countless acts which preceded it and made it possible. The pioneering surgeon who saves your life owes her life in turn to the workers who cleaned the hospital in which she was born, along with those who purified her drinking water and generated the electricity that kept her warm; and what about her friends, who out of love and loyalty sustained her through a self-destructive and potentially fatal obsession in adolescence? It follows logically from this principle that all scientific, technical and medical innovations that tend to increase human happiness and well-being are the intellectual property of the entire human race.

## 10. Capitalism and wage labour: the theft of life.

“Yes, as through this world I’ve wandered,  
I’ve seen lots of funny men,  
some will rob you with a six-gun,  
and some with a fountain pen.”

—Woody Guthrie: ‘Pretty boy Floyd’.

All modern states practice capitalism; the reproduction and accumulation of capital occupies even those who claimed socialism as their guiding principle, and almost all have now given up this pretence. Their stated goal is economic growth, often quaintly described as the ‘creation of wealth’; a bizarre concept since all the things we value in life either exist already or stand to be made by us, the workers, not by presidents, kings, clerics, bankers, generals or the politburo.<sup>1</sup> However these are the agents of the bourgeoisie, which must exact its tribute from us at every stage of the process.

Now for a little Marxism:

All modes of production, ancient and modern, involve three fundamental elements:

1. Planet Earth: provider of raw materials, giver of life to employer and worker alike, home to farm, factory, bank, office and school, this used to belong to us all, but through the process of primitive accumulation, currently belongs to the bourgeoisie.
2. The means of production: the workplace, tools and equipment housed therein, all products of our labour, but the bourgeoisie claims ownership of these also.
3. Our labour.

In Marx’s view, you create wealth when you take an object and apply labour to it, thereby turning it into a commodity with a market value. This applies equally nowadays to intellectual property, entertainment, services, software and so on.

The value of the means of production, plus the money the capitalist spends on raw materials and consumables, are termed ‘constant capital’ as their value is unchanged by the production process, being transferred to the product at the same rate it is lost through consumption and depreciation. Money used to buy labour is called ‘variable capital’ because it adds value to commodities.

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<sup>1</sup> I can make a fair case for how the former U.S.S.R. and other state ‘communist’ bureaucracies sustained capitalism through a period of history that ought, by rights, to have put an end to it.

Each commodity has an ‘exchange-value’ (or price) and a ‘use-value’, representing its worth to the purchaser. It goes without saying that the capitalist doesn’t give a flying fuck about the use-value of any commodity he sells, he isn’t in this game to improve anyone’s lot but his own. The commodity is merely a vehicle to transform a smaller quantity of capital into a larger one. It doesn’t matter to the capitalist whether all the oil is burned, leaving no petrochemicals for textiles and drugs, provided he gets the best price for it. Stewardship of Planet Earth is left to his surly guard dog, the state, which also protects his means of production and guarantees him a supply of cheap labour.

Under capitalism, all the products of labour are commodities. The skill, strength and experience of the worker are the products of the labour of others, who housed, fed and educated her. However, since the worker has no direct access to the means of production she cannot sell her labour as such — that is, the fruits of her labour — but only her capacity to work, measured by the number of hours she can reliably toil at the capitalist’s convenience. This commodity Marx called ‘labour-power’, its use-value to the capitalist being its capacity to add value to other commodities.

Few wage labourers earn significantly more than the exchange-value of the necessities of life that they consume — allowing consumer durables, leisure activities and pension funds as necessities. The exchange-value of labour-power, like the exchange-value of any other commodity, is the cost of its replacement or the amount of socially necessary labour it represents. In other words the value of all the goods and services required for each worker to continue doing what she does, and to maintain the productive capacity of her class — i.e. for working-class children to be raised, suitable to replace her in due course. Clearly it’s in the interest of the capitalist to reduce the exchange-value of labour-power to its absolute biological minimum; however people’s expectations of life are determined not purely by market forces but by cultural and moral factors which vary from time to time and place to place.

“A novel factor has appeared on the labour market: the will of the worker! And this factor, unknown when it comes to setting the price of a bushel of potatoes, has a bearing upon the setting of wages; its impact may be large or small, according to the degree of tension of the labour force, which is a product of the accord of individual wills beating in unison — but, whether it be strong or weak, there is no denying it.”

—Emile Pouget: ‘Direct Action’.

The difference between the cost of the labour-power and the value it adds is called surplus-value. The capitalist does not create wealth, he invests his capital in the means of production: land, raw materials, tools and machinery. He then buys someone else’s labour-power, and adds their surplus-value to his existing capital. Of course this added value is reduced by transport costs, overheads etc. but each of these costs contains its own element of surplus-value.

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<sup>2</sup> The proportion of public expenditure was negligible in Marx’s day<sup>(1)</sup> and he didn’t attach much importance to it. It complicates the picture but you can see that it is composed entirely of surplus-value and acts as a sort of buffer. The purpose of nationalised industry was to retain this surplus-value within the central pool of taxpayer / worker / consumers; this is called ‘state capitalism’.

<sup>(1)</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it amounted to about 10% of G.D.P. and consisted of military expenditure and the interest thereon.

Workers are also consumers and taxpayers, each must purchase the necessities of life, either directly or through a tax-raising entity,<sup>2</sup> at a premium to include the surplus-value appropriated from other workers by other capitalists.

Let's assume for the sake of argument that commodities, including labour-power exchange at their full value. If you earn £10 an hour, and can produce £10 worth of use-value in half an hour, the remaining half hour is worked not for yourself but for the boss — called 'surplus-labour'; of course only those who have control over the means of production can reap this benefit. Value accruing from this unpaid labour time Marx called 'absolute surplus value'.

Suppose the labour time necessary to produce £10 of value falls, due to improved production techniques, to twenty minutes, you're still working the same hours for the same rate but now forty minutes of each hour is for the boss, Marx called this increase 'relative surplus-value'. Now you're producing £30 of value per hour, it would seem that your labour-power is more valuable. Not at all, the capitalist must bring his commodities to market to realise this value, and as his stock increases, will meet the demand sooner. The capitalist isn't concerned with your cost of living, only the reproduction cost of labour time sufficient to produce £20 of value, which is now £6.66. Each commodity is less valuable as it embodies less social labour, he could reduce the price to sell them faster, or just cut your hours. If demand is high, other capitalists will soon catch on to the new technology, so the price will fall as they compete for a share of the market. If it requires less skill and experience to operate, you find yourself undercut by workers who will accept a lower hourly rate.

As production becomes more efficient, the exchange value of labour-power falls because it takes less labour-time to produce each commodity; this effect is immediate. However no capitalist reduces his prices to keep pace with the diminishing purchasing power of the workforce; he is forced into it as a result of competition from other capitalists, or falling demand.

Reducing the wage bill is another way to realise surplus-value, if the product is made in China and sold in Europe or the U.S. the worker may produce £30 in half an hour and be paid £1 or less, most of her working day is effectively unpaid.

"The income of the ruling classes can always be reduced in the final analysis to the product of unpaid labour: that is the heart of Marx's theory of exploitation.

That is also the reason why Marx attached so much importance to treating surplus-value as a general category, over and above profits (themselves subdivided into industrial profits, bank profits, commercial profits etc.), interest and rent, which are all part of the total surplus product produced by wage labour. It is this general category which explains both the existence (the common interest) of the ruling class (all those who live off surplus-value), and the origins of the class struggle under capitalism."

—Ernest Mandel: 'Karl Marx' 1990.

Meanwhile capitalists compete amongst themselves for control of the means of production. Maximising the use-value of labour-power over its exchange-value requires greater efficiency of production, achieved by greater investment of capital. So the means of production become progressively more capital-intensive and the game gets harder for small amounts of capital to play. Big capitalists expropriate little capitalists from the means of production as they once

expropriated the peasantry from their land. For this reason we say *capital itself* has the property of tending to accumulate.

This also accounts for the cyclic nature of capitalism and its periodic crises. The phenomenon of falling rate of profit had been noted by classical economists before Marx but they had no explanation for it. As profits are invested in the means of production the ratio of constant to variable capital in any commodity increases. But profit only comes from unpaid labour, so as volume of production rises, profits fall. Some capitalists will drop out of the game; their workers will become unemployed and others will acquire their premises at a discount. The exchange-value of both constant and variable capital has been greatly reduced, this is called recession.

Eventually the surplus goods are consumed or destroyed, the abundance of cheap labour and spare production capacity clears the way for profits to rise again so the cycle continues. The 'invisible hand of the market', beloved of capital's apologists is like a drunken helmsman frantically over-steering and plotting a zigzag course.

Along with the theory of surplus-value outlined above, Marx's other major theoretical contributions of importance to anarchists are the concepts of alienation, fetishism and reification. These are difficult ideas to grasp because they are invisible; they are woven into the fabric of our lives, into the reality we perceive. I've struggled with them myself so bear with me. Marx's achievement was creating scientific abstractions that enabled him to unpick this fabric and see the underlying mechanisms of capitalist society.

Alienation starts with the separation of the producer from the consumer, from the means of production, then from the products of labour and ends with the fracturing of all human relations. We are what we do, the boldest feature of our humanity is our determination to understand and modify the world around us. We are all both producers and consumers, our consumption drives our production and vice versa, but capitalism treats these functions separately, as if they were unrelated to each other, ultimately we become alienated from ourselves, our human needs from our productive capacity.

Suppose I am a boot-maker living above my little shop. I take pride in my work and my customers appreciate the boots I make.<sup>3</sup> The job is labour intensive and I can only make a few pairs a week but my loyal customers bring their old boots to be repaired and I can support myself with the necessities of life. I can also arrange the pace of work to suit myself; I can take a day off and finish a job in the evening if it suits me. Even more importantly to me, I have good relations with my customers and I'm respected as a skilled boot-maker.

Now the capitalist builds a boot factory in my town, using the latest machinery he can turn out 10 identical pairs of boots in the time I take to make one. I cannot compete with his prices and the trade dries up, nobody even gets their boots repaired any more as they are so cheap to replace. I have no alternative but to give up the shop and get a job in the boot factory; I start and finish work at the sound of a siren. I'm no longer a boot-maker, just a worker who operates the machine that punches the holes for the laces. Almost anyone can operate the machines so I can't command a skilled wage, but the boots are cheap so at least I can afford a pair. I never get to meet the people who wear these boots and I wouldn't know my boots from anyone else's.

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<sup>3</sup> Even in this simple commodity economy, I am making boots for sale, not to fulfil anyone's specific need for boots. I trust that people will always need boots, and my skill will make mine desirable to possess and use, but their use-value to me, and of the labour I have invested in them, is their capacity to obtain for me the fruits of other people's labour. We are already on the road to ruin.

Next the capitalist decides to close the factory and get the boots made in the Far East, by people whose wages are so low they cannot afford boots. I can no longer make payments on my dwelling so I move into a tower block on the edge of town. Eventually I get a job in a shop where we sell cheap imported boots, the manager, who couldn't make a boot if his life depended on it, expects me to come in early and stay late for stock taking.

The capitalist turns the old boot factory into a warehouse, and an office block is built where the shop used to be; wholesale orders are placed online for imported boots or who-knows-what, I now work in a call centre fielding enquiries from customers. Everything I do is monitored, from my calls to the length of time I spend in the toilet, I'm not allowed to speak or associate with other workers and the boss tells me I'm lucky to have a job.

That's alienation, now for commodity fetishism.

Because all commodities are made for the market, their use-value to the purchaser is secondary to their use-value to the capitalist, which is precisely their capacity to increase his capital, and that isn't realised until they reach the market. The trouble is there's nothing specifically human about the market; proponents of capitalism will portray the market as the aggregate of human needs and capacities, but it's really nothing of the kind, it's just the aggregate of the exchange of commodities in their general form, i.e. money. Within all this, human wishes and ambitions bubble up, are commodified and dissolve again, their use-values to humanity being no more than vehicles for exchange-value; so that all interactions between people are reduced to interactions between commodities.

When I was a boot-maker I added use-value with my labour; if a customer had a specific requirement I could meet it, I was selling my skill and ingenuity as well as my time. Since the capitalist now controls the making of boots, not I, I no longer sell my labour but only my capacity to work, or 'labour-power'; so the use-value I add is for the capitalist not the customer. There is more to this than my getting a bum deal for my labour or the customer for her boots, the relationship we once had as producers and consumers is now the relationship of abstract exchange-values determined by a market over which no one has control, not even the capitalist, for even he is controlled by the market.

Fetishism is nothing new; in the absence of reliable understanding of and power over their environment, human beings have always projected their feelings and desires onto inanimate objects. Animated as we are with thoughts and emotions, it's natural to suppose the material world is no different. The rhino horn and banana fruit have been considered aphrodisiacs for no better reason than their shape; a curious rock formation or an ancient tree becomes a shrine; a river on which the survival of an entire city depends, could easily be regarded as a God. Before the microscope revealed the causes of disease, amulets and charms were worn to ward it off.

Of course we're so much more rational these days; now open a glossy magazine, one which says you 'must have' these boots, even though they look really uncomfortable and cost three hundred quid, why? They really aren't going to make you stronger, healthier or more sexually attractive but you need to do something to feel better about yourself, and if you can't afford them, you can look up to the smug bastard who can. The poorest and most exploited members of society can get their kicks vicariously through celebrity culture, in which people are alternately celebrated for making fools of themselves in public, then pilloried for it.

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<sup>4</sup> This was in the U.K. publication 'Cosmopolitan', a veritable bible of commodity fetishism and celebrity with brand placement in every paragraph, sadly I didn't note the issue number.



One of the staff writers is hoping her partner will fork out for a pair of ludicrously expensive designer boots for their anniversary,<sup>4</sup> not a really *good* pair of boots but a really *expensive* pair, which will be conveniently out of fashion in a year or so, when their fetishised use-value will have evaporated. Here we have an example of the commodification of human relationships, she will be delighted, no doubt, and he will find himself in her good books. The bourgeois mechanism of value exchange has found its way into the bedroom! The resulting feelings of love and well-being lift the spirits of the happy couple, so even their brain chemistry has become commodified.

Now I cite this as an extreme example but the readership of the magazine finds it all perfectly normal, in fact they would consider it self-evident. In our alienated world, we're all so far removed from the causes of things, from the fulcrum of action, that truly bizarre and irrational concepts like fashion seem perfectly reasonable. The market, which no one understands, especially those who are paid handsomely to do so, is as mysterious and capricious as the River God, and worshipping it is equally futile.

“From the point of view of the national economy, to dig holes and then to fill them in is an entirely sensible activity.”

—John Maynard Keynes.

This is reification, just as the realities of life are made invisible and incomprehensible, so mirages such as ‘fashion’, ‘the market’ and ‘the economy’ become concrete, and like the River God, lives must be sacrificed to them.

A fairly recent development is the commodification of morality. The marketing of ‘fair trade goods’, ‘cruelty-free produce’ and ‘sustainable technology’ at a premium normalises unfair trade, cruelty-laden produce and unsustainable technology, in fact the market requires their predominance. Economists tell us, without irony, that caring for the environment is a luxury good, and by definition is beyond the scope of most wage-labourers who must struggle to care for their own. You can buy an ‘ethical pension plan’ — with pretty lax ethics, most of the stock in the one I was offered was with Apple. Try handing a spare tenner to a charity to alleviate suffering somewhere and you’ll get it straight back, in mailshots praising your compassion and revealing further horrors. Charities in the U.K. whose directors may receive six-figure salaries, have been the mainstay of the government’s forced labour programme. As the planet heats up, carbon trading markets proliferate, whereby corporations buy and sell allowances to pollute the atmosphere. About twelve percent of annual greenhouse gas emissions are incorporated into this real ‘black economy’.

“It is another case of the state (or states) enclosing the commons, this time the atmosphere, in order to forcefully create a new market. Capitalism has attempted to make something irreducibly complex (the climate) into something easily quantifiable (a carbon price). As David Harvey states, “*Creating markets where there have been none before is one of the ways in which, historically, capital has expanded*” (Derbyshire, 2014). Sullivan (2009) drives the point further when he says the modern era represents a “*wave of enclosure and primitive accumulation to liberate natural capital for the global market*” (p. 26). Capitalism’s requirements have always required either geographical expansion, technological/financial innovation, or both (Moore, 2011). Emissions trading and carbon markets are another example of this.”

‘The Failures of Atmospheric Commodification’ by probablyasocialecologist, 2015

The bourgeoisie, having stolen our planet, steal slices of our lives, and use these to continuously refine the means of production, tightening their political, social and cultural dominance over us. The planet is finite, but this is of no importance to the bourgeoisie; for as long as we live we have needs and they can manipulate those needs then use them to extract surplus-value from us; they have us digging our own graves.

So far so Marxist, but drowning in the market soup of exchange-values there are sentient beings struggling to get to the surface and breathe. As unregulated capital accumulation leads inevitably towards monopoly, or at least oligopoly, the state has to take a hand to stop the capitalists destroying civil society — their means of production and their labour force. And although the state serves the bourgeoisie, it's forced to engage with the people from time to time and that's inconvenient, politicians unlike company directors have to stand for election, or rely on the army to keep them in power.

When the state capitalism of post-war Europe was overstretched by the falling rate of profit on the one hand, and the demands of the workers on the other, the bourgeoisie fought back using far-right populism as a smokescreen. Primitive accumulation was resorted to, both in the privatisation of state assets in the west and the post-Stalinist East, and an historic expropriation of peasant societies in the Far East, turning the clock back to an earlier, more ruthless form of capitalism. This sponsored laissez-faire economic policies that permitted the proportion of fictitious capital to become untenable, prompting the state to step in and nationalise the banks.

The largest capitalists, having expropriated lots of little capitalists from their means of accumulation, eventually become alienated from their own capital. In the twentieth century the industrialists and entrepreneurs gave way to executives and management consultants; the 'owners' of the means of production no longer took any interest in its operation, being content to collect dividends from stocks traded on their behalf by other specialists, who would be paid fantastic sums to buy and sell other people's actual and anticipated surplus-value. This is Marx's 'fictitious capital'; in the year 2008, these highly paid experts traded financial instruments to the value of three and a half times the gross annual product of the entire world! These are the folk who must receive unlimited salaries and bonuses just to turn up, who live lives of extravagance and waste beyond our capacity to imagine; any curb on their excesses will cause them to take their ball home leaving us to plunge into the abyss, is it conceivable they didn't know what was going on? When the inevitable plunge came, we footed the bill. I don't believe capitalism can ever evolve beyond reliance on both primitive accumulation and heavy-handed state intervention.

Latterly, as cocaine paranoia became a significant factor in the marketplace, the trading was handed over to computer algorithms. Even the machines can get paranoid though, the shortcomings of software leading to temporary malfunctions, called 'glitches'. In 2010 a 'flash crash' dropped the Dow Jones Industrial average by 9% and wiped out a trillion dollars worth of value, making thousands of people technically destitute for about 15 minutes.

I lean quite heavily on Marx and Engels because they gave us the tools to understand not only the development of capitalism, but how it interacts with other systems like patriarchy, racism,

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<sup>5</sup> Like Isaac Newton's laws of motion and gravity, which are nevertheless perfectly adequate if you want to build a bridge or fire a projectile, and we don't have to believe Newton was a virtuous person or adopt any of his other opinions.

nationalism, militarism, religion, the media, parliamentary democracy and even the workers' movement; how it adapts to these power structures, co-opts them and profits from them. Marxist theory is fundamentally flawed<sup>5</sup> the two men were products of their time as we all are, their prescriptions now look as short-sighted as their insights were bold and prescient. Marx's description of the behaviour of fictitious capital in the final epoch of capitalism seems almost clairvoyant.

Where we part company is that they saw the Working Class as merely one of the productive forces, a product of capital itself, which was destined to overthrow it but lacked sufficient free-will to create anything beyond its historic destiny. I like to stand the whole thing on its head, we the workers are ultimately responsible for everything that ever was and will be, when we accept that responsibility and harness our strength to our imaginations, we will do a lot better than this.

## 11. Marxism-Leninism: how not to abolish capitalism and the state.

“He who complains is an enemy, he who opposes is a corpse.”

-Saloth Sar ‘Pol Pot’.

I firmly believe the revolutionary process is prefigurative; by which I mean that the way you conduct a revolution determines the society it creates, if you want to live with a gun in your back start out that way. A good objective test of whether you’re living in a socialist society is to ask yourself whether you’re still getting up in the morning and taking crap off people you don’t respect, it really is that simple.

It would be a shame to part company with the Marxists just as things are about to get interesting. As I’ve written elsewhere, I rather like some of you, you gave me my political education, we have supported each other as often as not and I admire your tenacity. Apart from anything else, I’d like to put the 20<sup>th</sup> century behind us. Shoot me down like a partridge<sup>1</sup> if I’m wrong, but we started out with the same aims.

Nevertheless anyone wanting to understand the mechanics of capitalism can do worse than read Marx’s ‘Capital: a Critique of Political Economy’; it’s not exactly riveting, more like 1400 pages of a German car manual, but for me it remains the definitive analysis. Other writers have stoically chewed through it so you don’t have to, beginning with his pal Friedrich Engels, who wrote a synopsis of volume 1 in 1868.

Why then, have Marxists made such a clusterfuck of creating socialism?

What is commonly referred to as Marxism should properly be called Marxism-Leninism, its basis is historical materialism,<sup>2</sup> the idea that the ideological character of society is solely determined by the social relations of production, and that these are in turn determined by the material factors of production<sup>3</sup> — chiefly technical progress — with geography, population and imperial expansion taking a secondary role. Taken together, the social and material relations amount to the *mode of production*. This is sometimes referred to as the base-superstructure model, with production as the base, and political, legal and cultural institutions as the superstructure. The theory holds that only (and simply) by altering the relations of production can you effect a revolutionary transformation of society.

Anarchist thinkers such as Bakunin and Kropotkin dismissed this model as a grotesque oversimplification, insisting that moral and philosophical currents which would be considered part of Marx’s superstructure had profound effects on its base. In 1859 Marx wrote:

“In the social production of their existence, men (*sic*) inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production approx-

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<sup>1</sup> Trotsky’s threat to the Kronstadt commune in 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Also called dialectic materialism or economic determinism.

<sup>3</sup> It in no way implies that people always act in their material self-interest, real or imagined.

priate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or — this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms — with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic — in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.”

—Karl Marx: *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Preface. 1859

There is nothing wrong with that oft-quoted statement but it can be interpreted in many different ways, justifying everything from reformist politicking to vanguard adventurism, and of course totalitarianism.

There’s some debate about how strictly Marx and Engels held this orthodoxy during their lifetime, as a great deal of their output was devoted to literary duelling with rival philosophers. Engels appears to contradict, or at least qualify the theory in his long-winded rant at Eugen Dühring:

“... cause and effect are conceptions which only hold good in their application to individual cases; but as soon as we consider the individual cases in their general connection with the universe as a whole, they run into each other, and they become confounded when we contemplate that universal action and reaction in which causes and effects are eternally changing places, so that what is effect here and now will be cause there and then, and vice versa.”

— Frederick Engels: *Anti-Dühring* 1878

And Marx, famously:

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

—Karl Marx: ‘Theses On Feuerbach’ XI 1845.

They were struggling to de-mystify the social sciences, to free them from superstition and metaphysics. One of their main issues was the primacy of matter — which they identified as objective existence, versus consciousness, or subjective experience. Stated as ‘philosophical materialism’ versus ‘idealism’, this is a contestable philosophical argument that goes back to the ancients, via Descartes, that can no more be settled than the existence of God can be finally proved or disproved. Innocent enough as idle speculation, it had some very serious consequences. Philosophical materialism is essential to establish the objective credentials of historical or dialectic materialism. It eventually turned back on itself as ideology was allowed to distort reality.

“Materialism in general recognizes objectively real being (matter) as independent of consciousness, sensation, experience ... Consciousness is only the reflection of being, at best an approximately true (adequate, ideally exact) reflection of it.”

—V.I. Lenin: *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* 1909.

That was Lenin having a pop at Professor Ernst Mach,<sup>4</sup> who influenced Einstein’s General Relativity and laid some of the philosophical foundations of modern science. Lenin’s motive was to malign his party rival Alexander Bogdanov A.K.A. Alyaksandr Malinovsky, a “Russian Machian”. He leans heavily on Engels ‘Anti-Duhring’. The arrogance of quoting a theoretical polemicist to discredit an experimental physicist informs the phenomenon of totalitarianism. The book became required reading in the Soviet educational system and the theory passed into dogma.

“Contrary to idealism, which asserts that only our consciousness really exists, and that the material world, being, nature, exists only in our consciousness’ in our sensations, ideas and perceptions, the Marxist philosophical materialism holds that matter, nature, being, is an objective reality existing outside and independent of our consciousness; that matter is primary, since it is the source of sensations, ideas, consciousness, and that consciousness is secondary, derivative, since it is a reflection of matter, a reflection of being; that thought is a product of matter which in its development has reached a high degree of perfection, namely, of the brain, and the brain is the organ of thought; and that therefore one cannot separate thought from matter without committing a grave error.”

—J. V. Stalin: ‘Dialectical and Historical Materialism’ 1938

The kind of error that can get you shot. Lenin and his successors used philosophical materialism to justify their view that a human is simply a piece of meat controlled by nerves, reactive to stimuli, to be conditioned by punishment and reward. Though never a student of Marx and Engels, I doubt that was what they intended.

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<sup>4</sup> Best known for his work on sound waves, especially the ‘sonic boom’, inertia and optics. He also studied

Marx perceived that capitalism was inadvertently engaged in the process of collectivising labour, thereby creating the conditions for its overthrow. In 1847 when the ‘Communist Manifesto’ was written, he correctly observed that this process was still in its infancy.<sup>5</sup> He proposed therefore, an interim state, the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ to allow the mode of production to mature to the point where a classless, stateless society could be achieved. Also the theory was not easy for everyone to understand, the effects of alienation made it hard for workers to see their class interest as they struggled with their day to day survival, so those in the know would form a political party to oversee this transition. Now if that idea seems with hindsight, too stupid for words, we have to bear in mind that the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Working Class had been virtually reduced to livestock already. It was hard to imagine their conditions being made any worse, then came the First World War.

“This idea of ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ is central to Marxist theory. Much confusion arises from the word ‘dictatorship’, which today conjures up images of repressive, unelected regimes. This is not necessarily what is meant (although it’s hard to ignore that wherever the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ was established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended up looking a lot like... a dictatorship). Bearing in mind suffrage had barely extended beyond male property owners in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Marx saw any state as a dictatorship of the ruling class (anarcho-syndicalists agree on this point). In capitalism the state is a dictatorship of the capitalist class — the bourgeoisie — and this is the case whether or not the state in question holds free and fair elections or respects human rights. If we accept this to be true then any revolution would necessarily involve the proletariat establishing its own dictatorship.”

—‘Fighting For Ourselves: Anarcho-Syndicalism and the Class Struggle’  
Written by the Solidarity Federation

Marx and Engels’ promotion of economic determinism required them to defend slavery, militarisation and imperialism as inevitable steps in the evolution of society. The workers must be patient and wait for the mode of production to advance until it had outgrown capitalism. The historical tendency of capitalist accumulation was an inexorable centralisation of political and economic power which would eventually make the market inoperable; giving way to universal ‘state capitalism’; then all the technical advances developed through the greed of the bourgeoisie would be at the disposal of the Working Class. Here’s Engels on slavery:

“The introduction of slavery in Greece under the conditions of that time, was a great step forward ... it was slavery that first made possible the development of agriculture and industry and with it the flower of the ancient world, Hellenism. Without slavery, no Greek State, no Greek art and science; without slavery no Roman Empire; without Hellenism and the Roman Empire as a basis, no Europe... without the slavery of antiquity no modern socialism ...”

—Engels: (*op. cit*)

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perception and psychology.

<sup>5</sup> In Marx’s day, the bourgeoisie was not the only client of the state; most territories were still dominated by landowning aristocracies with feudal production relations, against which bourgeois and proletarian revolutions stood neck and neck. America was still mostly wilderness, running on primitive accumulation and chattel slavery. By the end of the century, African, Asian, Russian, Spanish and Latin American peasants influenced by anarchist ideas were ready to proletarianise and collectivise themselves in one move.

Following the defeat of the Paris Commune insurrection in 1871, the International Workingmen's (*sic*) Association, which had brought together many radical tendencies, fell apart amid personal quarrelling and intrigue. At the London conference that year, Marx and Engels succeeded in passing a resolution that concluded:

"Considering, that against this collective power of the propertied classes the Working Class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes; that this constitution of the Working Class into a political party is indispensable in order to assure the triumph of the Social Revolution and its ultimate end — the abolition of classes; that the combination of forces which the Working Class has already effected by its economical struggles ought at the same time to serve as a lever for its struggles against the political power of landlords and capitalists — the Conference recalls to the members of the International: that in the militant state of the Working Class, its economical movement and its political action are indissolubly united."

To paraphrase the above: "fight the bourgeoisie using the political structures they devised to manage the capitalist mode of production, relying for success on the balance of class forces created by capitalism itself." This remains the position of the parliamentary left to this day.

The Marxists and anarchists went their separate ways; Marx and Engels turned to electoral politics particularly with the German Social Democratic Party (S.P.D.), which they had helped found. The S.P.D., like the British Labour Party later on, benefited from a short period of capitalist prosperity and rapid economic growth from military industrialisation, which put a premium on skilled labour. Trade union membership was high, and the workers were able to win material improvements through political representation. This seduced them into believing they could beat the bourgeoisie at their own game, thus 'Social Democracy' ceased to be socially revolutionary and came to represent the lily-livered reformist hypocrisy of the present day.

"The decades of peaceful gradual development transformed the character of social democracy. The labour leaders had bent under the sustained pressures of capitalism. For the developing careerists Marxist phrases were used at May Day processions, on workers' holidays and other such occasions, whereas in day to day work they adapted themselves to bourgeois society. The trade unions and the SPD had become rich and powerful, and had begun to harbour careerists and place-seekers at every level. These privileged layers now had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, in effect becoming not an instrument for the overthrow of capitalism, but of mediation between the classes."

—Rob Sewell: 'Germany: From Revolution to Counter-Revolution'

Then in 1905:

"A strike of miners in the Ruhr basin broke out and rapidly spread out of the control of union leaders to the whole mining region. The strike involved both organized and unorganized workers and raised not only economic demands but a political demand that the Prussian state take responsibility for the conditions in the mines. The trade union leaders were unable to stop this strike so they resorted to the tactic of leading it and then calling it off."

— (*ibid.*)

Sound familiar?

"This catastrophic policy which led to the emasculation of the socialist movement and its absorption into the capitalist State, rendered the German socialist movement (numerically the



strongest in the world) impotent to resist the First World War as well as the rise of Nazi fascism – historical tragedies whose magnitude it is impossible to assess.”

—Sam Dolgoff: ‘A Critique of Marxism’.

I invite you to peer into the abyss of 20<sup>th</sup> century politics; if all those people died for anything, it is that we shall learn from their mistakes.

Arguably however, by the end of the First World War, industrial production in the west had advanced to the point where the workers could indeed have taken control, abolishing both capitalism and the state in one move; the currents of revolutionary syndicalism developing across the globe provided a methodology for doing so:

“What the Socialist does realise is that under a social democratic form of society the administration of affairs will be in the hands of representatives of the various industries of the nation; that the workers in the shops and factories will organise themselves into unions, each union comprising all the workers at a given industry; that said union will democratically control the workshop life of its own industry, electing all foremen etc., and *regulating the routine of labour in that industry in subordination to the needs of society in general*, to the needs of its allied trades, and to the departments of industry to which it belongs; that representatives elected from these various departments of industry will meet and form the industrial administration or national government of the country.

In short, social democracy, as its name implies, is the application to industry, or to the social life of the nation, of the fundamental principles of democracy. Such application will necessarily have to begin in the workshop, and proceed logically and consecutively upward through all the grades of industrial organisation until it reaches the culminating point of national executive power and direction. In other words, *social democracy must proceed from the bottom upward*, whereas capitalist political society is organised from above downward.”

—James Connolly: ‘Industrial Unionism and Constructive Socialism’.

Isn’t that beautiful? The italics are mine. It was pretty much the view taken by Mikhail Bakunin, who inspired the European anarchosyndicalist movement. Mercifully, Connolly was executed by the British in 1916 before he could fall under the spell of Bolshevism.

That could have been the function of the Russian ‘Soviets’, the workers’ councils that gave their name to the new republic, but Lenin wanted a vanguard revolutionary party, so instead they became an arena for party politics. In fact the soviets were not the creation of the Bolshevik movement but arose spontaneously during the social convulsions of 1905, taking them by surprise:

“The Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses. It could find nothing better to do than to present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social-Democratic programme or disband. The Petersburg Soviet as a whole, including the contingent of Bolshevik working men as well, ignored this ultimatum without batting an eyelid”.

—Leon Trotsky: “Stalin”, London, 1947.

Trotsky joined the Petrograd Soviet and became its chairman, establishing his revolutionary credentials by getting locked up when the uprising collapsed. Soviets appeared again in February 1917,<sup>6</sup> threatening not only the old order, but Lenin's new cadre of 'professional revolutionaries', who were to be the instrument of the party committees and have no truck with the common workers. This aloofness caused them to be taken by surprise yet again. Such attitudes are partly explained by the origin of the party as a criminal conspiracy — one of many — against Tzarism. Although it had widespread and genuine support among sections of the Working Class, they exerted little influence on it. Those who showed promise were plucked from the factory to be supported by the growing underground bureaucracy. Clandestine operations did not lend themselves to frank discussion or consensus decision making, so they behaved as wolves among sheep. In April 1917 the German high command arranged for twenty-eight Bolsheviks, including Lenin, to travel to Petrograd by sealed train on a well-funded mission to take Russia out of the war.

The popular revolution started on what is now International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March; the Bolshevik *coup d'état* actually took place in November.

Under the provisional government that followed the abdication of Tzar Nicholas, the factory committees extended themselves as far as they could, imposing an eight hour day, demanding to see the books and effectively writing their own contracts wherever they could get away with it. Lenin was ever one to play to a selected audience; writing in April 1917, he advocates workers' control with recallable elected officials, paid no more than factory average. However, he wants this system ratified by a government decree — i.e. from above, and sees the factory committees as a stepping stone to nationalisation, which he insists, "*in no way implies the introduction of socialism*", but is simply a measure to restore order and prevent the collapse of war production. He's clearly walking a tightrope between the classes.

Within the factory committees themselves, the Bolsheviks pandered to the revolutionary fervour, resisting the Mensheviks' recommendation that they be under the control of the trade unions, in which the Bolsheviks were still relatively weak. After their October takeover, however, that is precisely where they would be. Lenin had been honest in one respect: the priority was never to create socialism, just to expropriate the political and economic power of the bourgeoisie, the factory committees movement was a temporary means to that end.

In July (old calendar) Pro-war politician Aleksandr Kerensky, a sometime Socialist-Revolutionary<sup>7</sup> lawyer who had become an advocate for bourgeois revolution, is installed as prime minister and launches an unsuccessful military offensive, mass desertion follows, soldiers and peasants begin expropriating land. As things hot up Lenin slopes off to Finland, where he writes the highly opportunistic 'The State and Revolution'<sup>8</sup> to ingratiate with anarchists and other anti-authoritarian workers. By the end of August, Kerensky has lost control and is facing a military coup, he has to go cap in hand to the Bolsheviks who recruit twenty-five thousand Red Guards to defend Petrograd. When they have occupied the city Lenin sends an imperious

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<sup>6</sup> The terms 'February' and 'October' revolution refer to the old Julian calendar that was in use in Imperial Russia. Lenin adopted the Gregorian calendar on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1918, advancing two weeks to synchronise with the Western world.

<sup>7</sup> A broad-based agrarian socialist party.

<sup>8</sup> Lenin appears to abandon the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat for a sort of anarchosindicalist direct democracy, preceded by only the briefest period of coercive force to "crush the resistance of the bourgeoisie". Lenin claims to have started writing it in Switzerland but left the manuscript behind. Like most of his writings it's composed of polemics against his rivals' misinterpretations of Marx and Engels and explanations of what the latter really meant, especially Engels' old mate Karl Kautsky. If it's indicative of anything at all, it's Lenin's insincerity.

letter to the Bolshevik central committee ordering them to seize power immediately. They “unanimously decided to burn it”.<sup>9</sup>

On the 5<sup>th</sup> October (old style) the provisional government decided to send the bulk of their forces, mainly those with revolutionary sympathies, to the front. This resulted in most of them immediately switching allegiance to the Petrograd Soviet, which by then had just achieved a Bolshevik majority with Trotsky as its president. It formed a Military Revolutionary Committee, comprising forty-eight Bolsheviks, fourteen Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, and four anarchists. It obtained the backing of the militant sailors of the Baltic fleet garrisoned on the island forts at Kronstadt, (many of whom were anarchists) which they had recently tried to declare an independent republic.

At 9:45 p.m. on the 25<sup>th</sup> October (old money) the cruiser Aurora fired a blank shell over the palace and the remaining loyalist troops made themselves scarce. At 2 a.m. Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko broke into the Winter Palace through a window in the servant’s quarters, taking with him a few of the Red Guards whose main interest was the Imperial wine cellar, and arrested the provisional government. This was the “storming of the Winter Palace” immortalised in the art of socialist realism.

As Petrograd went on the piss, the new day dawned to the Proclamation of Council of Peoples Commissars (Sovnarkom)<sup>10</sup> during the opening session of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. This body would have supreme executive power, its members nominated not by the Soviets but by the Bolsheviks’ Central Committee.

It was further proclaimed that:

“All power has passed to the Soviets ...”

So they had all better go back to work and await instructions:

“... New laws will be proclaimed within a few days dealing with workers’ problems. ... We ask you to put an end to all strikes on economic and political issues, to resume work and to carry it out in a perfectly orderly manner ... Every man to his place.”

In November Lenin issued a decree, no less, on “workers’ control”, which only formalised the arrangements workers had already implemented for themselves. As I’ve said before, the only purpose of granting rights is the option to withhold them. The proletariat was no more than an abstract to Lenin, another middle-class lawyer who had never done a stroke of work in his life.

Point 5 of the decree stipulated that:

“the decisions of the elected delegates of the workers ...” could be “annulled by trade unions and congresses”.

Point 6 declared:

“in all enterprises of state importance” delegates were “answerable to the State for the maintenance of the strictest order and discipline and for the protection of property”.

Point 7 defined these as:

“all enterprises working for defence purposes, or in any way connected with the production of articles necessary for the existence of the masses of the population.”

Which is pretty much everything.

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<sup>9</sup> N. Bukharin: *From the speech of Comrade Bukharin in a commemorative evening in 1921*, Proletarskaia revoliutsiia, no.10, 1922.

<sup>10</sup> Of its original incumbents, five — including Lenin and Stalin — died of natural causes, eight were executed, one assassinated (Trotsky) and one died in prison.

“... the lower organs of control must confine their activities within the limits set by the instructions of the proposed All-Russian Council of Workers Control. We must say it quite clearly and categorically, so that workers in various enterprises don't go away with the idea that the factories belong to them”.

—A. Lozovsky ‘Workers’ Control’ Petrograd 1918.

In fact the All-Russian Council, stuffed as it was with delegates from bodies hastily constructed by the new government, never held a quorate meeting. By hook or by crook, the party dominated the soviets and took them over, or just dissolved them by decree. The trade unions usurped the functions of the factory committees. Instead of expressing the will of the workers to the centre, they carried the decisions of the centre to the workers; thus the Dictatorship of the Proletariat became the dictatorship of the Party.

“They have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers’ right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy!”

—Leon Trotsky: to the tenth party congress, March 1921.

“Dangerous slogans”, eh? The tenth congress took place during the siege of Kronstadt which put paid to the unsuccessful ‘Third Revolution’, one of thousands of local uprisings against Bolshevik dictatorship. Trotsky was actually referring to the ‘Workers’ Opposition’ a mildly critical Communist Party faction drawn from the Trade Union bureaucracy, whose members had actually worked in industry and knew something about it.

It is precisely this separation of the political from the economic, of the needs and ambitions of the workers from their productive environment, which doomed the U.S.S.R. to perpetuate capitalist values and power structures through a long and wasteful detour around social revolution. Lenin explicitly referred to creating state capitalism, supposedly a fast-forward to capitalism’s end game, well aware this would take many years. The term ‘socialism’ was mainly used for propaganda effect and bore no relationship to actual production methods, which were highly centralised and authoritarian.

“Unquestioning submission to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of labour processes that are based on large — scale machine industry. ... today the Revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process”.

—V.I. Lenin: The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government. 1918

“If we are to speak seriously of a planned economy, if the mode of distribution of labour power is to be brought into full correspondence with the economic plan at any given stage of its development, then it is impermissible for the Working Class to lead a nomadic existence. In the same way as with troops, they must be prepared to be stationed in holding camps, posted here or there or simply ordered about.”

—Leon Trotsky: Russian Correspondence, Inprecator, Volume 10, 1920.

I could fill a book with quotes from Lenin and Trotsky about the necessity of dictatorship and state terrorism; the workers were to be treated like cattle in the name of their emancipation. They were all expendable and their lives could be taken whenever it was found expedient to do so, this principle was established from the outset. My favourite line has a touch of the Monty Python about it:

“It is necessary, secretly and urgently, to prepare the terror,”

—V.I. Lenin: Memorandum to Nikolay Nikolayevich Krestinsky September 1918; quoted in ‘The Mitrokhin Archive:  
The KGB in Europe and the West’ by Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin.

The Bolsheviks were engaged in a desperate power struggle with the Socialist-Revolutionaries, whose power base lay with the peasantry rather than the industrial Soviets, they advocated agricultural communes. Peasants were problematic as their fortunes depended on the harvest alone — there was no abstract power relation to be transferred from the bourgeoisie to the state. In good times they were self sufficient, they didn’t need the state but the state certainly needed them, to be the provisioners of the factories and the army. In Marxist terms they had no revolutionary potential because once they had control of the land they would be immune to party politics. As Eric Hobsbawm points out:

“Peasants, however unrevolutionary, want land, and lack of land is against natural justice. The remarkable characteristic of the proletarianised [agricultural] labourer was that he (*sic*) no longer wanted land, but higher wages and good employment”

—Eric Hobsbawm and George Rude: ‘Captain Swing’.

Higher wages and good employment are in the gift of the controllers of the means of production, but land is only obtained by taking it, therefore the proletarianisation of the peasantry is a priority of both bourgeois and Bolshevik revolutions.

The militant wing of the S.R.s favoured the guerrilla tactics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century ‘People’s Will’ anarchist movement that had assassinated Tzar Alexander the second. Lenin was recovering from gunshot wounds after arbitrarily dissolving the constituent assembly in which the S.R.s had just been voted an overwhelming majority. Stalin’s proposal for “open and systematic mass terror” was hastily approved by all the other Bolshevik leaders, running scared from the wave of bombings and shootings. In the first year of the Red Terror the conservative official figures admit to 6,300 summary executions by the Cheka. Civil War followed, in which Trotsky stationed troops at the rear to shoot anyone caught retreating without permission.

In August 1920 Angel Pestaña attended the Second Congress of the Third International on behalf of the Spanish National Confederation of Labour (C.N.T.). The libertarian union affiliated to the Comintern the year before, although it had affirmed itself as apolitical. The appearance of a proletarian takeover in Russia excited anarchists just as much as everyone else and the news from the east were confused at best, amid the vitriol spewed out by the bourgeois press. Throughout 1917, partly inspired by these events, Spain had trembled on the brink of revolution. Anarchist and socialist unions united in a general strike, military conscripts mutinied and barricades were erected in the streets. Anarchists were sensitive to the idea of tactics being shaped by local conditions, and slow to condemn fellow workers. Errico Malatesta summed up his uncertainty privately to Luigi Fabbri:

“With the expression dictatorship of the proletariat, our Bolshevising friends intend to describe the revolutionary event in which the workers seize the land and the means of production and try to create a society in which there is no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers. In that case, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be a dictatorship of all and it would not be a dictatorship in the same sense that a government of all isn’t a government in the authoritarian, historical, and practical meaning of the word ... In reality, it’s the dictatorship of a party, or rather, the leaders of a party. Lenin, Trotsky, and their comrades are doubtlessly sincere revolutionaries and won’t betray the revolution, given their understanding of it, but they are training government cadres that will serve those who later come to exploit and kill the revolution. This is a history that repeats itself; with the respective differences having been considered, it’s the dictatorship of Robespierre that brings it to the guillotine and prepares the way for Napoleon. ... It could also be that many things that seem bad to us are a product of the situation and that it wasn’t possible to operate differently, given Russia’s special circumstances. It’s better to wait, especially when what we say cannot have any influence on events there and would be poorly interpreted in Italy, making it seem like we’re echoing the reactionaries’ biased slanders.”

—Errico Malatesta: quoted by Luigi Fabbri in ‘Dictatorship and Revolution’ 1922.

Whilst in Moscow Pestaña met with anarchists such as Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Augustine Souchy, who expressed their disillusionment with the Bolshevik regime. He told the congress he had no mandate to endorse the announcement of a new Red Labour International, with its specifically Marxist language. He knew the membership would never accept the control of a party:

“Everything referring to the taking of political power, the dictatorship of the proletariat ... must wait for decisions that the CNT will take after my return to Spain, when the Confederal Committee learns what has been decided here.”

—Jose Peirats Valls: ‘Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution’.

The Communists promised to amend the document to take account of the Spanish delegate’s reservation, then in his absence they published the original text and appended Pestaña’s name. He found the proceedings farcical:

“The chairman made the rules, presided over the deliberations, modified proposals at will, changed the agenda, and presented proposals of his own. For a start, the way the chair handled the gavel was very inequitable. For example, Zinoviev gave a speech which lasted one and one-half hours, although each speaker was supposedly limited to ten minutes. Pestaña tried to rebut the speech, but was cut off by the chairman, watch in hand. Pestaña himself was rebutted by Trotsky who spoke for three-quarters of an hour, and when Pestaña wanted to answer Trotsky’s attack on him, the chairman declared the debate over. He also protested the way in which speakers were chosen. Theoretically each delegate could speak on every issue, but the chair selected “the most capable ones”. He was also shocked that no minutes were kept. Nor did they vote by national delegation, only by individual delegate. It had been agreed to count the vote proportionally, but the agreement was not kept, and the Russian Communist Party assured for itself a comfortable majority. On top of everything, certain decisions were made behind the scenes and never reached the assembly at all. That is how the following motion was approved:

*In the future worldwide Congresses of the Third International, participating trade union organizations will be represented by delegates from the Communist Party of their respective countries. All protest on this decision was simply ignored.”*

– (ibid.)

The proposed structure of the Red Labour International would likewise place all the domestic activities of affiliated unions under the supervision of their local Communist parties. An exasperated Pestaña reported back recommending the C.N.T. review its affiliation. He was imprisoned on his return to Spain; in fact the entire National Committee was arrested the following year, leaving the union temporarily in the hands of Marxists Joaquin Maurin and Andreu Nin (of whom more later) who sat on the report. The decision had to wait until the Confederation’s 1922 congress when it affiliated to the anarchosyndicalist International Workers Association instead.

By the time Malatesta’s words appeared in print, the character of Lenin, Trotsky and the others was evident and the guillotine was in full swing. Anarchists with a high international profile were left unmolested but their comrades were slaughtered in droves. The venerable Pyotr Kropotkin returned from his 41-year exile in July 1917. Unlike Lenin who was granted safe passage by the Kaiser, Kropotkin took his chances in the North Sea. He visited the dictator to intercede on behalf of a friend condemned to death, and demanded an end to the reprisal shootings and hostage-taking the new state had resorted to.

“You and I have different points of view. Our aims seem to be the same, but as to a number of questions about means, actions, and organisation, I differ with you greatly. Neither I, nor any of my friends, will refuse to help you; but our help will consist only in that we will report to you all the injustices taking place everywhere from which the people are groaning.”

—David Shub: ‘Kropotkin and Lenin’ 1948.

Published in English by Bastard Press and currently available from Wessex Solidarity.

And he did so until the end of his life in 1921:

“Russia has become a Soviet Republic only in name. ... At present it is ruled not by Soviets but by party committees ... If the present situation should continue much longer, the very word “socialism” will turn into a curse, as did the slogan of “equality” for forty years after the rule of the Jacobins.”

—(ibid.)

“Is it possible that you do not know what a hostage really is — a man imprisoned not because of a crime committed but only because it suits his enemies to exert blackmail on his companions? ... If you admit such methods, one can foresee that one day you will use torture, as was done in the Middle-Ages.”

—(ibid.)

The dynamic duo took some following, Stalin made no secret of his intention to cram three centuries worth of primitive accumulation — he used the British Empire as an analogy — into a generation; unsurprisingly 20 million people died in the process. In 1928 the Comintern adopted its ultra-left ‘class against class’ policy mainly to settle internal power struggles and facilitate

forced collectivisation, re-armament and industrialisation. This had the effect of isolating foreign Communist Parties from the Working Class movements in their respective countries. They became ever more irrelevant to their own social struggles, as they were pitted not against the bourgeoisie, but against the unions and parties of the Second International. In a later chapter I shall examine how this policy shaped, and was shaped by, the rise of fascism.

When it became apparent that the workers of the world were not, in fact, going to unite and follow the Russian example, Stalin settled for the status quo. Building on Lenin's substitution of the Party for the Class, the ideal was now a one-party controlled economy competing successfully in bourgeois terms, building an empire in a capitalist world. Trotsky, who clung to the idea of world revolution, was expelled and later murdered, along with his supporters and most of the October revolutionaries. Stalin set quota for arrests and executions that his minions competed with each other to exceed. The function of the Third International and all the foreign Communist Parties affiliated to it shifted from fermenting revolution to protecting the strategic interests of the U.S.S.R. A policy defined as 'Socialism in One Country', so just as the interests of the Russian Working Class had been subordinated to the all-important state, so the workers of the world would, where necessary, be sacrificed on the same altar.

Why did so many revolutionaries abandon their critical faculties in blind obedience to Moscow? The scientific certainty of Marxism jarred with the failure of the revolution to spread beyond the U.S.S.R. and any serious analysis of this could only lead to heresy and loss of faith. The Soviets alone had succeeded in achieving their historic destiny, and they were encircled by enemies who would stop at nothing to put them back in their box; this gave them a monopoly on truth. So foreign Communists became devoted acolytes of an opportunistic and peculiarly Russian cult; requiring little intellectual capacity in their leadership.

"Leaving aside for the moment the scientific validity of 'Scientific Socialism', did we who became adherents of Marxism think about these theories scientifically? Not at all. We were disciples, advocates, expounders, missionaries of the 'Cause'. These theories became the substance of our Faith, containing all we hoped for, enabling us to see what we wished to see. We were subordinating our reasoning to belief as all religionists do, transforming theories into doctrines, interpreting the social transformation taking place before our eyes as the 'disintegration of capitalism' despite the fact that life was flouting the basic tenets of our doctrines. Suddenly, the whole Marxist thesis of capitalism bursting itself asunder in the most highly developed and industrialised countries first was knocked sky high, for behold the 'Ten Days that Shook the World' were declared by Lenin and the Bolsheviks to be the opening days of the 'World Proletarian Revolution'. Did we stop in our tracks, ask why we had been forestalled by our new god 'history' and query whether the Russian Revolution could be what its leaders claimed it to be? Not at all. We were missionaries of a faith and cared not two hoots whether it was Peter or Paul who led the Proletarian hosts or whether the Revolution began in Jerusalem or Rome."

—J.T. Murphy: 'Twilight or Dawn?'

Peace News, The International Pacifist Weekly, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1956

Found at: Marxists Internet Archive.

Once the vision of proletarian revolution had given way to the grubby tactical manoeuvring of incompetent paranoiacs, there ceased to be any objective criteria for the correctness of any policy. The leader of the U.S.S.R. could never be incorrect so no debate was possible, only parrot-style



repetition of jargon. The most disastrous errors of judgement could always be retrospectively attributed to the last batch of counter-revolutionaries. The preposterous Trotsky-fascist conspiracy theory used to justify the purges in Russia and Republican Spain had to be endorsed in every report to Moscow, so the boss's paranoia was fed with lurid tales of spy-rings, gangs of Trotskyist saboteurs and Bukharinist bandits. When the Kremlin decided to replace the Spanish Prime Minister for refusing to endorse such nonsense the two Spanish Comintern delegates, Jose Diaz and Jesus Hernández, accepted the decision with regret, believing the move too divisive. Palmiro Togliatti refused to minute their reservations, on the grounds that it was "inadmissible" to accept that there could be any discussion on the matter. Hernández was then further humiliated, being ordered to publicly call for Caballero's resignation.

The baffling and meaningless verbal formulations used to justify each reversal of direction, the fabrications and pseudo-ideological analyses were a silly game played in deadly earnest by folk who knew the slightest departure from approved terminology could get them denounced and shot. When Stalin farted, officials of the Comintern would strain to reproduce the precise tone, vibrato and stench. They applauded every policy change: from class against class to the 'popular front' against fascism; the Soviet-Nazi pact of 1939 and even the dissolution of the Comintern itself in 1943 were all greeted with rapturous enthusiasm. When the rank and file had their way, as at Cable Street, the leadership explained that was what they had intended all along.

With the partition of Europe after the Second World War, both sides were served by representing the Soviet system as socialist or communist, allowing the bourgeoisie to demonise socialism as an idea, whilst giving the Soviet regime a false legitimacy among the militant proletariat, this was still going on in my lifetime, and its echoes have yet to die down. For me, the movement that turned Working Class militants into sycophants, gangsters and pimps is the real tragedy of the twentieth century. But as a disaffected young man I too was seduced by the symbolism, by the romance of revolutionary authority, the illusion that somewhere in the world capitalism had already been defeated and those who were ruining my life exerted no influence. There was the cult of Che Guevara, he may have been a psychopath but he was *our* psychopath.

It seems to me that orthodox Marxists such as Mandel quoted above focus more on the theory of surplus-value, the quantitative aspect of exploitation, than on fetishism, the qualitative aspect, because their parties in government failed to address it. The Soviets never said: "go and be creative, and show us what you can achieve", they said: "build us an icebreaker, a rocket, a camera". They said "build apartments everyone can afford", not "apartments everyone will want to live in". As for artificial scarcity, the driver of capitalism, they were masters at that. Why would people need to 'afford' anything in a territory the size of the U.S.S.R. with all its resources? The reason is simple; had they stopped converting human activity to exchange values, they could not have retained their power, they would not have been a government at all.

The ends justified the means we were told; but they lost sight of the ends and only the means survived. In Marxist language, the failure to abolish the alienation of labour from the means of production, the continued reduction of human qualities to the exchange-values of things, not by markets but by a class of bureaucrats, perpetuated capitalist power relations. Wage labour is an abusive relationship however you dress it up, and money is of itself a structural oppression.

Marx's scientific theories became fetishises, the slogans worshipped to banish reason made a litany even more stupefying than the subtle deceptions of liberalism. Soviet Communism was no more than the reification of the Bolsheviks' methods: centralisation, uniformity, orthodoxy, obedience, coercion, secrecy, treachery and deceit. Not the nurturing of human strengths but

the manipulation of human weaknesses. Their symbols went everywhere, they all put up statues of themselves; the personality cult is reification writ large. With the relations of production no longer masked by the market, everyone could see where the “painful pounding sensation” was coming from, as in earlier modes of production, the controllers and operators were not subject to the same laws, it was a return to monarchy. Their totalitarianism was authority in a vacuum, without even the justification of tradition or metaphysics to anchor it in the culture, just “do as I say or I’ll shoot you”. Thus it swiftly paved the way for its more durable alter ego, fascism.

‘The state’ became a synonym for socialism on both sides of the iron curtain. This mirage of an alternative to capitalism provided a foil for its most ruthless proponents to refine their own exploitative mechanics, to the extent that when the Russian empire collapsed, the bourgeoisie claimed to have won the class war!

“In the struggle for these objectives Bolshevism will eventually be seen to have been a monstrous aberration, the last garb donned by a bourgeois ideology as it was being subverted at the roots. Bolshevism’s emphasis on the incapacity of the masses to achieve a socialist consciousness through their own experience of life under capitalism, its prescription of a hierarchically structured ‘vanguard party’ and of ‘centralisation to fight the centralised state power of the bourgeoisie’, its proclamation of the ‘historical birthright’ of those who have accepted a particular vision of society (and of its future) and the decreed right to dictate this vision to others — if necessary at the point of a gun — all these will be recognised for what they are: the last attempt of bourgeois society to reassert its ordained division into leaders and led, and to maintain authoritarian social relations in all aspects of human life.”

—Maurice Brinton: *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*  
1917 — 1921 *The State and Counter-revolution*.

Sure enough, the Russians eventually created capitalism and their corrupt bureaucracy survived the transition seamlessly. In seventy years they hadn’t even managed to abolish racism, misogyny, homophobia and religion, all those vices and delusions re-surfaced with a vengeance.

Maoism or ‘Third World-ism’ took Stalin’s Popular Front a stage further and stood Marx on his head. If you can establish the idea that your vanguard party substitutes for the aspirations of the proletariat in all circumstances, you don’t actually need a proletariat. Applying Marxist symbolism to societies with the feudal mode of production and pre-capitalist power relations, the goal is an unashamedly bourgeois revolution. Styling themselves Revolutionary Communists, Maoist cadres appeal to nationalism and anti-imperialism, recruiting peasants to take the land through a guerrilla campaign. The party will then seize state power using cross-class alliances with anyone who fancies getting ahead of the old order, and transform itself into a homespun bourgeoisie.

China now practices something resembling corporatism (National Socialism). North Korea has successfully recreated feudalism, with three generations of the same dynasty in charge, and anecdotally,<sup>11</sup> a system based entirely on patronage, your access to power depending on how close you are to the ruling family.

For the necrophile Khmer Rouge killing became an end in itself. Their rabid xenophobia and preoccupation with racial purity makes them hard to place on the Marxist spectrum. Their big

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<sup>11</sup> The only information that comes out of North Korea is from people who have narrowly escaped with their lives, we could hardly expect them to be unbiased.

idea was to turn the entire country into a machine for producing rice, and export it all to fund their ancient conflict with Vietnam. Too bad they didn't have the faintest idea how to go about it. For all their fetishism of Khmer peasant traditions the leaders were affluent, Western-educated, and not all ethnic Khmers. There were precedents in Lenin's 'war communism', Stalin's collectivisation from above, and Mao's Great Leap Forward,<sup>12</sup> but their obsessive secrecy deprived them even of a personality cult. Hardly anyone knew Pol Pot was Brother Number One, and the Communist Party of Kampuchea only declared its existence years after taking power. They ended up funded by Chinese and Western imperialism against the Soviet bloc. I think it best to understand these historical phenomena in terms of the psychological deterioration of individuals corrupted by power and the fear it inspires, rather than wasting effort on ideological analysis.

Meanwhile, Marxist parties in opposition in the west apologised for these excesses while tinkering with capitalism through the reformist unions and social democratic parties; squabbled amongst themselves, played electoral power games and pulled the plug on genuine class struggle whenever they feared losing control of it.

Marx didn't create the Khmer Rouge, any more than Jesus did the Inquisition or Mohammed the Daesh. What those traditions have in common, however, is that all carry the seeds of totalitarianism in the certainty of their world-view. On the one hand 'divine authority' and an absolutist moral code, on the other 'objective social science', in each case interpreted by not-especially clever people with their own axes to grind. Anarchists don't have this problem, instead we sometimes allow our flexibility and humanity to lead us into dodgy alliances or ill-advised compromises and lose the coherence of means and ends that way.

A new generation of anarchists is trying to reclaim the word 'communism' but for an old recovering Trot it's a bit too much. I know workers from the post-Stalinist East who won't even talk about it: "there was nothing in the shops but vinegar". I'm not sure if that was literally true or just a metaphor; it works either way. I've tried explaining the anarchist origin of May Day but it just makes them think of tanks.

Not that mass murder is any more acceptable when conducted in the name of liberal democracy. The point is that if you once accept the primacy of an abstract: the state, the law, the economy, religion, the dictatorship of the proletariat, or what-have-you, over individual human life, it becomes possible to justify absolutely anything. I could do it, you could do it, whatever you like, limited only by your ability to manipulate the language. Capital and the state must always regenerate each other, so that abolishing one without the other is not even theoretically possible.

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<sup>12</sup> In fact the rationale behind murdering anyone you're not sure of, because you've got more people than you need, mainly reminds me of the 'Mola plan', of which more later.

## 12. Appendix: Some thoughts on historical materialism.

For what it's worth, I'm with Mach. All descriptions of reality are only human rationalisations limited by our crude sensory apparatus and slow thought processes. We only perceive what we can conceive. You don't need to understand the theory of gravity to fall out of a tree, but sooner or later you're bound to ask why the ground keeps coming at you, and look for an explanation. Through experiment, ingenuity and our boundless curiosity we refine our descriptions to iron out observable contradictions — or some of us do.

Political theories, true or false, are most effective if widely held. For centuries people went around saying the earth was flat, and acted accordingly. It's easily checked: climb a mountain on a clear day and look around, you'll see a circle, and it gets bigger the higher you climb. Now walk some distance and climb another one. The same thing happens. If the earth was flat this would only occur when the sun was directly overhead, everywhere else you'd see an ellipse. Countless individuals must have drawn this conclusion in antiquity but kept it to themselves for a quiet life.

Some people still believe the earth is flat and will bend themselves out of shape trying to make their observations fit the theory. When presented with evidence they prefer to imagine why someone would fabricate it than examine it dispassionately. They can't stop me flying round the globe nor stop it casting a curved shadow in a lunar eclipse, but for them it remains flat. Flat as piss on a plate.

If we are to accept the development of production relations as subject to natural laws, the benefit of this insight is to employ such laws to the advantage of our class. There would be no point in knowing where we were headed if we were content to drift on the tide. Could it be the bourgeoisie are on to this too? As in physics, the mere fact of observation alters the outcome.

Whether or not we accept that individual or social consciousness is influenced by economics, there is no question that the controllers of each cycle of history portray theirs as the pinnacle of evolution, claiming justification in terms of eternal principles.

Because capitalist power relations are concealed behind the exchange of commodities, all classes are subject to the same forces — bosses and workers alike — this was not the case under earlier modes of production, where the controllers simply laid down the law to the operators, however:

The superstructure — the state and legal system — has as its sole aim a monopoly on direct coercion, which makes it essentially reactive. To this end it is dependent on the existing mode of production so it must favour the bourgeoisie, whose sole aim is to maximise capital accumulation.

“The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’. 1848

But:

It must also hold it in check, otherwise capitalism would readily destroy its labour force, civil society, and the planet. Every individual bourgeois knows this, they are compelled to compete as ruthlessly as they can get away with or fall behind, so they depend on the state holding them back, as it holds back their competitors.

The base and superstructure then, though clients of each other, are also competing interests. The state can and will alter the relations of production, especially if class antagonism, rival states, environmental ruin or concentration of power threaten its monopoly.

Historical materialism places the Working Class in a cleft stick. Destined to effect a revolutionary transformation, we must wait for the development of productive forces — for the bourgeoisie to complete its own historic mission and step aside — or at least totter enough to be pushed over. This makes us both the subject and object of history. Lenin got around this by a process of substitution:

“In the one case we have a party which thinks for the proletariat, which substitutes itself politically for it, [and in the other we have a party which politically educates and mobilises the proletariat to exercise rational pressure on the will of all political groups and parties.] ...”

“In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead, as we shall see below, to the Party organisation “substituting” itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee;”

—Leon Trotsky: ‘Our Political Tasks’ 1904.

Trotsky later changed his mind and was entirely complicit in the process that would cost him his life. Ironically this text was cited as evidence of his heresy against Marxism-Leninism.

The Working Class is invincible when it collectively declines to work, or occupies territory and refuses to relinquish it, this it can do at any time, regardless of the political regime in force. So it’s the *perceived* material conditions that need to mature, i.e. the *consciousness* of the Working Class, we must free ourselves from the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

So to actually go about making history requires the Working Class to achieve self-awareness, becoming “*a class for itself*”<sup>1</sup> here the superstructure steps in, its culture construes each producer as a separate client of the nation-state whose interaction with the others is regulated by its laws rather than the scientific ones, exploiting common cognitive biases and logical fallacies to persuade us this is the natural and permanent order of things.

When self-awareness appeared in leaps and bounds at the turn of the last century, the Bolsheviks, insisting the Working Class didn’t know what they were about, created their own ideological superstructure to much the same effect. They first substituted themselves for the revolutionary class — the workers — then for the fledgling bourgeoisie, and finally, for the deposed monarchy.

A century ago, the superstructure almost lost control of the base. Workers and peasants all over the globe expropriated the fields and factories challenging both property and the state’s monopoly. Working together at common tasks and living in close proximity, they achieved collective will and force of numbers, they needed no leadership or direction in this.

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<sup>1</sup> In ‘The Poverty of Philosophy’ Marx’s polemic against Proudhon, he describes workers combining to raise wages as an example of a class acting in its own interest. It was the superstructure, first in the shape of fascism, then neoliberalism, that eventually effected the atomisation of the class to counter this.

The changes in material relations of production that so animated Marx and created these effects have long been assimilated, two World Wars, and one cold, took care of that.

“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.”

—K. Marx & F. Engels (*op. cit*)

Indeed.

Techniques of production and distribution (of value) are presently changing faster than ever and we are on a very different terrain. Whilst it severely burns my arse to accept that: “*No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed ...*” capitalism survives, its contradictions intact, endlessly re-inventing itself and developing new productive forces — or we develop them and the bourgeoisie appropriates them.

Society as a whole is no longer: “*more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other*”<sup>2</sup> social strata are being re-introduced. Nevertheless, in the electronics and textile factories of the Far East, working conditions are not much different from the weaving sheds and munitions factories of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Since the Second World War, the technology that atomised the base has begun to dismantle the superstructure. The electronics industry has both isolated us from our neighbours and connected us across continents to people we will never meet, not just through exchanging produce of social labour, but directly.

One consequence of this is it’s virtually impossible to keep anything secret any more. The rulers of the world are shown up for the feckless buffoons they are, presenting themselves as cartoon characters: the spiv, the ogre, the clown. They play up to this because they don’t know what else to do — they really are no brighter than they look. If Lenin was “Ghengis Khan with the telegraph”, a latter-day Lenin would have a twitter account, and probably make a bell-end of himself with it.

Culture, ideology, and the media that convey it, are no longer the preserve of a handful of intellectuals. I can write a pamphlet in my lunch break, print a hundred copies on the bosses’ equipment, and pass it out on the street after work. I’ve reached twelve thousand strangers in a few hours with a blog post, and that’s small fry, Ian Bone’s blog was getting hundreds of thousands of hits in its heyday.

Who is to say whether the productive forces have matured or not? The Working Class has always been equal to the task in hand. Suck it and see.

This is bullshit:

“Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the progress of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.”

(*ibid.*)

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<sup>2</sup> (*ibid.*)

## 13. Mutual aid versus the sick society.

“Housing, electric light, hairdressing saloons, medical care, pharmaceutical products which by June 1937 had already cost 16,000 pesetas, were free, as also was bread which was unrationed. Eighteen litres of olive oil were distributed per person per year. Meat which was earmarked for the militia and for consumption by city dwellers was rationed to 100 grammes a day — in spite of the large herds. Austerity was in the make-up of the Spaniard from the Interior. All these consumer goods were distributed in the communal shops. One was reserved for oil, soap and wine; another for bread, another for butcher’s meat in the former orphanage (there were no more orphans in Andorra or in any other collectivised village: all children without parents found a family). Seven tailors made clothes for the workers who had until then very rarely bought clothes. When in the past did a shepherd ever possess clothes made to measure?”

When one comes to the question of education, need one say that it was not neglected? Until July 1936 the school was installed in a dark and filthy building. Yet, six months earlier a new building had been completed but local politics, as filthy and obscure as the old school building, prevented it being used. The Collective did not lose a day, and started classes there immediately.”

—Gaston Leval: ‘Collectives in the Spanish Revolution’.

Primates are social animals and we are no exception, since we no longer roam the forests foraging for food, whenever we’re left to our own devices we tend to gather in affinity groups based on shared interests and values; it stands to reason no-one would voluntarily associate with people they didn’t get on with.

Before long we start to care about each other personally, which is an essential survival mechanism as the success of the group could at some point rest on the performance of any of its members. What’s more, the personal development of any individual is likely to benefit the whole group, as their new or refined talents are brought to bear. As long as you personally share in the common purpose it makes no sense to break the weakest link, this is no more than self-interest. Mutual aid then, identified by Kropotkin as “a factor in human evolution” is the most practical basis for any social project, or in the hackneyed phrase:

“.. from each according to his (*sic*) abilities, to each according to his needs.”

—Louis Blanc: ‘The Organisation of work.’ 1839

It’s also quite hard to be happy if all those around you are suffering, unless you’re a sociopath or you’ve been culturally conditioned to it.

“Society and its prevailing sense of values leads to another form of alienation; it alienates some from humanity. It partially de-humanises some people, makes them insensitive, ruthless in their handling of fellow human beings, self-centred and grasping. The irony is, they are often considered normal and well-adjusted. It is my sincere contention that anyone who can be totally adjusted to our society is in greater need of psychiatric analysis and treatment than anyone else.”

—Jimmy Reid, to Glasgow University 1972

Jimmy Reid was a Marxist-Leninist, also a courageous and visionary individual.

One consequence of alienation is illness. When I was young every other kid had asthma, probably as a result of growing up in a tiny little house where everyone smoked all the time. Now they all have depression, attention deficit, self-harm or behavioural disorders, presumably from growing up surrounded by people permanently on the edge of despair.

A little stress is healthy, we're quite brave when we have to be, and most stresses in life arise from external conditions which affect a group rather than an isolated individual, a drought, a storm, a factory fire. Facing challenges together strengthens us, educates us about ourselves and each other, and usually leaves us with a collective sense of satisfaction, even our grief is shared. However, the agenda of the neoliberal project has been to make every individual responsible for their own survival, whilst the state only takes responsibility for capitalism's survival by keeping them in line and facilitating the extraction of their surplus-value.

The deliberate dissolution of Working Class communities was calculated to stop workers feeling responsible for each other; in order to minimise the exchange-value of labour-power, they must be compelled to compete with their neighbours in a buyer's market. Stress provoked by your relations with the labour market must be faced alone, and by itself can reduce you to a gibbering wreck. Even your nearest and dearest may condemn you for failure as the culture makes it clear that you really have no business feeling happy or healthy unless you are busy adding value to someone else's capital.

"It has become an article of the creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself; a convenient belief to those who live on the wealth of others"

—William Morris: 'Useful Work vs. Useless Toil' 1885.

This alienation of needs from abilities creates a problem; the state cannot ignore the social plagues of alcoholism, depression and suicide but to approach these ills systematically would mean abandoning the pretence of individual freedom and responsibility; it can therefore only treat the symptoms rather than the causes.

Many people are damaged by their experiences, they need help all right; in the form of support, love and respect, often as not what they get is medication. The medicalisation of natural human reactions like anger, frustration, grief and anxiety has created the opportunity for the bourgeoisie to generate vast profits from selling us chemicals to regulate our responses to our alienated environment, fitting us to their modes of production, or at least rendering us harmless, at our own expense.

On social media I once observed that eating disorders were virtually unheard of before 1980. A younger comrade responded that this couldn't be true because a genuine mental illness must be rooted in our brain chemistry. Well of course it is, but brain chemistry isn't fixed by our biology. Never mind that our food and water is tainted with substances unknown a few decades ago, our hormones and neurotransmitters are generated in response to our interactions with the outside

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<sup>1</sup> This is the situation in Britain in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and shows no sign of abating. The bourgeois media have created a moral panic over abuse of the Spartan welfare system, although the cost of potential 'benefit fraud' is negligible compared to the cost of corporate tax evasion, and remains a tiny fraction of the overall budget.



world, or rather our perception of it. These illnesses are as real as miner's lung or occupational deafness, and just as avoidable.

The economy makes us sick and trades our ill-health. Those excused from competing in the labour market are stigmatised and subjected to repeated and humiliating work capability assessments;<sup>1</sup> their exchange-value is measured and found wanting. Equal though they are in the eyes of the law this just shouts at them and to the world that they have insufficient use-value to the bourgeoisie therefore aren't important. The mentally ill must engage with a bureaucracy so complex it regularly defeats its own managers, bombarded with computer-generated letters threatening them with destitution. Thousands have died waiting for appeals to be heard; one person with no limbs must report every six months just in case they have miraculously grown back — define insanity.

Of course all this costs far more than it saves — even in monetary terms. As wage labour becomes less profitable anyone deemed incapable of adding value to capital through it becomes raw material to the industry that generates its profits from managing their incapacity. From the jobcentres' amateur psychiatrists to the unpaid 'work experience' placements, disability assessors, private mental hospital beds at a grand a day to the commercially run prison workshops, rehab schemes and more psychiatry, back to the jobcentre. They are a raw material that, if carefully used, need never be consumed.

This seems a good point to bring up privatisation and austerity. The right are incredulous that anarchists demand the retention of state-funded healthcare, education and other utilities, why don't we take care of it ourselves? The reason of course is property, no matter who 'owns' the school or hospital, we built it, and everything in it, so transferring its management, and its priorities, from the bourgeois state to some individual bourgeois is not progress. Cuts in public services deny us access to things we created, privatisation means we have to pay for them again. If I'm supported by some scaffolding, and you take bits of it away, I'm not being given an opportunity to stand on my own feet so much as fall on my arse.

We are dependent on each other, but capitalism makes us exploit each other's dependency in competition for debt-tokens. Each commodity holder uses their rights of exclusion over their commodity to access the commodities of others. In the case of the worker, they sell their labour power to access the necessities of life from which they are otherwise excluded. Governments claim private capital can provide services more efficiently — by which they mean it can meet their minimum standards at a lower price. This may be true, capitalists can achieve savings by shedding staff, chiselling wages, breaking agreements, neglecting obligations, subcontracting operations and so on, but their motive is profit, and the provision of public service is only a means to that end.

Suppose the state puts two complementary health services out to tender, say mental health care and treatment for addiction, and engages two contractors, A & B respectively, being the lowest bidders. Each entity is responsible for itself, it has a contractual obligation to the state to meet a minimum standard, and a legal obligation to its shareholders, to maximise their return. The state purchases care from B on behalf of a client who from time to time is also a client of A. Once they are in remission from their habit/s B's job is done, but logically, they are in danger of relapse if their depression, anxiety or other problems recur. They will only be referred to A if they present with a visible mental health condition, by which time they may be well into the substances again. Protocol may prevent B communicating with A regarding its clients, but it has no business reason to do so anyway, if they come back for more so much the better. Similarly it

doesn't matter to A if the state is spending more money than it needs to with B, as long as A is making a profit, and recurring relapses will likely bring it more trade. The two companies are not in competition, in fact they are dependant on each other for clients, along with the commercial prisons, and of course the bourgeois media, which like to gloat at the sorry state we're all in.

In a world where a message can be transmitted around the globe instantly, where humans can live in space or under the sea, where a military aircraft can travel faster than a rifle bullet, people are disabled or incapacitated not by their medical conditions, but by the failure of the social group to accommodate their needs on the basis of 'to each ...', thereby failing to fulfil the most basic function of social organisation. A living body requires food, water and shelter; an active mind needs stimulation, diversion and the possibility of improvement. These things are not negotiable, they are not to be bargained for or rationed, and so long as they are, there will be no peace.

A former colleague of mine who moved to the Southern U.S. and went native bemoaned the liberal politicians spending *his money* towards the well-being of the poor, if these people were unable to support themselves by their own labour, why should he subsidise them with his?

"What makes it your money? Currency you hold is simply the promissory note of a central bank. It represents a complex web of social relationships and its value exists only as part of an economic mechanism; you would never have earned a penny without the efforts of thousands of people you will never even meet. Keep your money, go and bury it somewhere, but any benefit you derive from it will require the labour of others, why should they subsidise your labour with theirs?"

Capitalism has it that some forms of labour-power are more valuable than others, citing market forces; some workers' labour has more use-value to the bourgeoisie as its capacity to add exchange-value is greater, so it commands more social product. Suppose we take the needy bourgeoisie out of the equation, we see that the true social value of labour is often out of all proportion to its exchange-value, the most obvious and familiar example of this is the domestic labour involved in parenthood. The time and care lavished on children by their parents, freely given and unpaid, guarantees the survival of the species and is the foundation on which all human progress rests. Without it, social production, capitalist or otherwise, would be impossible. Nor is there such a thing as an unskilled job; work such as refuse disposal, cleaning and food packing must be approached with diligence or the consequences will be disastrous.

"We know that if the engineer, the scientist and the doctor are paid today ten or a hundred times more than the labourer, and the weaver earns three times as much as the toiler in the fields and ten times as much as a match girl, it is not because what they receive is in proportion to their various costs of production. Rather it is in proportion to the extent of monopoly in education and in industry. The engineer, the scientist and the doctor simply draw their profits from their own sort of capital — their degree, their certificates — just as the manufacturer draws a profit from a mill, or as a nobleman used to do from his birth and title." ...

... "But human societies could not live for two successive generations; they would disappear in fifty years, if each one did not give infinitely more than will be returned to him in money, in "notes" or in civic rewards. It would be the extinction of the race if the mother did not expend her life to preserve her children, if every man did not give some things without counting the cost; if human beings did not give most where they look for no reward."

—Pyotr Kropotkin: 'The Conquest of Bread.'

I don't believe for a moment that the engineer, the scientist and the physician do what they do primarily to get rich, and it would be a crap teacher who just watched the clock and took the money with no care for the development of her students. The innovators, the visionaries, the architects of the modern world, those who've unlocked the secrets of nature, have made their mark for the joy of personal accomplishment and self-expression; the sweetest reward for effort. The creative spirit was in them and it was bound to come out, whatever the prevailing mode of production. Caring for the elderly, sports clubs, amateur dramatics, recycling, gardening, vehicle maintenance, historical research, free parties, open source software development, writing, blogging, cooking or playing music for friends. All these voluntary activities enrich our lives and many are essential to our well being.

The orthodoxy that the market is a self-regulating aggregate of human ambitions and accomplishments requires economic theorists to propose that every act can be reduced to transaction. They would have us believe that each human choice is based on a simple cost-benefit analysis; our political and legal systems all rely on this premise, with the catastrophic results we see all around us; but life is not transactional. I put it this way:

"Did you pay your debt to your parents? Have you had your money's worth out of your children? What was the worst thing anyone ever did to you and did you get even? (If you have, best keep it to yourself.) Do you divide the difference between what you spend annually on your lover and what they spend on you by the number of shags you had? Are you paying them for sex or are they paying you and if so, is it because one of you is better at it than the other?"

Here the labour theory of value, on which classical economists and even Marx based their calculations, evaporates. Every hour of waged labour-power, which adds exchange-value to commodities and to the labour-power of other workers, will contain a huge proportion of what we can call 'gift-labour', unpaid acts of pure altruism, performed out of kindness and goodwill. These acts haunt the bankers' balance sheets like ghosts, so who is in debt to whom?

Once we move away from putting relative values on different forms of activity — and we must — the concept of work as a special category of behaviour will be meaningless, as it was for most of human history.

## 14. The ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

“If it’s true a rich man leads a sad life,  
that’s what they say,  
from day to day.  
Then what do all the poor do with their lives,  
on Judgement Day,  
with nothing to say?”

—The Clash: ‘I’m not down’.

Ideological (or cultural) hegemony is the curious arrangement whereby the ruled adopt the language and belief system constructed for them by their rulers, internalise their goals, and end up eagerly justifying their own oppression. This conceptual prism lends reality to illusions and makes the blatantly obvious invisible; denying the reality of class struggle, it justifies the status quo with specious moral arguments and fairy stories; it was ever thus:

“Why are we carrying this bloke around in a gold chair?”

“Because the River God decrees it, now get back in line or I’ll cut your bollocks off.”

Marx pointed out that the dominant ideology was always that of the ruling class; in fact this is no more than our everyday experience, even in personal relationships the narrative is always constructed by the dominant party:

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.”

—Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: ‘The German Ideology’ 1846.

Marxist parties took Marx’s scientific approach as justification for presenting all their social theory as objective science, so wherever they took power, the cultural hegemony was absolute. Eventually, the everyday tasks of repression could be devolved to the oppressed themselves, leaving their leaders free to put their hands in the till.

“It is an excuse that everyone can use, from the greengrocer, who conceals his fear of losing his job behind an alleged interest in the unification of the workers of the world, to the highest functionary, whose interest in staying in power can be cloaked in phrases about service to the Working Class. The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.”

—Vaclav Havel: ‘The power of the powerless’ 1978.

We are socialised from an early age into understanding the world within a narrow frame of reference, to offer any other analysis is to deviate from common sense; so the idea that we could run our world without hierarchy or money changing hands is dismissed. The class that must work for wages is only allowed to construe economics in terms of work and money. One must earn one’s living, pay one’s way and save one’s money (i.e. put it in a bank for the bourgeoisie to multiply it, see above). Children must be taught the ‘value’ of money and that the world (the bourgeoisie) doesn’t owe them a living. Work hard, follow the rules and maybe Father Christmas will bring you an island, like Richard Branson, and if you don’t aspire to own an island you must be some kind of communist.

Orwell described how, by not having words for things, they could be made to simply disappear from view; are you still struggling to find a synonym for ‘bourgeoisie’? Careful manipulation of language confines the discussion of any topic within strict parameters. The apparatus of inter-state violence is described as ‘defence’, intra-state repression is called ‘security’, using unemployment to drive down wages is ‘efficiency’, the removal of benefits is ‘reform’ and abolishing workers’ hard-won rights is ‘flexibility’, ‘making us more competitive’. Who the actual fuck, is ‘us’, anyway? It’s worth comparing all this with the language of Havel’s post-Stalinist nightmare:

“government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the Working Class is enslaved in the name of the Working Class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal assistance.”

—Vaclav Havel: (*op. cit.*)

There’s a definite convergence there; of course the terms ‘modernisation’ and ‘restructuring’ mean exactly what they say — the inexorable refinement of the capitalist mode of production to consolidate the power of the bourgeoisie and wring from us every last drop of surplus-value. The cultural and moral factors that hold the price of labour-power above its biological minimum are constantly challenged by those who have never experienced hardship. Reference to ‘the national interest’ or the slimy use of the pronoun ‘we’ by millionaires when talking to paupers, serves to maintain the preposterous idea that the capitalist has anything in common with the person who cleans his crapper. I especially detest the phrase ‘UK-PLC’, but it does emphasise that this isn’t your country; you only work here.

The minimal vocabulary of the tabloid press, apparently fewer than 1000 words, many of those made up by the papers themselves, allows the class to participate in its own oppression. The workers are cheeky blighters who must be managed or they will spend all day drinking tea and reading the S\*n; the unemployed are scroungers who choose not to work, unionised workers are pricing themselves out of a job — the ungrateful bastards! Meanwhile the saintly capitalist is an

example to us all; he works long hours, takes all this responsibility and stress upon himself, and really deserves to own an island. The hapless workers are fed aspiration and contempt lest they recognise their class interest; it's easier to blame losers than winners, they remind me of a child who is bullied at school then goes home and kicks the dog.

“Stereotypes of the Working Class (or immigrants or Gypsies) as lazy, irresponsible, and unintelligent allow people to blame these groups for their own poverty and to deflect blame from the system. Ideological beliefs associated with individualism, meritocracy, belief in a just world, and the Protestant work ethic presumably serve the same function.”

—‘The psychology of system justification and the palliative function of ideology’: John T. Jost & Orsolya Hunyady

It would seem self-evident, no more than common sense, that if you work hard you will achieve more than if you while away your time in leisure, meditate, or laze around; but capitalism co-opts this truism, subverts it, and ultimately defeats it. The use of the word ‘work’ to mean wage labour is particularly insidious as it smudges the subtle distinction between labour and labour-power that lies at the heart of the theory of surplus-value, on which all our exploitation is based. As an engineer I understand ‘work’ to be the transfer of energy from one form to another. Such transfers are subject to losses, so are only usually undertaken for a beneficial purpose.

Wage labour however, is the transformation of human energy into a commodity, then into tokens of someone else’s debt, then back into commodities, and finally into human energy once more; for us it’s a zero-sum game but at each stage the bourgeoisie bleed a little off and their power increases. The distinction between domestic and social labour, between work and leisure and even the habit of only sleeping once per day<sup>1</sup> are all consequences of the wage labour system.

The fetishisation of ‘work’ and ‘work ethic’ by our own class glorifies our exploitation; we’re all wearing ourselves out to no good purpose!

“It is only because of the state’s enforced separation of labour from the means of production that labour acquires the perverse habit of thinking, not of work as a creative activity performed by the worker with the help of the material prerequisites of production, but of a job that he is given. Work is not something that one does; it is a boon granted by the ruling class, of its grace.”

—Kevin A. Carson: ‘Studies in Mutualist Political Economy’.

I often meet people in middle age who feel they’ve successfully navigated capitalism; having almost paid off their mortgage and got their children an education, they can now afford to run a car and take the occasional holiday. It’s a bit late in the day to tell them there is no Father Christmas. Their attitude to the social struggles going on all around them is: “keep the noise down over there, we’re trying to sleep”. They are desperate to tell you how hard they worked and saved to get where they are, they brag of their misery, taking pride in how they’ve been used, haunted by the fear that someone else may attain happiness by an easier route.

“Now, take my case. They hung me up here five years ago. Every night, they take me down for twenty minutes, then they hang me up again, which I regard as very fair, in view of what I done, and, if nothing else, it’s taught me to respect the Romans, and it’s taught me... that you’ll never get anywhere in this life, unless you’re prepared to do a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay!”

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<sup>1</sup> For most of human history people would cease their exertions at dusk and sleep, rising later to reflect, work

—From ‘Monty Python’s Life of Brian’.

But these are the children of the post-war social democratic settlement, their healthcare and education was guaranteed by the state, even to the extent of free school milk (I can just remember it, abolished by Thatcher as education minister in the Heath government). In the aftermath of the second world war, capitalism rebuilt itself by persuading the Working Class they had a stake in it, the welfare state and collective bargaining were not devised out of altruism, but to prevent revolution; it’s no use telling an armed population who have just fought for the nation-state’s survival that actually it still belongs to someone else. As the transition from Keynesianism to neoliberalism in the West coincided with the collapse of Bolshevism in the East, a narrative arose that portrayed market capitalism not just as a mathematical abstraction, but rather as an ideology in its own right, packaged with representative democracy, consumerism and things we ought to take for granted anyway, like free speech.

As a youngster I was often told I should be grateful to live under a regime where I could speak my mind without being thrown in jail,<sup>2</sup> this formed part of the popular “fuck off back to Russia” speech. Those fed on a diet of raw, untreated hegemony are destined to regurgitate it.

“The most unpardonable sin in society is independence of thought. That this should be so terribly apparent in a country whose symbol is democracy, is very significant of the tremendous power of the majority.....Today, as then, public opinion is the omnipresent tyrant; today, as then, the majority represents a mass of cowards, willing to accept him who mirrors its own soul and mind poverty.”

—Emma Goldman: ‘Minorities versus Majorities’ 1917.

I find all that a bit rich, I was born with a brain and a mouth and I don’t consider it a privilege to use them as I see fit. Since every state presents itself as the guardian of freedom and guarantor of human rights, why should we thank it for not violating those rights? Would it be terribly unpatriotic of me to point out that such freedoms as we have were obtained at the cost of many lives, through disobedience, obstruction, riot and armed insurrection? The Luddites, Chartists and Suffragettes smashed things up; asking nicely got nowhere:

“My firm conviction is that, in our country, universal suffrage is incompatible, not with this or that form of government, but with all forms of government, and with everything for the sake of which forms of government exist; that it is incompatible with property, and that it is consequently incompatible with civilisation. ...

... The inequality with which wealth is distributed forces itself on everybody’s notice. It is at once perceived by the eye. The reasons which irrefragably prove this inequality to be necessary to the wellbeing of all classes are not equally obvious. ...

... I will oppose, with every faculty which God has given me, every motion which directly or indirectly tends to the granting of universal suffrage.”

—Lord Macaulay: to House of Commons on the second People’s Charter 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1842.

So we know where we stand then:

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or socialise before retiring for the night.

<sup>2</sup> We all had Timex wristwatches, cheap because they were made in fascist Portugal, where you did get thrown

“Three and half millions have quietly, orderly, soberly, peaceably but firmly asked of their rulers to do justice; and their rulers have turned a deaf ear to that protest. Three and a half millions of people have asked permission to detail their wrongs, and enforce their claims for RIGHT, and the ‘House’ has resolved they should not be heard! Three and a half millions of the slave-class have holden out the olive branch of peace to the enfranchised and privileged classes and sought for a firm and compact union, on the principle of EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW; and the enfranchised and privileged have refused to enter into a treaty! The same class is to be a slave class still.

... The people are not to be free.”

—Editorial in *The Northern Star*: May 1842.

One of the arguments against the People’s Charter, made by Lord John Russell, was that the uncertainty would drive investment overseas — fuck my old boots! The tune hasn’t changed in 200 years! Only when universal suffrage could be achieved without threatening private property was it finally granted; by then the slave class had been persuaded of the necessity of inequality “to the wellbeing of all classes”.



## 15. Victim-blaming, system justification and the ‘just world’ fallacy.

“...whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

—Galatians 6:7

There’s a pretty dodgy bit of logic, but it illustrates certain cognitive biases to which humans may be subject, these tend to intersect and reinforce one another, and lend themselves to ruling or oppressing elites for the purpose of strengthening their ideological hegemony.

Obviously, it’s a false analogy, just because a rule is true of agriculture doesn’t guarantee it will apply in other spheres of life. It also overlooks the possibility that a third party may have sowed something else when our man wasn’t looking. Variants of this phrase are most often used in expression of the ‘just-world fallacy’, the idea that people somehow get what they deserve, as per the colloquial use of the word ‘karma’: “What did I do to deserve this?” is a common complaint of the blameless. Postulating reincarnation or an afterlife seems like a pretty extreme response to the realisation that we do not start with a level playing field, and all our best efforts in life can be thwarted by anyone in a position to exert power over us.

Victim-blaming manifests itself in response to abuses of power, most significantly:

- Poverty and unemployment: “They can’t be bothered to improve themselves.”
- Sexual and domestic violence: “S/he was asking for it.”
- Racism and xenophobia: “They’re all... etc, etc.”
- State brutality: “They must have done something wrong.”
- Miscarriages of justice: “There’s no smoke without fire.”

Victim-blaming makes us feel better all round: first of all we have to believe it won’t happen to us, or we wouldn’t sleep well; secondly if we sense injustice we either have to do something about it or live with our feelings of impotence; lastly we can congratulate ourselves that we’re morally superior to those who apparently deserve such punishment. As a bonus it justifies the popular vice of ‘*Schadenfreude*’.<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1960’s, partly inspired by the trial of the war criminal Adolf Eichmann, Stanley Milgram explored the limits of obedience by conducting experiments in which subjects were asked to administer electric shocks at increasing voltages, up to a potentially lethal 450V, to actors they believed were volunteers. Twenty-six out of forty participants administered the full

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<sup>1</sup> Schadenfreude (ˈʃaːdənfʁɔydə) delight in another’s misfortune German: from Schaden harm + Freude joy. —

range of shocks. It appeared that they were easily able to abdicate responsibility for the outcome of their actions to someone who bore the trappings of authority.

Melvin J. Lerner followed his work by examining the role played by the concept of justice in these circumstances, studying the reactions of more or less passive observers to the process of torture — in his own words:

“M. J. Lerner (1971) and M. J. Lerner and Simmons (1966) confronted their participants with the vividly moving experience of watching someone who had been essentially trapped into receiving a series of unavoidable electric shocks as part of her participation in a psychological experiment. Of course, when given the opportunity, these observers elected to rescue and compensate the victim, but when unable to do that, many of them tended to derogate the victim’s character. However, why would observers attempt to compensate an innocent victim, whereas similar others, unable to do that, denigrate her personal worth? One possible answer pointed to a motivational component: The observers cared so much about believing that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get, that if they cannot restore justice by their actions, they will try to do so by other means, such as persuading themselves that the victim actually deserved to suffer, or would be compensated later, possibly in the next life.

Another possibility is that the cues in the situation, particularly the vivid signs of the victim’s suffering, elicited a heuristic-based automatic response, “bad things happen to bad people,” that led to the victim derogation.”

—Melvin J. Lerner: ‘The Justice Motive: Where Social Psychologists Found It, How they Lost It, and Why They May Not Find It Again.’

Another little quirk that skews our judgement of our fellow beings is ‘fundamental attribution error’ (sometimes known as correspondence bias) the tendency to ascribe the behaviour of others to their character or personality rather than the circumstances in which it occurs, this is good for reinforcing prejudices and strays into the metaphysical at times: “typical Capricorn”. Finally, ‘system justification theory’ contends that people take comfort from defending the status quo, even when they may perceive it to be unfair and not in their material best interests. “Better the devil you know” is perhaps the most familiar expression of this bias.

“That the mass bleeds, that it is being robbed and exploited, I know as well as our vote-baiters. But I insist that not the handful of parasites, but the mass itself is responsible for this horrible state of affairs. It clings to its masters, loves the whip, and is the first to cry Crucify! The moment a protesting voice is raised against the sacredness of capitalistic authority or any other decayed institution. Yet how long would authority and private property exist, if not for the willingness of the mass to become soldiers, policemen, jailers, and hangmen? The Socialist demagogues know that as well as I, but they maintain the myth of the virtues of the majority, because their very scheme of life means the perpetuation of power. And how could the latter be acquired without numbers? Yes, authority, coercion, and dependence rest on the mass, but never freedom or the free unfoldment of the individual, never the birth of a free society.”

—Emma Goldman: ‘Minorities versus Majorities’ 1917.

There’s a fair amount of experimental evidence for system justification theory, but it is kind of intuitive anyway. We’re hard-wired to try and make sense of our world and we’re uncomfortable

when it doesn't add up. Wherever we fall in the pecking order our survival depends on our ability to reliably predict outcomes and rapidly adjust to them emotionally. Our expectations become tailored to our experiences to avoid repeated disappointment and mitigate stress. It's been observed that people often rate the desirability or otherwise of a given outcome according to how likely they think it is.

The benefits of identification with a group depend on the perceived status of that group, and may involve playing to stereotypes created by others; for example, it's harder for the unemployed to organise together because people don't readily identify themselves as unemployed,<sup>2</sup> they're all "between jobs", the U.K. government craftily emphasises this by calling them 'jobseekers', which also displaces any personal ambitions they may have in favour of simply getting a job.

So if you have less invested in identifying with a group you have fewer reasons to think highly of it, which depresses your sense of entitlement. Meanwhile all those braying toffs at Prime Minister's Questions have a strong group identity (a fair few of them went to the same school, what are the odds of that?) which reinforces their conviction that they're entitled to dominate and exploit the rest of us. The advantaged only have a little conscience to assuage whereas the disadvantaged have to weigh the loss in self-esteem that comes from accepting their victimhood against the greater loss that would go with being unable to predict or adapt to their fate. They are therefore subject to vastly greater mental stress to go along with their reduced material circumstances, placing them at greater risk of illness and social dysfunction, thereby perpetuating their misery.

To examine why people would consistently act against their own interests, John T. Jost and Orsolya Hunyady cited experimental studies to test eighteen specific hypotheses derived from system justification theory. These were concerned with: the rationalisation of the status quo, the internalisation of inequality (out-group favouritism<sup>3</sup> and depressed entitlement), relations among ego, group, and system justification motives (including consequences for attitudinal ambivalence, self-esteem, and psychological well-being), and the reduction of ideological dissonance.

It turns out that a great deal of emotional and intellectual effort is expended in defending the status quo, however unsatisfactory it may be. The compulsion to do this is greatest amongst those who benefit least from the distribution of power and resources, and the effect increases as inequality expands. Specifically the belief in meritocracy — weak in those whose business is loading the dice — is strongest amongst those who are bound to lose, and have only the consolation of trusting that the game was fair. Does this explain why the bourgeoisie has always been "*a class for itself*" and the proletariat is not? Can it account for the survival of disastrous totalitarian regimes that by any rational analysis ought to have been overthrown in a heartbeat?

"We speculate that system-justifying ideologies serve a palliative function in that they reduce anxiety, guilt, dissonance, discomfort, and uncertainty for people who are in positions that are either advantaged or disadvantaged."

[...] "What we have argued is that there is a socially acquired motive to justify and rationalise the existing social system. The operation of this motive has been demonstrated on measures of stereotyping, ideology, deservingness, desirability, and even memory. ... Paradoxically, the sys-

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Collins English Dictionary online.

<sup>2</sup> The 'National Unemployed Workers' Movement' in the 1930's benefitted from the overwhelming ideological coherence and group identity of the Communist Party.

<sup>3</sup> A tendency in individuals who identify with a particular group to think more highly of those perceived to belong to another category.

tem justification motive is sometimes strongest among those who are the most disadvantaged, presumably because they have the most ideological dissonance to resolve. System justification often has opposite social psychological effects on members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. For members of high status or advantaged groups, system justification is generally associated with in-group favouritism, increased self-esteem, and decreased ambivalence, depression, and neuroticism. For members of low-status groups, by contrast, system justification is generally associated with out-group favouritism, in-group ambivalence, decreased self-esteem, increased depression, and increased neuroticism.

We have argued that, despite these potential costs, system-justifying ideologies serve a palliative function in that they make people feel better about their own situation. System justification may reduce dissonance and uncertainty especially (but not exclusively) among members of advantaged groups. From a coping perspective, there are many reasons why one might accept the potential costs that come from embracing system justifying ideologies. These include the denial of discrimination, the perception of control, and the preservation of hope. We have argued that people engage in system justification in an attempt to cope with circumstances that they cannot change.”

—John T. Jost & Orsolya Hunyady: ‘The psychology of system justification and the palliative function of ideology’.  
European Review of Social Psychology, 2002–13.

With both advantaged and disadvantaged having an ideological stake in the status quo, and the ruling class having such a huge material investment in perpetuating that ideology, is it any wonder that we’ve found it so hard to effect social change?

Of course, some of us have all this arse-backwards. We’re attracted to the minority point of view, like to side with the underdog, give folk the benefit of the doubt and have a taste for self-examination, maybe that’s what makes us anarchists. I’ve seen it argued<sup>4</sup> that cognitive biases cannot be avoided because they are essential to our thought processes. I utterly refute this; I don’t accept we are limited by our biology, individually and collectively, we can evolve.

If we are to topple the pyramid of capitalism we will have to flatten the pyramid of status, we must learn to despise the privileged and advantaged, and seek unity not in ideology, but pride in our Class and its achievements.

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<sup>4</sup> On the internet, of course.

## 16. Religion: Russell's teapot.

"Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of sceptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake. If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is an intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time."

—Bertrand Russell: 'Is There a God?' 1952.

Unlike many anarchists it's not a priority of mine to go around ridiculing other people's spirituality — "some of my best friends are religious" — ha ha! Religion interests me only insofar as it is used to justify and reinforce power structures. It should be self-evident that hierarchical, dogmatic, and secretive institutions lend themselves to abuses of power, whether they are revolutionary socialist parties or the Roman Catholic Church. The conviction that they are acting under divine or scientific authority, and that their mission is more important than the well-being of any individual is a toxic combination.

The just-world fallacy and system justification are explicitly written into the scriptures; postulating an omnipotent and omniscient deity whose movements are so mysterious as to include hitting the St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church in San Bernardino, California with a mudslide on Christmas Day 2003, killing fourteen worshippers including nine children, his wonders to perform — merry fucking Christmas! Anyway, I wasn't going to take the piss.

At its core is the concept of faith, belief in something you have read or been told without requiring proof, which would seem on the face of it to have negative evolutionary potential, however it is considered a great virtue. It follows that the writer or speaker of the 'word of God' must be deferred to.

If you allow the evidence of your senses and judgement of your intellect to be overruled by doctrine, you subordinate yourself not to God, but to another human being. Where religion is established, the priesthood are either directly appointed, or franchised by, the ruling class, so they are going to favour the status quo, uphold cultural traditions and endorse the prevailing mode of production. Under these circumstances interpretation of scripture is best left to professionals who can choose what to emphasise — how exactly do you get a camel through the eye of a needle? Organised religions seek to get established because they must compete for members, where they express an interest in the social order they take for granted the dominance of man over nature, of men over women, of property, debt and government.

Most religions have an ethical code,<sup>1</sup> confirming the wise and loving nature of God, despite His own delinquent conduct. Charity, honesty and self-sacrifice should help with recruitment and safeguard private property, but transaction, and its evil twin, coercion, are also built in. Piety, faith, accurate observation of rules and rituals are meant to curry favour with the God/s and stave off misfortune (except the mysterious kind). The package includes immortality, a second leap of faith that part of the person survives death to be rewarded, punished or reincarnated, bolstering virtue with a cost-benefit calculation. Eternity is a bloody long time, so this is no more than a tautologous demonstration of belief.

Religious morality is abstracted however, it is systematically alienated from human antagonisms, so well suited to a society based on the alienation of labour. The social conditions that lead to conflict are no concern of religion; poverty and inequality are to be accepted gracefully as God's will. Even theologically-inspired liberation movements confine themselves to appealing to 'natural justice' or 'human rights' rather than analysing and dismantling oppressive structures.

Return to fundamentalism or reform of a decadent tradition can serve to unseat an old order and make way for new social conditions of production, as the Protestant reformation paved the way for capitalism. A new religious orthodoxy lent itself to the creation of bourgeois essentials such as the concept of race — used to justify primitive accumulation, and the nuclear family — to separate production from reproduction.

Its residue is found in the apparently contradictory views of the Christian right, who promote social control while rejecting economic regulation. Abortion is opposed, but also sex education and contraception in schools. The alleviation of poverty and disease are of little importance compared with dragging unwanted pregnancies to full term. Creationism, biblical misogyny and homophobia help to muddy the water against informed choice. Behind all this woolly-headedness is a white supremacist agenda that seeks to concentrate social problems such as overcrowding, illiteracy, and ill-health in specific communities. Domestic poverty guarantees a pool of cheap, easily exploited labour. Overseas poverty lowers the price of raw materials, which boosts the margin on manufacturing. Nuclear weapons and military expenditure are supported for their vast public subsidy to private capital.

Your transactional balance sheet starts out in the red thanks to 'sin' or guilt — which the faithful are meant to feel most of the time, unworthy, indebted. Despite the similarity of the word 'guilt' (old English *gylt*) to words such as: *gilt*, *gild*, *gold*, *guild*, *geld*, *guilder* etc., the dictionary only says: "can be confused with" however:

"Looking at instances where Old English has been changed to Latin, we find that *gylt* is rendered as *debitum* in The Lord's Prayer, and *guilty* turns up as *debet* in the Gospel of Matthew. So here's where there's a case to be made for guilt having the sense of debt — something you owe. And certainly feeling guilty because you have failed to deliver what was owed doesn't appear too way out.

If we accept this — and you're always free to disagree — then we can find some similar Germanic family words related to debt. Old English has the word *scyld* meaning crime, sin, or just plain guilt, which in turn is cognate with Old Norse *skuld*, Old Saxon *sculd*, and Old High German *scult*, all of which also have the sense of debt or bondage."

—Russell T. Cross: 'The Etyma™ Language Blog'

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<sup>1</sup> The teapot is silent on these issues, though some of Her followers have adopted the mantra: "make tea not war"

And:

“According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the etymology of the Old English *gylt* is largely unknown, since the connection commonly assumed, the Old Teutonic root *geld* (to pay), is phonologically inadmissible. But the primary sense of ‘debt’ can still be assumed on the grounds that *debitum* in the NT is rendered as *gylt* and because the Old English *scyld* (Germanic *schuld*) developed the sense of ‘guilt’ from that of ‘debt’. The Germanic *schuld*, as derived from the verb *sollen*, has migrated to the Modern English ‘should’ to express an obligation, while the earliest use of *gylt* designates a “failure of duty” (OED) or something that ‘should have’ been done. As seen from the history of this semantic migration, which records the coexistence of ‘should’ and ‘should have’, or the economic and the moral sense, the modern English sense of ‘guilt’ is stricken with ambiguity.”

—David Ratmoko: ‘On Spectrality: Fantasies of Redemption in the Western Canon’.

Ah, sorry about all that, but I thought it was bleeding obvious anyway.

A Boss in Heaven is the best excuse for a boss on earth, therefore If God did exist, he would have to be abolished.

—Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*

Religion perfectly sets you up for a life of exploitation by unfathomable market forces. In a universe that is simultaneously beautiful and terrible, you are but a speck, nevertheless it was all created especially for you, you ungrateful bastard. Have faith, be submissive, obedient, even your little corner of the world is beyond your comprehension or control — except through your personal relations with the deity. Ask humbly for what you need, and if you don’t get it, it’s because you’re unworthy. It’s all about you — try harder, you’re working for the greater good, but don’t ask questions, you wouldn’t understand. Accept every twist of fortune as punishment or reward. The distant, alienated boss you never see, has more important things to do than speak to you, but nevertheless numbers every hair on your head, and even watches you in the bog.<sup>2</sup> If he makes you redundant, gives you cancer or drowns your kids, it’s only to test your faith.

“The world doesn’t owe you a living”, why not exactly? Monotheistic religions would have it that we owe our lives and our environment to the Creator; so that in effect we are all born in debt. The Judeo-Christian creation myth lays down the law from the beginning, adding the concept of original sin for good measure, to justify not only the subjugation of women but the following injunction:

“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

—Genesis 3:19.

That was the King James Version, and comes close to excusing wage labour, or even slavery; by the time we come to the Good News Translation, it’s gone all Waitrose organic:

“You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything, until you go back to the soil from which you were formed. You were made from soil, and you will become soil again.”

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<sup>2</sup> If you work for Amazon, this may be literally true.

—Genesis 3:19.

It's almost as if they hadn't heard the Bad News about the producers having been expropriated from the soil. Historically, states have claimed divine authority or at least approval for their activities via established religion, thereby taking on the responsibility for collecting our cosmic debt; this function they sub-contract to the blessed bourgeoisie.

"Do they owe us a living?

Of course they do, of course they do.

...

Owe us a living?

Of course they fucking do!"

—Crass: 'Do they owe us a living?'

If life is a gift, it's an unsolicited one so I'd say give it six months and if it's unclaimed, it is yours to do with as you see fit. The petulant teenager protesting: "I didn't ask to be born" may have a point; we are born to ease the debt burden of our forebears, but to whom is it owed?

"After all, we do owe everything we are to others. This is simply true. The language we speak and even think in, our habits and opinions, the kind of food we like to eat, the knowledge that makes our lights switch on and toilets flush, even the style in which we carry out our gestures of defiance and rebellion against social conventions, all of this we learned from other people, most of them long dead. If we were to imagine what we owe them as a debt, it could only be infinite. The question is: Does it really make sense to think of this as a debt? After all, a debt is by definition something that we could at least imagine paying back. It is strange enough to wish to be square with one's parents, it rather implies that one does not wish to think of them as parents anymore. Would we really want to be square with all humanity? What would that even mean? And is this desire really a fundamental feature of all human thought?

—David Graeber: 'Debt: The first 5000 years'.

I wouldn't be here now but for friends who cared about me enough to keep me alive; some of them didn't make it this far themselves so I won't be paying them back. Nor do I count the cost with the people I care about; there are no transactions between equals.

Theology being the study of God, the science of the divine, it has to confine its investigations to those aspects of scripture that cannot be tested. A great deal of time and effort has gone into this. In our case, referring to sacred texts, we might speculate on the colour and finish of the glaze, the style of handle, the length of the spout or diameter of the lid, but the existence of the teapot is never up for dispute. If we were to examine too closely the circumstances under which it could have been launched on its orbit we would risk accusations of heresy, that we wished to know rather than simply believe.

"The study of theology, as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and it admits of no conclusion. Not anything can be studied as a science, without our being in possession of the principles upon which it is founded; and as this is the case with Christian theology, it is therefore the study of nothing."



—Thomas Paine: *The Age of Reason*.

Perhaps the reluctance of some people to let go of hierarchy, dominance and transaction is a residue of childhood religion, a component of formal education in most societies, so the life of the citizen begins by making compromises with reason. We were taught Physics in one classroom, and mythology in the next, for a serious purpose. The lot of a sentient being is to be born into a world that barely accommodates our material needs, and is woefully inadequate to the desires and aspirations sentient beings must have. However much they ponder life they have little control over it as an individual and it soon comes to an end. The finality of death cracks a bigger whip than any human master, so death must be shrouded in mysticism, get that in early enough and it can be tacked on to any crank world-view as you go along. The obvious conclusion that the main obstacle to satisfaction is society itself must be suppressed. A rich and engaging fantasy life is indispensable both as a palliative and a constraint, from the stained-glass window to the magazine, the cinema, television, X-box and I-phone.

As exploitation became less direct, and the power relations were obscured, so the fantasies have grown more elaborate and intrusive. The feudal warlord would have had at his disposal most of the hypothetical punishments of the gargoyles of the pit: whips, chains and branding-irons; whereas paradise for the peasant amounted to little more than green pastures, abundance of food and respite from toil. The latter-day religious demagogue recruits misfits via youtube and twitter to create hell on earth. Nurtured in a culture of graphic but two-dimensional violence, they will have participated in fantasy genocide and performed any number of mock assassinations long before they reach adulthood — if they ever do.

The resurgence of mediaevalism in the twenty-first century is puzzling to the liberal mind. Before they get all superior, I contend that modern, secular societies are set up to be as fundamentally theological and superstitious as ever, perhaps even more than pre-technological ones. If it were not so, you wouldn't have to spend six weeks of each year listening to bloody Christmas music at the shops, following close on the Holy Month of Halloween. Traditional feasts and Saint's days performed important social functions that are now taken care of by facebook. In 1967 Guy Debord wrote:

"The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation."

—Guy Debord: *'The Society of the Spectacle'*

Could he have imagined what was in store? Maybe that was why he shot himself in 1994. Debord's little book is not an easy read, like most things translated directly from French to English the language creaks a bit. I've struggled with it several times in different translations — it's worth persevering, as it's basically a sequel to Marx's *Capital*.

Marx used metaphysical language to describe the commodity with good reason. Commodity fetishism is the mechanism by which the worthiness or otherwise of any human behaviour, once the province of morality and religion, is decided by the relative exchange-values of things. These values determine whether your benefits will be sanctioned for missing a jobcentre appointment and which country NATO will invade next. It's Debord's *Spectacle* that, in a more blatantly acquisitive, materialistic and amoral world, obscures the underlying commodity-relations and makes them appear as rational or ethical human choices.

In my brief summary of Capital I compared commodity fetishism to primitive religion in quite a superficial, simplistic way, but things have moved on a bit since I wrote it. The mobile phone, which started out as a badge of status, signalling your activities were so important you had to be instantly contactable, eventually persuaded us it might have some practical use.<sup>3</sup> A sort of etiquette developed, people were persuaded to turn them off in restaurants and meetings, the advent of the camera phone led to a ban in schools, sports centres and swimming pools. That lasted about six months, then they gave up trying to enforce it. As soon as the mobile device granted continuous access to the Internet it became the new cigarette.

People film everything; they film instead of looking, then stick it on the Internet as an offering to Social Media, the all-seeing eye of God. They even film themselves committing crime — confession, maybe? Online gaming and pornography are rituals, connecting the individual to something that is not self, but not specifically human either, call it meditation if you like, the sound of one hand clapping. The ceremonial nature of pornography is inarguable, as predictable as a Catholic Mass.

“According to Debord, the spectacle is the triumph of semblance and of sight, where the image replaces reality. Debord mentions television only by way of example; for him the spectacle is a development of that real abstraction which dominates commodity society, based on pure quantity. But if we are immersed in an ocean of uncontrollable images which prevent our having access to reality, then it would seem to be yet more audacious to say that this reality has itself totally disappeared and that the situationists were still too timid and too optimistic, now that the process of abstraction has devoured all of reality and the spectacle is today even more spectacular and more totalitarian than it was ever imagined to be, carrying its crimes to the extreme of assassinating reality itself.”

Anselm Jappe: ‘The Metaphysical Subtleties of the Commodity’

If a tree falls in the forest, and no-one tweets about it, does it really fall?

As one set of victims harks back to the middle ages, albeit a techno-version, another is fascinated by zombies and vampires. Adult men and women while away their hard-earned leisure time peering into a dystopian fantasy rather than looking out the window at the dystopian reality. There are two aspects of the cult of the undead that interest me — apart from this mass retreat into infantilism, or perhaps I should say the wholesale herding of the masses into it.

The first is the substantive metaphor: we inhabit the disintegrating corpse of a dead civilisation; the ideas and values that underpinned its institutions are long-discredited and held only ironically, if at all. It dimly remembers its history, and tries forlornly to return to where it last felt alive. It shambles on inexorably, feeds on our muscles and brains, and infects us with its banality and cynicism. The vampire is of course the commodity, the shiny, innocent representative of abstract and mostly futile social labour. The limitless creative and practical abilities of human beings, wastefully alienated from them and converted into exchange-values: “Dead labour sucking living labour”, as Marx put it. It’s often not even a thing, but an experience, a service, an identity or other pretence, rendered worthless instantly the transaction is complete.

What is the relationship between these monsters? The vampire of legend was a fiend, an evil spirit, but through fiction to film and recent television incarnations has been rehabilitated. A comic or even romantic figure, and where the parasite is attractive, entertaining and seductive would it not be churlish to resent the draining of your lifeblood?

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<sup>3</sup> If you’re habitually late and drive a twenty year old car, yes, but I won’t talk to you while I’m taking a crap.

“Also shall be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made by any person of substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the administering of such substances, the person has been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows”

—Article 246 of the Haitian criminal code 1864

Now the traditional zombie of African-Haitian folklore, the soulless person controlled by witchcraft, could just have been a metaphor for slavery itself. The modern zombie, entirely the creation of Hollywood, is entranced not by witchcraft but by an all-pervading and probably man-made disease. It’s uncannily like the modern worker; sleepwalking on their pointless daily routine through a dream-like misrepresentation of reality, desperate to consume. They are not the slaves of men, but of the commodity.

Secondly, they are both us and not us; *any member of our society infected becomes the other, a universal enemy to be feared and destroyed by any and all means*. It turns out there is a huge appetite for such an enemy, for grabbing a shotgun and blowing the head off the boy next door, with no comeback and no remorse. There are countless examples of popular culture and mass media creating dastardly villains to justify our worst impulses, and religion may well have originated the idea, but the zombie epitomises the alien amongst us, the alien within us, our alienated selves, our self-disgust at what capitalism has made of us. We long for someone to take it out on, for the apocalypse to put us out of our misery.

I’m not a Christian but it seemed like the message of Christ was: “if you want peace, treat everyone equal, share everything out and forgive your enemies”; how did that morph into “join our gang or we’ll set fire to you”? Or: “God hates blacks, gays and women”. Someone else’s God hates Catholics, or Protestants, Jews, Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, Hindus; what do you think makes someone get up in the morning and blow themselves up in someone else’s place of worship? Fucking grow up.

I make no apology for concatenating religion, mythology and light entertainment; I hope I’ve shown they all serve the same purpose in the long run. Don’t get me started on football.

As for the universe, if it didn’t have sentient beings in it no one would ever get to hear about it, so it would be a pretty pointless exercise; in that sense it owes its existence to us, let’s give ourselves the benefit of the doubt — and beware of the dogma.

## 17. Racism and the Working Class.

Racism is another ideological hegemony closely woven into the fabric of modern (capitalist) society. It is a species of mythology, and like religion, requires certain assumptions to be taken on trust, not subjected to rational analysis. So I'd like to examine who racism serves, what racists actually believe, and how these ideas gained currency in the first place. Racism holds that mankind can be divided into separate branches identified by physical characteristics, and that these can be 'ranked' in terms of ability, intelligence or morality. I well remember school books in my youth that presented this as fact.

Race is a political construct with no scientific basis, it does not follow from any of the major religious traditions, nor is it particularly old. Nevertheless, apologists for racism often contend that there have always been antagonisms between races and this is rooted in some feature of human nature — that old cobbler. By extrapolation, they imply that racism can never be eliminated entirely, which absolves them from the bother of having to do anything about it, or even refrain from it. Instead, they propose the state shall legislate to mitigate the effects of racism, so that all shall be equal in the eyes of the law. This is dangerous system-justifying nonsense.

Liberal confusion arises from the observable fact that when different cultures are suddenly brought into contact they tend to be suspicious of each other. Unfamiliar customs and language present barriers to understanding. This can be termed 'racial prejudice' and will be most acute amongst those getting the worst deal economically, as restricted status leaves only group identity to compete for. Such cultural antagonisms will be ironed out fairly quickly unless exploited by political or religious interests for their own ends. In Britain most migrant influxes have been fully absorbed within a generation or so, and yet racism persists as a structural oppression, because it continues to benefit the ruling class.

Racists may point to conflicts between oppressed groups as evidence that racism is natural, that such people are also racist, they may even claim to have been victims of it themselves. Again they are confusing racism with prejudice. White people are in fact never victims of racism, although they may experience prejudice or hostility. Prejudice can taint your relations with your neighbours or colleagues, but not with an entire society: not with the education system, the economy, the police and courts. Only a structural oppression can do that. Regarding structural oppression as 'hatred' is similarly flawed; the use of the term 'hate crime' relies on the liberal postulate of legal equality, as if the state can somehow remedy the crimes on which it rests. The state does not hate; it divides, controls, oppresses, silences, exploits and kills.

Rudolph Rocker, in his 1937 book *Nationalism and Culture*<sup>1</sup> embarks on a short enquiry into the origin of the word 'race' and its validity as a scientific term.

Labouring under the misapprehensions of his time, when there was no general agreement on the origin of mankind, he concludes that the concept of race is confused at best, and serves no

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<sup>1</sup> It should have been published in Germany in 1933 but the Nazis put paid to that, Rocker moved to London when Hitler came to power.

purpose except to stifle the building clamour for social change that made racial conflict a central preoccupation of the twentieth century. He delves into the bizarre and convoluted theories being promoted at the time.

“Every class that has thus far attained to power has felt the need of stamping their rulership with the mark of the unalterable and predestined, till at last this becomes an inner certainty for the ruling castes themselves. They regard themselves as the chosen ones and think that they recognise in themselves externally the marks of men of privilege.”

—Rudolph Rocker: ‘Nationalism and Culture.’

Since then, it has become clear that we are all descended from a common strand, perhaps even from a single mating, of pre-humans, and the detailed mapping of the human genome reveals that our biology is entirely coherent. There is no ‘white race’ — a phrase now only used by fascists and their apologists. Whiteness is simply an absence of characteristics prone to being perceived as ‘racial’, and relief from being excluded as a result. It turns out that characteristics such as: shape, build, complexion, hair and eye colour arise from genes that are in no case exclusive to a single Diaspora. Most likely they have arisen over the centuries from environmental adaptation. This leaves us only the politics to consider.

The thesis of this chapter, which is by no means original but bears repetition, is that racism as an ideology is neither natural nor innate. In fact it was concocted quite deliberately for a very specific purpose, to stave off the movement for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Although it was associated with the ‘age of enlightenment’ it has been informed by the anti-Semitism of the middle ages and the war between European and Ottoman empires; it attempts to give objectivity to the idea of the ‘heathen’. Subsequent to the emancipation of the (African) slaves, racism continued to intensify, to justify both the continued exploitation of the African Diaspora, and the wars of Empire, all of which came into the category of primitive accumulation.

At least half of the early American colonists were indentured servants, usually for a limited period, but increasingly the death penalty was imposed for all kinds of petty offences, on the understanding that it would be commuted to transportation for life. Only at the turn of the Eighteenth Century did Africans begin to outnumber Europeans in the plantations. When the Louisiana Purchase added 828,000 square miles of territory to the newly-independent U.S.A. its economy became totally dependent on slave labour. So it was in the British colonies of the Caribbean, as the landed aristocracy bribed the merchant classes with colonial plunder to avoid a bourgeois revolution.

In the early phase of colonialism, distinction was made between Christian and ‘heathen’. The latter were encouraged to convert, often at the point of a sword. Following a number of incidents in which African and European slaves found common cause, the emphasis switched to ‘black’ and ‘white’ captives. These categories would be treated differently and the laws framed to reflect this. This is the origin of ‘whiteness’. Many of the African diaspora did embrace the oppressor’s religion; I’ll stick my neck out so far as to postulate that this philosophy of resignation, acceptance and “pie in the sky when you die” held them back, and may continue to do so — see Chapter Fifteen.

Religion did them no favours however; an obscure passage of Genesis was pressed into service:

20 And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:

21 And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren

without.

23 And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

24 And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

25 And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

26 And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

27 God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

—Genesis 9:20–27

The descendants of Shem 'Semites' would occupy the holy lands, those of Japheth (the Europeans) would "enlarge" i.e. invade other people's territory, Ham and his descendants 'Hamites' got Africa and were condemned to slavery by Noah's curse. Reading between the lines, some ministers preached that Ham was cursed for sinning with his mother. You couldn't make it up, but someone did! The superstitious scholars of the middle ages had somehow overlooked this interpretation<sup>2</sup> but it was suddenly very convenient. For those who didn't buy the mythology, the new science of genetics could be bent to the purpose though Darwin never accepted the concept of race. Enlightenment philosophers and physicians, notably Carlyle, Hegel, Kant, Knox, Linneus and Voltaire, confidently postulated a hierarchy of races, placing their own stock at the top. The African always came last.

Of course the imperialist's expression of Christianity would not take no for an answer, and was backed up with cannon. The exploitation of racialised humans was fantastically profitable so for the first time chattel slavery was legally defined and sanctioned by the various colonial "slave codes" — see Chapter Seven. As it fuelled the Industrial Revolution the brutality of colonial administration was incredible, the 'white' proletariat having been reduced to the status of livestock, 'non white' populations occupied a rung below them. In 1857 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that African Americans were not citizens.

My parents' generation often used the word "coloured" to refer to anyone who was visibly not 'white'. It was insidious on many levels. First of all it reinforced the hegemony by lumping together everyone with heritage outside North Western Europe. It was a euphemism, since black was understood to be pejorative,<sup>3</sup> and the user congratulated themselves on not applying one of the many vulgar racist epithets. Worse, it created a hierarchy of lightness.

So considering race as a cultural and political factor it is necessary to take into account not what race is and isn't, but what it is perceived to be. I prefer the term 'white supremacy' to racism, because the concept of 'whiteness' can now be seen for what it is — simply the absence of readily racialisable characteristics, that could be used to mark an individual as 'other' to the hegemonic

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<sup>2</sup> Actually if you read the rest of it, Ham had other sons. Canaan got cursed but it was the uncursed Cush that went to Africa so the Africans would properly be called 'Cushites'.

<sup>3</sup> This dates from the mid-Sixteenth Century. The blacksmith was black from his work, similarly the blackguard, a kitchen skivvy, later this came to mean thief or vagabond. The black sheep, blackmail, black list, black day, black magic, black art, and many more. A person's name might be blackened, or they were "not as black as they're painted". I strongly recommend finding alternative terms.

group. These include not only skin tone and African or Oriental<sup>4</sup> physiology but language, religion, cultural traditions and practices. We can bury arguments over whether oppression of a particular ethnic group can be considered racist, when such group is defined by culture rather than heredity. If the campaign draws on the techniques of historical racism, then it's racist.

Complementing the fairytale explanations of primitive accumulation and gendered labour is the myth of civilisation, the idea that indigenous peoples somehow benefited from being colonised, as the armies of Europe raped and pillaged their way across Asia, Africa and the Americas. The territory of Madagascar still owes a fiscal debt to the French state for the expense of invading it and imposing European culture on it over a hundred years ago.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, UNESCO's Fourth General Conference established an "expert committee on race" calling for the collection of scientific data on race problems and for an educational campaign to disseminate scientific knowledge of race. Its declaration, published in July 1950 concluded that the appearance of race was simply the distribution of a small number of genes whose varying proportions resulted from adaptation and isolation, subject to constant change. There was no evidence for differences in temperament, personality or ability between ethnic groups and cultural differences were just that. It resolved:

"14. The biological fact of race and the myth of 'race' should be distinguished. For all practical social purposes 'race' is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. The myth of 'race' has created an enormous amount of human and social damage. In recent years it has taken a heavy toll in human lives and caused untold suffering. It still prevents the normal development of millions of human beings and deprives civilisation of the effective co-operation of productive minds. The biological differences between ethnic groups should be disregarded from the standpoint of social acceptance and social action."

—"The Race Question." UNESCO, Paris, July 1950

It seems quite incredible in view of all that has happened in the intervening seventy years. The atrocities that accompanied Britain's withdrawal from its colonies, the indiscriminate bombing of Vietnam and Cambodia, the genocides and ethnic cleansings that have fed the arms industry, the legally-enforced segregation that persisted in many states. This was before the Civil Rights marches, the Kenya emergency, the Mangrove affair, the O.A.S. bombing campaign, My Lai and Bloody Sunday.

The overall unemployment rate in the U.S.A. for 2013<sup>5</sup> was 7.4%, for African Americans it stood at 13.1% while 38.8% of black teenagers were out of work. Similar statistics tell the disparities in educational outcomes, income, life expectancy. We note the summary execution of black youth by police forces in the Western world, that healthcare provision is still tailored to North-Western Europeans, that at time of writing women of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain are four times as likely to die in childbirth as their 'white' counterparts. The disproportionate number of ethnic minority subjects in the prison and mental health industries.

It has been suggested that the legacy of the middle passage is collective psychological trauma. The erasure of language and culture, breaking of family relationships, brutality and humiliation, may haunt the descendants of enslaved people. I do not, for once, feel qualified to explore this

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<sup>4</sup> History and even geography are written by the ruling elite. I used the word 'Oriental' to illustrate this, it means 'Eastern' and assumes you are standing in Western Europe.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics: Labour Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity 2013. Available online.

premise but I think the only way out is an emphatic rejection of ‘whiteness’ not just by people ‘of colour’, but by the entire Working Class. When politicians try to celebrate “Western”, “British” or “civilised” values we must tell them where to get off, these do not bear close inspection. It falls to us to make room for a syncretic Working Class culture that can accommodate all strands of humanity and highlight the stupidity of going to war for the bosses. This is not so far from Darwin’s 1875 recommendation.<sup>6</sup> Teach your children the shameful history of empire. Stop buying sweat-shop clothing and electronics, find out where your fruit and veg comes from and establish contact with the workers who grow it. Above all, think before you open your mouth.

In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century there has been an alarming development. Against a background of an overall drift to the right, the liberal media have revived the idea of race as an objective category. The phrase ‘mixed-race’ — which if you think about it is meaningless — has resurfaced. ‘White’ people especially white Working Class youth, and worse, white Working Class males are discussed often in the context of material disadvantage and lack of educational attainment. This is frankly ludicrous, what makes them white? Perhaps that they have never been asked where they come from or invited to go back there. If young women and ethnic minority pupils are catching up with or overtaking their male, unracialised counterparts, that is surely to be celebrated, they will face difficulties enough when they submit themselves to the capitalist market. This could be a problem only for the misogynist and white supremacist.

Racism continues to benefit the capitalist boss, whatever their ethnic background they will not suffer for it. The Working Class achieves nothing from tolerating or reproducing it but a race to the bottom for crappy jobs and low wages. Promoting artificial scarcity and exclusion, it is the bourgeois politician who tells you the newcomers are taking your taxes and housing when there has never really been any shortage of anything in the developed world. The Working Class has never been ‘white’ in modern times, nor does it have anything to gain from borders. This isn’t your country, it’s “UK-PLC”, you just work here.

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<sup>6</sup> “As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races.”

—Charles Darwin: *The Descent of Man* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1875, pp. 187–8.



## 18. Privilege (for the benefit of the privileged), identity and the Class War.

“We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves. The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena; they are crucified alone.

... From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes.”

—Aldous Huxley: ‘The Doors of Perception’.

This was always going to be a personal account, anarchism is after all an extrapolation of the particular to the general. The author is an able-bodied (at time of writing), cis-male, heterosexual,<sup>1</sup> Working Class anarchist of North European heritage, self-educated with a few engineering and craft skills, living in the South of England, I don’t need a university lecturer to tell me that’s a position of considerable privilege in the modern world, and a potentially reactionary one, yet I’ve honestly never wanted anything from this society but to witness its demise. I’m also big, ugly, and in my fifties which helps when dealing with management and cops.

Early on I questioned whether I was writing primarily for people more or less like myself, and dismissed the idea. Obviously it has its limitations, it wouldn’t be of much use to someone whose interest was, for example, the development of anarchism within Chinese culture. It is intended for people new to anarchist ideas, and privilege is a concept many find utterly baffling. Like reification<sup>2</sup> it’s a hard one to get your head around because it’s woven into the fabric of perceived reality, it’s largely invisible, especially if your contacts are all drawn from a narrow social base.

Privilege in this context is an absence or mitigation of oppression, seen from the point of view of the oppressed. At first sight it’s counter-intuitive, because no one ever feels privileged,<sup>3</sup> and the colloquial use of the word is a benefit of some kind, usually earned. It sounds dangerously close to the bosses’ view that we ought to be grateful for access to work, housing, health and education. It’s a demonstrable fact that the presence of any super-exploited group, migrant labour for example, depresses pay and conditions for all workers, so how does it work? How is it a privilege not to be excluded, underpaid, sexually abused, targeted by cops or attacked by bigots?

The liberal would claim these as basic human rights, but they have it backwards, society is oppressive by its nature, its institutions were specifically devised to divide and exploit us, so we each become acclimatised to the level of oppression we experience, and only when these lines are crossed protest that our rights have been violated. This is the liberal trap — it’s the oppression that’s normal, not the absence of it. For many these experiences are routine, and they may indeed

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<sup>1</sup> I seldom use the word ‘straight’, it implies bias, and I’m not claiming my relatively banal proclivities as a badge of community with anyone.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, privilege is a form of reification.

<sup>3</sup> There’s a lesson there; not even the ruling elite feel privileged, because they’re conditioned from birth to

consider it a privilege to walk home without being harassed, to apply for a vacancy and be offered an interview, or to attend and not hear that it has just been filled.

If X walks a steeper road than Y, all things being equal, Y will make more progress in a given time for the same effort. Capitalism requires us to compete by excluding others,<sup>4</sup> so as Y is ahead of X they will have the first choice of whatever they need for the next leg of the journey, and set off feeling positive and refreshed. So on through life; Y will always be where X isn't, and X will have to work harder than Y just to avoid being left by the wayside. Y's setbacks will be easier to overcome and of shorter duration. Believing in equality of opportunity, Y may conclude the demoralised and resentful X isn't trying, or they may congratulate themselves on their own industry and cunning. Meritocracy is a nasty bourgeois trap, like justice, it's a logical fallacy.

Most forms of oppression are mediated by economics (that is not to say most cases). I've taken to using the term 'purchasing power' to define the structural oppression created by fiscal wealth and poverty. This emphasises that money held by (A) is power over (B), (C), (D), (E), (F) ... etc, because its only value is the expectation that they must compete to acquire it. Increasing any individual or entity's purchasing power of itself restricts others' access to goods and services, including the essentials of life, and their own social produce. In fact unless most are obliged to bargain for these basics — for their very survival — the vast wealth of the few will be null and void.

It's possible then to see the economy as a complex structure of interlinked see-saws; wherever you are placed in it you can't possibly rise without someone, somewhere, falling by a corresponding amount. The liberal concept of "social mobility", the politics of aspiration and contempt, challenge us to escape from our Class rather than work together to liberate it. You are Working Class if you've got nothing to sell but yourself, but talk of "working people" sets the bosses as gatekeepers to the Class and they're quite comfortable using the term when they get to define it. You need not congratulate yourself on being selected by some bourgeois to add value to their capital — thereby increasing their power over us all.

The other point that must be grasped is that no-one achieves anything entirely by their own efforts. I don't make my own boots, and if I walk comfortably it's thanks to the availability of cheap footwear, the fruits of super-exploited labour. Since we are all obliged to engage with the oppressive system to survive, we are all its instruments to some extent. Our participation strengthens it, making us complicit in our own, and others' oppression. Like it or not, we're all walking on a pile of corpses.

The legacy of imperialism is everywhere. The hegemonic culture of Northern Europe and the English-speaking world defines itself in terms of what it is not, and that which it has conquered and suppressed. Styling itself the "free world" or "civilised world" it laid waste to, and still dictates terms to the other. It rebuilt itself after two World Wars by wringing the last drops from its colonies as they struggled loose, and consolidated global political-financial institutions to continue primitive accumulation by other means. Its cities and prisons are filled with the descendants of slaves and expropriated indigenous peoples; the echoes have not even begun to subside as the post-colonial world tears itself apart and vast populations are dispossessed. Taking a hands-off approach, the old empires attempt to clear up the mess they left by bombing it flat.

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believe they deserve a bigger slice of the pie.

<sup>4</sup> Housing gentrification and social cleansing is a good example of this.

Another thought experiment:

a) You step on my toe, I'm wearing safety boots, I tap you on the shoulder and say quietly:

"Oi mate, you're on my foot."

"Oh, sorry."

"No problem."

b) I'm wearing flip-flops because my toe is painfully inflamed and I can stand the touch of neither shoe nor sock, it keeps me awake at night. I worry about it. Now you step on my toe:

"YOU STUPID MOTHERFUCKER GET OFF MY FOOT!" — With a shove.

"Eh? Steady on, calm down — Jesus!"

There is heated and sometimes acrimonious debate in radical circles over the relative merits of class and identity politics. I think the argument is overworked and counter-productive, at its extreme poles are some pretty entrenched positions that I've little hope of shifting. Accusations of reformism<sup>5</sup> or divisiveness come from one side, and 'class reductionism' or even Bolshevism from the other. In caricature: one views the oppressed as a homogenous mass that will live harmoniously once it has overthrown capitalism. The other sees society as a web of social and cultural structures in which everyone is busy oppressing someone else in ways they cannot possibly comprehend; class is represented as just one of these structures. Their emphasis is on privileged subjects correcting their oppressive behaviour in deference to those less privileged.

Sometimes a mass walkout is appropriate, as happened at Bridgwater postal depot in 2015 in support of a disabled worker subject to discrimination. It's a question of picking the right spanner for the job.

It's worth examining the insights and limitations of both perspectives. In the first place, if 'the workers' really were homogenous we would have abolished capitalism generations ago! Strict class reductionism would have to endorse the labour theory of value, which is flawed, as wage labour is not the sole or even primary source of social product. Nevertheless, it is the premise on which capitalism rests so we have to confront it. I think class reductionism is an Aunt Sally frankly, I don't know many modern anarchists who believe we could just wait till "after the revolution" to deal with patriarchy, racism etc, but there were moments during the twentieth century when this was entirely plausible because the revolution appeared to be imminent if not underway.

"You have no idea how primitive everything in this direction is. Enlightenment among women is desperately needed. But our comrades are too engrossed in winning the anti-Fascist war to devote much time to this kind of necessary labor. A beginning has been made of course. But one cannot sweep away the ignorance, prejudice and superstition of a people in four months."

—Emma Goldman: letter to Stella Ballantine, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1936  
from 'Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution'  
edited by David Porter, AK Press, 2006.

We're not there now, within the liberal democracies bourgeois ideological hegemony has re-established itself with a vengeance, social revolutionaries are fighting a rearguard action, and this has forced a change of emphasis from overthrowing systems of oppression to mitigating

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<sup>5</sup> Most of us are in unions, and whilst we recognise their limitations, it isn't reformist to invoke employment law in cases of discrimination or sexual harassment if it gets the desired result. Law is the terrain on which we operate, we can no more ignore it than, say, a wall or a ditch. These obstacles are placed to inconvenience us, and we must

their effects on individuals. Anarchists and socialists once embedded in workplace and community have become semi-detached from the class, inward-looking and self-referential, whilst anti-oppression politics have turned to the mainstream. “Back in the real world” we are told, the capitalist mode of production is given and there’s no will to do more than tinker with it. This in turn has shifted their focus from social to personal relations, from collective to individual action.

“...it is not enough to want the emancipation of the individual alone. We must also want the emancipation of all. It is not enough to rebel against oppression. We must refuse to be oppressors. We need to understand the bonds of solidarity, natural or desired which link humanity, to love our fellow beings, suffer from others’ misfortune, not feel happy if one is aware of the unhappiness of others. And this is not a question of economic assets, but of feelings or, as it is theoretically called, a question of ethics. Given such principles and such feelings which, despite differences of language, are common to all anarchists, it is a questions of finding those solutions to the practical problems of life that most respect liberty and best satisfy our feelings of love and solidarity.”

—Errico Malatesta: ‘Communism and Individualism’

Nevertheless, privilege theory offers useful insights, not least that oppressive structures in society can be reproduced in microcosm in personal relationships, as we each individually adapt to our position under the status quo, we internalise some of its assumptions. Because oppression has a qualitative as well as a quantitative aspect it is by definition isolating, it can cut across class lines and has an unfortunate tendency to create cross-class alliances. Focussing on privilege highlights the uncomfortable fact that the oppressed often don’t need too much encouragement to oppress each other.

With hindsight we can see that the failure of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century workers’ movement was due to narrow sections of the class substituting for the whole. If as I’ve postulated elsewhere, patriarchy is the author of all other oppressions, any revolution that fails to tackle it will inevitably re-constitute capitalist power relations, and that is precisely what happened. Because these errors are associated with the statist left there’s an element of self-delusion that our own ignorance, prejudice and superstition have been swept away by our libertarian theoretical analysis. I think anarchists should be studying oppression as doctors study bacteria and viruses rather than stethoscopes. If you’re a doctor you ought to know how a bloody stethoscope works.

It’s not difficult; visible class struggle takes place within the sphere of non-domestic production, but class society relies on unpaid domestic labour as heavily as it does on surplus-value so anti-patriarchy is ‘invisible class struggle’.

“Men who claim to be anarchists or feminists should do their own cooking, cleaning, and childcare. That, for me, is rule # 1. ...

... There is no way around it. Part of anarchy is picking up your own responsibilities. Men who leave cooking, cleaning, and childcare predominantly to women are oppressive.”

—Kirsten Anderberg: ‘A Man’s Heaven is a Woman’s Hell’

From Zabalaza books:

‘A Collection of Essays on Feminism and Sexism in the Anarchist Movement.’

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find a way over or around them. I might however, pitch my enemy into the ditch if I’ve a better understanding of their orientation to it, Hitting an opponent with a door or a wall is just as effective as bringing a spanner to the fight, and the only thing that matters is who’s left standing at the end of it.

And why wouldn't you do it? Unless you've accepted the bourgeois ideology that only social production (or its disruption) validates your efforts. Why would a Working Class bloke settle for being as helpless and dependent as a bourgeois? Voluntary activity, motivated by caring for your friends and family, or anyone else for that matter, in defiance of transaction and coercion, is revolutionary — insofar as if we all did it, their system wouldn't work. In 1934, between prison sentences, Buenaventura Durruti returned to his family in Barcelona, where he was on an employers' blacklist, so they had to rely on the income of his partner Emilienne Morin. His union comrades were often dismayed to see him in an apron peeling potatoes or bathing the baby:

"When will you stop thinking like the bourgeoisie, that women are men's servants? It's enough that society is divided into classes. We're not going to make even more classes by creating differences between men and women in our own homes!"

From Abel Paz: 'Durruti in the Spanish revolution.'

We make war and revolution simultaneously, with our potato peelers. A word of advice to those organising radical events: if you haven't worked out in advance who's going to do the catering and washing up, you may find female members picking it up by default. This can slip by unnoticed as you've got other fish to fry — and you're used to seeing it. So ideally agree a rota beforehand, and if you're male and you happen to find the kitchen full of women, muck in and get the work done to free your comrades up for other activities. That's communism mate! It's the most important thing you could be doing, more important than that big speech you were going to make.

I regret the use of the term 'classism'<sup>6</sup> as it applies to social and cultural constructions of 'class' alongside ethnicity and gender. Class is not a form of diversity to be accepted, it is the objective distinction and necessary antagonism between the controllers of the means of production and its operators. The existence of a class capable of reducing all human interactions to exchange-values is in itself enough to prevent equality. I'm quite protective of the appellation Working Class, it applies to us who have nothing to sell but our labour. It's grotesque for shady bosses and millionaire footballers to try and pass themselves off as Working Class just because they drop their aitches and pick their nose at the table. If you hire and fire you're bourgeois; if you've changed sides, you are the enemy, by definition. Similarly, a university graduate mired in debt who works in a bar is not 'middle class'.

In Chapter Six I postulated a simple class society founded on a single transaction, enforced by law. As you've probably sussed, it's only 'the money trick' without the money. The point is that money isn't necessary to create classes, all the elements are there: the alienation of labour, the fetishism of things, and reification, whereby the movement of things establishes a master-slave relationship and confers the power of life and death. So it is in all human relations; they are either expressions of love, friendship, goodwill, solidarity or mutual aid, however you like to rationalise them, or a matter of dominance, the manipulation of another's needs by exclusion, and it can happen in your union branch or your front room.

Racism, misogyny, homophobia and elitism are endemic in our class. It's hard to blame it all on the bourgeoisie — or is it?

I maintain that every oppression is historically constructed and systematically reproduced by material factors, not merely by individuals misbehaving, perceiving it to be in their interests, or

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<sup>6</sup> I describe discrimination based on education, regional accent and so on as snobbery or elitism, in recognition that it operates in one direction.

internalising their own oppression. Though all those things do happen, they would not be enough on their own. Our rulers really do need these divisions to remain in place, they didn't create all of them, but do their best to perpetuate them in ever more subtle and sophisticated ways. They also have an interest in disguising the nature and significance of class. In fact nearly everyone on earth is Working Class, of these, most are not 'white' and fewer than half are male. The ruling class would really love you to believe racism is innate, they've been telling us so ever since they invented it. Friction between different cultures is natural, but usually settles out pretty quickly at ground level. In fact you'll find the greatest manifestation of racism where the population is most homogenous, stoked by the bourgeois media that tells us it's our weakness and only their legal system keeps us from killing each other.

"There is a certain optimism in the idea of 'consciousness-raising,' or the concept of 'the people,' that seems naïve and unconvincing to many of today's activists. The shift from 'consciousness-raising' to 'calling out,' for instance, reflects (*and encourages*) a loss of confidence in the capacity of people to learn about, understand and oppose forms of inequality that do not adversely impact them as individuals. These doubts are, in turn, elaborated in terms of positionality and privilege."

—Stephen D'Arcy: *The Rise of the Post-New Left Political Vocabulary*. 2014

My Italics.

I'm going to be a little harsh now. Calling out or 'privilege checking' manifests itself as a formalised *ad hominem* put down anyone can use to terminate an argument once they've had their say — it's pure essentialism. The gratuitous allocation of privilege, frequently online between total strangers, to dismiss an opinion without engaging with it, serves to stifle any debate beyond parrot-style repetition of jargon and further entrenches the caricatures described above. I've also been a bit unfair to Stephen D'Arcy, as I've picked probably the most sceptical paragraph in the entire text. Taking the argument to its logical conclusion, as a 'white man' I could not critique thatcher, who identified as female, nor Idi Amin or Nicky Crane,<sup>7</sup> as African and gay men respectively. You can back right out with that.

In practice you will only find this in activist circles, the Internet, or in academia, it's never going to have any traction in the works canteen. It was particularly prevalent ahead of the referendum on the British state's membership of the European Union. I've written enough about this elsewhere, but suffice to say my preference would be to the detriment of both hated institutions. I've always regarded European political union as a white supremacist project that the former imperialist powers rushed into as they lost their colonies, it represents the global hegemony of European culture, and even the dominance of Northern Europe over Southern, and Western over Eastern. Furthermore the British state has always been a bad influence over the others, driving the most anti-Working Class policy. I listen to the Polish worker at the next bench but I also take account of the farm labourer in South Africa or the refugee stranded on the Turkish border who I may never meet. I live in an area where most workers are from outside the E.U. and they were always going to get shafted. As for protectionism, capital will always find ways to move around, and to reduce the price of labour to its minimum local reproduction cost.

When I speak of the Working Class I don't specifically mean the British Working Class or the European Working Class, there are seven billion of us, and none is any more important than another. It's become fashionable to refer to the 'white Working Class', either to denigrate it as

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<sup>7</sup> Notorious (in London) fascist hooligan of the 1970's and 80's.

reactionary, or lament its marginalisation, but since when was it a cultural identity? There were black dockers and Chinese seafarers in the Liverpool transport strike, there were Spanish miners in the Cambrian Combine Dispute, Jewish and Irish workers fought together at Cable Street, the Grunwick dispute was led by Asian women. To defeat the bosses our class *must act as a class*, there is no way round this.

The activists who originated these theories knew whereof they spoke, the Combahee River Collective was a group of black lesbian feminist socialists formed in 1974. Its members had been active in Civil Rights, the Black Panthers and radical feminism. Within such liberation movements, and the left generally, they found themselves confronted by white or male supremacy and homophobia, as in the wider society. Tactically they had no option but to organise exclusively with others who shared their perspective, to tackle their own specific oppression as no-one else was going to do it. The thrust of their politics however was to analyse how the methodology of oppression in different systems informed and reinforced one another, and were ultimately used to prop up capitalism. Class was at the centre of this analysis.

“We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”

—‘The Combahee River Collective Statement’ April 1977.

Can be found on the web and is included in:

‘Home Girls, A Black Feminist Anthology, edited by Barbara Smith 1983.

This document is perhaps the first well-known public expression of the concepts of identity as a political position, and intersectionality. It goes on to list practical autonomous projects the group initiated or participated in within their areas of concern, it seems a world away from today’s ideological hairsplitting that frequently ends by calling for established institutions to do something.

Putting the emphasis on individual privilege rather than systemic oppression has the obvious drawback that privilege can be addressed by simply bringing everyone down to the same level rather than raising everybody up; this in fact is the agenda of the modern bourgeoisie. I believe that a society based on mutual aid and solidarity can only be achieved through voluntary association, starting from a federated affinity group structure. Post-capitalist councils of producers and users would of necessity call in delegates from groups with needs and interests that are not readily anticipated or understood by others. So whilst I’m exasperated when privilege is played as a trump card to shut down discussion, it’s equally frustrating to have the ‘proliferate than thou’ type refuse to engage with it altogether.

What do bosses want? More profit for less investment. They have no interest in excluding women, gays or any category from the workplace as they ideally want every actual or potential hour of labour-power competing in their market, thereby minimising the value of all. But if they can get anyone a bit cheaper, because their options are restricted, so much the better. Patriarchy and nationalism are cross-class conspiracies, collusion between bosses and unions to exclude women or limit immigration weakened the Working Class as a whole, and those white male workers who feared their jobs being undercut were hardly masters of their own destiny to begin with.

Historically the oppression of women has benefited some men with free domestic labour, increased sexual licence, relief of responsibility for reproduction, etc. These are not real benefits,

they contribute nothing to personal growth and autonomy, and any perceived gain by an individual is a bribe willingly sustained by the boss who can put a measurable fiscal value on, for example lowering the cost of cleaning or social care, performed mainly by women workers who then have to fit waged employment around their roles within the nuclear family. Only the bourgeoisie benefits from cross-class alliances, and from a fragmented proletariat.

Without a class struggle perspective there is something a little smug about owning up to privilege and admitting complicity in oppression. The hierarchical structure we inhabit was constructed for us by a class that survives by restricting access to the product of social labour. They have been careful to set us all in different places precisely to discourage us from acting coherently. The worst thing we could do in my view is to define individuals according to the boundaries created by the hegemonic group. To insist, now, that people cannot “learn about, understand and oppose forms of inequality that do not adversely impact them as individuals” is a counsel of despair. If it’s true as I’ve been told that it is impossible for a conscious individual to dissociate themselves from patriarchy or white supremacy we admit defeat. Privilege can inform our personal relations with others but our struggle is collective, against a common enemy. If we cannot co-ordinate our efforts, we will not win.

In her 2006 introduction to her 1969 essay ‘The Personal Is Political’, Carol Hanisch wrote:

“I wish we could have anticipated all the ways that ‘The Personal Is Political’ and ‘The Pro-Woman Line’ would be revised and misused. Like most of the theory created by the Pro-Woman Line radical feminists, these ideas have been revised or ripped off or even stood on their head and used against their original, radical intent. While it’s necessary that theories take their knocks in the real world, like everything else, many of us have learned that once they leave our hands, they need to be defended against revisionism and misuse.”

—Carol Hanisch: ‘The Personal Is Political’, introduction.

In the original text she had written:

“One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution.”

—(*ibid.*)

Acceptance of bourgeois reality is acceptance of fetishism, and here lies the false dichotomy between class and identity politics. Waged labour is a commodity with an exchange value relative to the exchange values of things: toothbrushes, coffee, bicycles, petroleum etc. The capitalist class values it strictly according to its capacity to augment capital. These are not specifically human values, they take no account of utility or morality, only the relative values of things. Identities are also commodities with market values: Male, female, brown, white, artistic, transgender, gay, heterosexual, athletic, disabled, Scottish accents and posh ones. In that capacity capitalism also equates them with things.

How then can you achieve equality in a class society? If you cannot escape your identity, and because privileged identities are by definition construed in terms of oppressed ones then the only way out is economic. We would seem to be exactly where the bosses want us and their accountants will be able to calculate the relative worth of a gay footballer, Asian musician,



transgender actor or a wheelchair athlete. All your cross-class campaign can do is raise the market value of that identity to the capitalist<sup>8</sup> I won't knock anyone for doing that if it gets them a better hourly rate or keeps them out of jail, as long as they understand there is no equality in a commodity economy.

Let's not overlook the role of the state in all this; what the bourgeoisie cannot defeat it will pay off. Think how fast each wave of youth culture was bought up, standardised and sold back to us after initial failure to ban it. The bourgeoisie always recognises and acts in its common interest and will make such ideological compromises as are necessary to keep all of us at bay. It operates by keeping its systems of domination strictly to their separate functions. Legal, political, social, economic, military — each has its own logic and doesn't interfere with the others, though all may come to bear on you at once. Although it relied heavily on racism, patriarchy, hetero-normativity, the nuclear family and Christian work ethic to get underway, the logic of the market respects only the exchange of commodities, and the state, in its role as guarantor of markets, can take no account of these things.

The state grants permission to do things but not the means to do them. In granting permission it emphasises not only that it possesses the means to prohibit, but retains the option to do so. It has begun to dismantle the legal framework for oppression of some identities and simultaneously submitted them to the market. This does not stop its agents from disproportionately locking up and shooting, for example, black or transgender people in poor districts, so long as their market value remains low.

The USA elected a black president who presided over the torture of Muslim prisoners of war, the enslavement of black workers in the prison-industrial complex, and the systemic assassination by cops of Working Class black youth. If there is ever a female president, a gay president, a trans' president: they may become a rallying point for those communities but they will set no one free, it isn't their job. The ANC revolution in South Africa created a new black bourgeoisie, which exploited exactly as before; their police gunned down striking workers as they had in the days of empire. The West is awash with goods produced in the sweatshops of recently independent Asian countries.

Just as revolutionary syndicalism was replaced by representative trade unionism, trapped into a legal framework and diluted (in Twenty-First Century Britain at least) to homeopathic levels, so a range of civil rights, feminist, LGBTQ and anti-racist organisations have been co-opted into the mainstream and given cross-class agendas to pursue. First, acceptable and compliant representatives of the movement are selected, legitimised and given sufficient funding to defuse their personal angst. They will then by a fairly organic process be separated from those they purport to represent, some of whom will then be characterised as 'extreme' and heavily slandered. Entry into academia or some state sponsored advisory panel for the chosen few then guarantees them a career where they can be no threat — or use — to anyone.

Thus the bourgeois revolution is incomplete, the ruling class are becoming structurally diverse but continually invent new prejudices for us to replace old ones. Islamophobia heavily plagiarises earlier forms such as the anti-Semitic blood libel, the 20<sup>th</sup> century 'yellow peril' and the anti-Irish paranoia that accompanied the war in the North. The vast majority of us will still be in the shit, of course, until we grasp the true nature of capitalism in sufficient numbers to walk away from it.

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<sup>8</sup> The racist and sexist trade unionists only lowered the market value of other identities.

Insofar as autonomous 'safe spaces' are prefigurative of a free and equal society, they amount to a minimum standard of conduct for activists, but are not revolutionary in themselves, as they have no impact on the enemy. Direct action has been represented as exclusionary because not everyone can participate to the same extent, for any number of reasons: age, mental or physical health, mobility, precarious employment or citizenship status, parole and so on. Let no-one suppose that different roles are more or less important — those are bourgeois judgements.

There are actions, such as street marches, where it is appropriate to move at the pace of the slowest, especially where the aim is to cause maximum disruption, and be highly visible. On others a voluntary division of labour will fall based on needs and abilities, both for the success of the undertaking and the safety of participants. When things get exciting sometimes the hardest thing is persuading the spotters to stay put and aloof.

Some very bold direct actions have been executed by disabled activists at significant cost to themselves. On the other hand, if it is necessary to spy on some fascists it would be useful to be white and straight-looking, and capable of making a swift exit. The revolution will not be accessible, nor a safe space, but the day after must be.

## **19. Fascism and antifascism. Part one.**

### **Bourgeois fascism: pre-emptive counter-revolution.**

“Only one thing could have broken our movement — if the adversary had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed with extreme brutality the nucleus of our new movement.”

—Adolf Hitler: to Nuremberg Nazi Party congress, 1933.

Anarchism finds its antithesis in fascism; an understanding of its origins, practices and dynamics is essential for anarchists, as it holds up a mirror to our vision of social relations, magnifying everything we wish to do away with. It is also necessary to oppose it with everything we have, or it will do away with us. Only when we have permanently eliminated all the causes of fascism, will we have created a sustainable freedom.

The First World War was the culmination of alienated production, industrialised slaughter of nameless, faceless humanity in the name of empire, the total negation of the individual. Fascism emerged in its wake, synthesising the ‘social Darwinism’ and militarism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and co-opting crank theories about differences between the races. It received impetus from the rapid expansion and migration of the populations of Europe, and the perceived threat to capitalism itself from Bolshevik Russia. Its founder Benito Mussolini described it as ‘corporatism’ or “the merger of corporate and state power” so it was essentially an aggressive defence of capitalism. He placed everything and everyone in the service of the state, under a dictatorship, Hitler combined it with Keynesian economics and called it ‘National Socialism’ (Nazism).

At first glance fascism and Bolshevism appear very similar (the inside of a cell looks pretty much the same the world over) however their historical context distinguishes them; whereas fascism is capitalism’s Plan B, Bolshevism is simply high-speed pre-capitalist primitive accumulation. Small consolation if you’re about to be shot. Nevertheless, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and co provided their enemies with a ready made template for a totalitarian planned economy in which the Working Class were compulsorily enrolled in a kind of vertical syndicalism, ruled from the top by hook or by crook — no method of coercion was out of bounds to the leadership, no treachery or deceit too brazen. It was a simple matter to mirror Lenin’s ‘democratic centralism’ and pitch it to a different constituency.

A definition of fascism is elusive and sometimes controversial. In fact fascism, like patriarchy and law enforcement, is ever-evolving to meet the changing needs of the bourgeoisie, who are its ultimate beneficiaries. Often the initial response of our class in hard times is not to stick together but to look around (never upward) for someone to blame; a conspiracy arises between rulers and ruled to look backwards to some mythical golden age when ‘we’ were great.

Fascism takes many forms but is always characterised by certain unmistakable features:

- Fascism is divisive whilst promising unity; its political activities are calculated to stir up ethnic conflict and incite violence against minorities or political opponents.
- Fascism strengthens hierarchy and patriarchy, glorifies warfare and usually fetishises the military and police.
- Fascist parties always claim to be defending something; usually the nation, possibly the race, the culture, religion or even the continent; whatever it is, it's gone to the dogs and someone else is to blame. There is always a clearly identifiable scapegoat, but whoever they've picked for you to hate, it will never be the bosses, the authors of your misfortune.
- Fascism will try to identify with traditional values and cultural norms; although it may adopt revolutionary-sounding language for effect and even embrace countercultural themes it is always reactionary in intent.
- When fascists recruit amongst the workers or the unemployed, they replace class with race or nation.
- Fascists speak of freedom, the freedom to dominate and exclude. They stand for the aspiring little man as he struggles to better himself, to elevate himself above his peers, but in so doing they strip him of his identity and render him an isolated individual whose only social relationship is to the boss.
- Fascists will invariably target examples of independent Working Class organisation, anarchists, socialists, union and other radical activity as 'unpatriotic' or subversive.

In short, the mission of fascism is to hypnotise and enslave the Working Class, one at a time.

The extent to which fascism intersects with bourgeois society is complex and ambivalent, but the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century reveals that fascism would never have got off the ground without the collusion of the political establishment and it would not have survived any period of its history without the protection of the state; remember, everything the state does is to discourage us from acting as a class.

"No government in the world fights fascism to destruction. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping through its hands, the bourgeois raise up fascism to maintain their privilege."

—Buenaventura Durruti, antifascist: to Pierre Van Paassen. 24<sup>th</sup> July 1936.

The ruling class openly flirted with fascism from the start; with the class system under threat on all sides, it's easy to see how attractive the idea of obedient, conservative-minded workers marching about in uniforms was to the bosses. In 1920's Italy, after two years of wildcat strikes, land and factory occupations by socialist and anarchist workers; landowners and industrialists funded Mussolini to recruit a scab army of Blackshirts to evict the workers and break up union meetings. They were supplied with arms and vehicles, the army supported them with training and logistics, and firearms permits were selectively granted to right-wingers. The state relied on the fascists for strike-breaking until they got out of control, then rolled over and asked them to form a government. When the official unions eventually organised armed resistance it was too little, too late.

Fascist tactics have changed little over the years. They set about to discourage and confound Working Class organisation through violent intimidation. Meetings were disrupted, premises and individuals targeted for attack. As they grew in numbers and resources, beatings gave way to assassinations, arson and kidnapping. The left politicians made the fatal mistake of relying on the law to protect their rights, to no avail. The courts gave the Blackshirts preferential treatment so that the violent clashes they provoked resulted in the imprisonment of antifascists. In a routine that will be familiar to present day antifascists, the police usually turned on whichever group appeared numerically smaller on the day.

Some of the stiffest resistance came from the anarchist groups and the syndicalist U.S.I. union, and they would bear the brunt of the violence. In the summer of 1921, these militants formed antifascist fighting squads 'Arditi del Popolo', organised along paramilitary lines. Each unit had autonomy and operated according to the political composition of its locality. Alongside anarchists and union organisers they attracted First World War veterans, republicans and members of the official Socialist and Communist parties. Rivalry between these two parties prevented them from offering support however, neither having any use for an organisation beyond its control. In August the Socialist Party signed a non-aggression pact with the fascists, requiring its members to withdraw, and P.C.I. activists were pulled away to do their own thing. The 'Pact of Pacification' amounted to class collaboration between industrialists and Socialist functionaries claiming to represent the Working Class. It conferred an air of legitimacy on the fascists, allowing them a foothold in areas where they could otherwise not have operated. The Arditi understood as clearly as the bosses that both fascism and antifascism are outside the law. After twenty-plus fascists were killed at Sarzana, their commander lamented that the Blackshirts had got used to confronting people who ran away or offered feeble resistance, and had never actually learned to fight.

The following year, the Socialists called a legal general strike, which the fascists were largely able to circumvent with scab labour. In August 1922, three hundred and fifty Arditi successfully defended the city of Parma against twenty thousand Blackshirts who laid siege to it for six days after the police abandoned their posts. Putting their differences aside, workers built barricades, dug trenches and prepared to fight for every street with petrol bombs and axes. Eventually the fascists, who were still unprepared to take casualties, drifted away in disarray. Alarmed by such a display of Working Class autonomy and unity, the army occupied the town and took down all the barricades. In October Mussolini marched on Rome with a slightly larger force and the politicians capitulated. The Socialist leader Turati appealed to the King to uphold the constitution, but due to persistent lobbying by the General Federation of Industry and the Banking Association, he handed power to Mussolini, who at that time had only 35 out of about 600 deputies in Parliament. The fascists still didn't have it all their own way, especially in the industrial North, but over years, the antifascist movement succumbed to assassination, imprisonment and exile.

"The Italian Socialists, blind as ever, continued to cling to legality and the Constitution. In December, 1923, the Federation of Labour sent Mussolini a report of the atrocities committed by fascist bands and asked him to break with his own troops. (Reference: Buoizzi and Nitti, *Fascisme et Syndicalisme*, 1930) The Socialist Party took the electoral campaign of April, 1924, very seriously; Turati even had a debate at Turin with a fascist in a hall where Black Shirts guarded the entrance. And when, after Matteotti's assassination, a wave of revolt swept over the peninsula, the socialists did not know how to exploit it. 'At the unique moment,' Nenni writes, 'for calling the workers into the streets for insurrection, the tactic prevailed of a legal struggle

on the judicial and parliamentary plane.’ As a gesture of protest, the opposition was satisfied not to appear in parliament, and, like the ancient plebeians, they retired to the Aventine. ‘What are our opponents doing?’ Mussolini mocked in the chamber. Are they calling general strikes, or even partial strikes? Are they trying to provoke revolts in the army? Nothing of the sort. They restrict themselves to press campaigns.’ (Speech, July 1924) The Socialists launched the triple slogan: Resignation of the Government, dissolution of the militia, new elections. They continued to display confidence in the King, whom they begged to break with Mussolini; they published, for his enlightenment, petition after petition. But the King disappointed them a second time.”

—Daniel Guérin: *‘Fascism and Big Business’*

Inspired by Mussolini, a Conservative Party faction known as ‘British Fascisti’ along with the National Citizen’s Union (formerly the Middle Class Union) prepared for organised mass scabbing in the event of a general strike. This led to the formation of the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (O.M.S.), described by the Daily Mail as “defence against the reds” and announced on the letters page of the Times by the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks. The O.M.S. claimed to be non-political and had the backing of the government, who were initially uncomfortable with B.F. involvement; nevertheless many individual fascists joined and occupied prominent positions. The ‘British Fascists Ltd’ as they had become in 1924, were asked to change their name and generally tone it down a bit, they refused, though a small split complied. As the general strike approached, however, fascists swarmed into both the O.M.S. and the special constabulary.

Churchill spelt out the establishment’s position:

“Italy has shown that there is a way of fighting the subversive forces which can rally the masses of the people, properly led, to value and wish to defend the honour and stability of civilised society. She has provided the necessary antidote to the Russian poison. Hereafter no great nation will be unprovided with an ultimate means of protection against the cancerous growth of Bolshevism.”

—Winston Churchill: speaking in Rome Jan. 20, 1927.

Quoted in: Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II and the End of Civilization. by Nicholson Baker 2008.

No one came out of the General Strike looking good; the Labour Party and T.U.C. had betrayed the miners, all the politicians had displayed cowardice and the far right became confirmed in its self-appointed role of defending whatever-it-was against an imagined Jewish-Communist conspiracy. The fascists’ anti-union position brought them into immediate and violent confrontation with the left; they also hoped to recruit the unemployed, as Mussolini had done, in direct competition with the National Unemployed Workers Movement.

Socialists, communists and anarchists lost no time in organising against them. They were hampered by the reluctance of the party leaders to work together as they competed for the allegiance of the Working Class. The Communist Party was of course directed from Moscow, and faithfully followed the meanderings of the Comintern, unhelpfully labelling anyone who declined its control as ‘social fascists’. This policy had disastrous consequences in Germany, where it prioritised its rivalry with the Social Democrats, leaving the way open for the Nazis, whom it refused to

regard as a threat. The Labour Party sought electoral respectability, rendering it useless in what would become a street-level battle for control of territory. The original 'Independent Labour Party', distinguished by its opposition to WW1, and its more militant antifascism, remained affiliated to the parliamentary Labour Party until 1931.

Nevertheless more or less informal coalitions appeared at local level, driven by events. The uneven treatment of the two sides by the law is quite revealing; antifascists were typically charged with riot and sentenced to hard labour, whereas four fascists who hijacked a newspaper van at gunpoint were bound over for a year. The latter stunt was pulled by a splinter group, the National Fascisti who were more explicitly violent and racist than the B.F. and included the fanatical anti-Semite Arnold Leese and William 'Lord Haw-Haw' Joyce.

Of course Leese was just a paranoid obsessive, wherever did he get it from?

"The part played in the creation of Bolshevism and in the actual bringing about of the Russian Revolution by these international and for the most part atheistic Jews ... is certainly a very great one; it probably outweighs all others. With the notable exception of Lenin, the majority of the leading figures are Jews. Moreover, the principal inspiration and driving power comes from Jewish leaders ... The same evil prominence was obtained by Jews in (Hungary and Germany, especially Bavaria).

Although in all these countries there are many non-Jews every whit as bad as the worst of the Jewish revolutionaries, the part played by the latter in proportion to their numbers in the population is astonishing. The fact that in many cases Jewish interests and Jewish places of worship are excepted by the Bolsheviks from their universal hostility has tended more and more to associate the Jewish race in Russia with the villainies which are now being perpetrated".

—Winston Churchill: Illustrated Sunday Herald 8<sup>th</sup> February 1920.

In 1931 fascism became the latest vehicle for the ambitions of Oswald Mosley, an opportunist Parliamentarian who had enjoyed electoral success as Conservative, Labour and independent candidate before travelling to Italy and meeting Mussolini. The B.F. had appealed mainly to the establishment, landed gentry and the right of the Tory party, and its ideology was confused even by fascist standards. One of its policies was to reduce unemployment by cutting taxes to the rich so they could hire more servants! With his roots firmly in the aristocracy, a military career behind him, and having like Mussolini wandered the political spectrum, Mosley set about concocting a platform populist enough to rival the Communist Party, based on nationalism, anti-Semitism, Keynesian socialism, economic protectionism and defence of the empire. Mosley's target was not the workers as such, but aspiring middle classes, self-employed, managerial grades, farmers, market traders and so on, basically anyone who had a stake in preserving the status quo, but didn't have the ear of the political establishment.

His last venture into electoral politics, the New Party, performed dismally in the 1931 general election, henceforth he embraced the fascist principle of taking power by force. In Germany the Nazi party was gaining ground by such means, and emboldened by the ambivalence of the state, the movement became increasingly violent. The New Party and other assorted groups were combined into the British Union of Fascists; they followed the continental fascists' fetish for physical culture and paramilitary drilling, and adopted a uniform based on a black fencing shirt.

The German situation was like a slow-motion replay of the Italian one; since the Kaiser had been overthrown in the Spartacist uprising of 1918/19 the German bourgeoisie had been forced to

compromise with the Working Class to prevent social revolution, and they hated it. The balance of power was held by the Social Democratic Party (S.P.D.) with its gradualist, inevitablist conception of socialism. The most powerful labour movement in the world was integrated into the capitalist state; the Communists referred to this as 'social fascism'<sup>1</sup> whereas the Nazis regarded any combination of workers as Marxist, and therefore part of a Jewish conspiracy.

"After Hitler had been released from Landsberg the National Socialist Party was refounded early in 1925. Once more he addressed his followers in the Biirgerbrau cellar: *"To make a struggle intelligible to the broad masses, it must always be carried on against two things: against a person and a cause. Against whom did England fight? Against the German Emperor as a person, and against militarism as a cause. Against whom do the Jews fight with their Marxist power? Against the bourgeoisie as a person, and against capitalism as its cause. Against whom, therefore, must our movement fight? Against the Jew as a person, and against Marxism as its cause..."* He considered it necessary for psychological reasons to have only one enemy, the Jews; his opinion had not changed."

– Francis L. Carsten: *'The Rise of Fascism'*.

My italics.

He could have been paraphrasing Churchill from five years earlier. Because the Nazis had no constituency among the workers (never more than five percent of votes in the workplace committees) the Communists and Social Democrats ignored them, preferring to squabble amongst themselves. They remained a tiny, anti-union terrorist and propaganda group, sustained financially by the industrialists and landowners.

"If the enemy had known how weak we were, it would probably have reduced us to jelly. It would have crushed in blood the very beginning of our work."

–J. Goebbels, 1934.

So the delicate flower of fascism was nurtured and held in reserve until the start of the depression. The slump threatened to impoverish the German middle class, who resented the position of the industrial proletariat with its powerful embedded unions and negotiated guarantees; in September 1930 the National Socialists polled six million votes. Fearing revolution, the capitalists lavished money on them; by 1932 they were up to twelve million. Hitler courted the middle classes, making them all manner of unrealistic promises to break up big business and support individual enterprise. In fact the reverse happened, the Nazi government would fiercely concentrate capital into a military-industrial oligarchy.

During this period the U.S.S.R.'s own re-armament programme was heavily dependent on the goodwill of the German industrialists, who felt threatened by the pacifism of the S.P.D. The 1922 Rapallo Treaty, in which both parties waived reparations from the Great War, permitted Germany to test its military hardware in Russia as it was prohibited from doing at home by the Treaty of Versailles; this allowed both countries to benefit from the latest technology. Stalin paid for arms in hard currency, funded by wheat exports from the collective farms at the price of mass starvation, the German Communist Party must have seemed a small sacrifice. In 1931, the Comintern instructed the K.P.D. against its wishes, to vote with the Hitlerists in a referendum to unseat the Social Democrats in Prussia. Turnout was pitiful and the proposition was defeated, but this combination of complacency and sheer idiocy left the door wide open. At the

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<sup>1</sup> Which is precisely what it is.



12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Comintern, Osip Piatnitsky boasted that the blind obedience of the German Party was second only to the Russian one.<sup>2</sup> Nazism took hold in the universities, where the students found themselves stranded with little hope of reward for their academic achievements. As unemployment rose to six million over the next two years, Hitler's paramilitary S.A. provided food and shelter in their barracks and recruited a private army of three hundred thousand 'storm troopers'. The German Working Class was ready to fight, but its leadership capitulated again and again, preferring to ridicule the barbarians.

Hitler came to power in the spring of 1933, and the Rapallo accord held until January 1934, when Germany signed a non-aggression pact with Poland. The Comintern abruptly changed tack and decided it would work with the other antifascist parties after all, however in Britain the C.P.s street fighting image did not appeal to those with political ambitions and the united front failed to get off the ground. In fact the antifascist front was originally Trotsky's idea and had only the year before led to mass expulsions of 'counter-revolutionaries' from the party for advocating it. Three years later, at the next congress of the K.P.D. (in exile, naturally) the blame would be laid squarely at the door of the German leadership; two absent members Neumann and Remmele were especially singled out by the Comintern delegate Palmiro Togliatti for "underestimating fascism, and their failure to make a real effort for a united front with the Social Democrats."<sup>3</sup>

Harold Harmsworth, the proprietor of the Daily Mail and briefly the Mirror, a personal friend of Mussolini and Hitler, made his papers a mouthpiece for the B.U.F. along with General Franco and Nazi Germany. This probably accounted for the fact that a quarter of the Blackshirts were women, the majority of the Mail's readership have always been female. The erstwhile King Edward VIII was likewise a friend and admirer of Hitler who would have had Britain on the other side in the coming world war.

"I should like to express the appreciation of countless Germans, who regard me as their spokesman, for the wise and beneficial public support which you have given to a policy that we all hope will contribute to the enduring pacification of Europe."

—Adolf Hitler to Harold Harmsworth, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1933.

"At this next vital election Britain's survival as a great power will depend on the existence of a well organised party of the right ready to take over responsibility for national affairs with the same directness of purpose and energy of method as Hitler and Mussolini have displayed" ...

—Harold Harmsworth: 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts', Daily Mail 15<sup>th</sup> January 1934.

"Young men may join the British Union of Fascists by writing to the Headquarters, King's Road, Chelsea, London, S.W."

—Harold Harmsworth, writing as 'Viscount Rothermere':  
'Give the Blackshirts a helping hand', Daily Mirror 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1934.

"... the Blackshirts, like the Daily Mail, appeal to people unaccustomed to thinking. The average Daily Mail reader is a potential Blackshirt ready made. When Lord Rothermere tells his clientele to go and join the Fascists some of them pretty certainly will."

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<sup>2</sup> 'The Communist International 1919–1943 documents selected and edited by Jane Degras Volume III 1929–1943' The Royal Institute of International Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> (*ibid*)

—“A Spectator’s Notebook”: The Spectator, 19 January 1934.

“My Dear Führer, I have watched with understanding and interest the progress of your great and superhuman work in regenerating your country.”

—Harold Harmsworth, to Adolf Hitler, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1939.

“Despite her flaws, the only responsible vote in France next Sunday is one for Marine Le Pen.”

—Richard Waghorne: Daily Mail Online, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

“The German slogan ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ is somewhat tainted by its connection with Nazi concentration camps, but its essential message, ‘work sets you free’ still has something serious to commend it.

—Dominique Jackson: Daily Mail Online, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

No change there, then. The Express also advocated appeasement until the last minute, and Edward was such an embarrassment they had to make him governor of the Bahamas to get him out of the way.

Because physical superiority was central to fascist ideology, the only effective means to halt their progress was to beat them at their own game, so physical resistance developed out of necessity, a plethora of antifascist associations were formed for this purpose, some with their own uniforms. Left and union events were invaded and had to be stewarded, Jewish interests and individual Jews were subject to assault, so they either joined existing groups or organised independently. Up and down the country, political meetings were turning into pitched battles. With Working Class communities under attack, everything the B.U.F. did became fair game so violence accompanied them wherever they went. In 1933 16 year old Ubbie Cowan went along with a group of friends to oppose a meeting addressed by William Joyce:

“I heard Joyce speaking and it was too much to bear. So I charged the stage and threw him off the platform.

When I realised that this was going on week after week in Stepney, and I remember grabbing Joyce and just saying to him, get out of it, you lying bastard. I sent him flying.

Partly because of the disinterest shown by other political parties in what was happening to Jewish people in the East end, I joined the Communists.”

—Ubbie Cowan, antifascist, to Islington Tribune 29<sup>th</sup> September 2011

What was glaringly obvious to Working Class Jews may have escaped their wealthier fellows however.

“On New Year’s Day 1934 was formed the January Club, whose object is to form a solid Black-shirt front. The chairman Sir John Squire, editor of the London Mercury said that it was not a fascist organisation but admitted that ‘the members who belonged to all political parties were for the most part in sympathy with the fascist movement’.”

—The Times, 22 March, 1934

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<sup>4</sup> ‘The Menace of Fascism. What it is and how to fight it.’ By Ted Grant: June 1948.

According to Ted Grant,<sup>4</sup> Members of the January Club included Ralph D Blumenfeld, founder of the Anti-Socialist Union, former editor of the Daily Mail and Daily Express, and the prominent Zionist Major Harry Nathan, Liberal MP for Bethnal Green North East.

The January club's published records contradict this. It could be that the B.U.F. subsequently expunged the names of Jewish members, or maybe Grant was trying to make a point. Either explanation is plausible; truth is the first casualty of war. Please get in touch if you can shed any light on this.

Either way, British capitalists were busy re-arming Nazi Germany; in March 1934 the merchant banker and Chairman of Vickers, General Sir Herbert Lawrence, refused to deny it:

"I cannot give you an assurance in definite terms, but I can tell you that nothing is being done without complete sanction and approval of our own government."

—Herbert Lawrence, Quoted by Henry Owen in '*War is Terribly Profitable*'

In Gateshead the fascists attacked the I.L.P. May Day rally outside the labour exchange and were seen off by the unemployed workers. This incident prompted the formation of the 'Greyshirts' Anti Fascist League, which effectively shut down fascist activity in the area. In June, Mosley addressed a triumphalist rally at Olympia and the fascist stewards ran amok, beating protesters and anyone who got in their way while the police turned a blind eye, then as antifascists scuffled with the Blackshirts outside the venue some were arrested. Stepney Communist Marks 'Barney' Becow received the first of several terms of hard labour.

In the days and weeks after Olympia, B.U.F. meetings were attacked and disrupted in London, Leicester, Glasgow, Plymouth and Brighton. By the end of 1934 the continual violence had deprived the B.U.F. of any semblance of respectability and most of its middle class membership; Rothermere ceased his public support for the group, complaining bitterly to Hitler that his hand had been forced by Jewish businesses threatening to take their advertising elsewhere.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1935 Mussolini sent his armed forces into Ethiopia and fired the opening shots in the conflict that would shortly tear up three continents. He also had his eye on the strategic Balearic Islands while Hitler coveted the ores and mineral deposits in the Iberian Peninsula and Western Sahara. Spain and Portugal had long ago lost their political and economic independence and were no longer counted among the great European powers; a circle of vultures looked down, waiting to deploy their natural resources in the next imperialist kick-off. Events in Spain were about to have a transformative effect on the antifascist movement and European history.

"Before embarking on the Ethiopian venture, Mussolini analysed the composition of the British population in terms of age, noting that it included 24 million women against 22 million men. Some 12 million male citizens were over the age of 50, the limit for men liable for military service in wartime. Outcome: the static masses outweigh the dynamic masses of young people. The quiet life, compromise, peace. He told me of an episode which is not without piquancy: in order to press on with his reading of a detective story Baldwin simply could not be bothered for one whole Sunday with the envelope containing the instructions concerning the Laval-Hoare Plan. The delay was enough to fuel the controversy in France and to lead to the foundering of the plan."

—Gian Galeazzo Ciano: 'Diaries 1937–1943' 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1937.

Ciano was Italy's foreign minister during the Spanish Civil war, explaining that the Italians had no fear of British interference with their blatant piracy in the Mediterranean. The Laval-Hoare Plan to carve up Abyssinia, provoked public outcry in Britain and France.

In London, Douglas Jerrold, editor of the far-right Catholic 'English Review', member of Mosley's January Club and the pro-Nazi Anglo-German Fellowship, was approached by Luis Bolin, London correspondent of the Spanish monarchist ABC newspaper. Bolin wanted to transport General Franco in secret from the Canary Islands to Morocco, where he would launch a military coup; Jerrold in turn hired British secret agent Major Hugh Pollard. On the 11<sup>th</sup> July their chartered De Havilland Dragon Rapide aircraft took off from Croydon aerodrome piloted by Cecil Bebb, who may or may not have been a spook as well, with Pollard as navigator. Pollard's daughter Diana, and another woman, Dorothy Watson, went along to make the trip look a little less suspicious. International flights were uncommon at the time and were closely monitored by Special Branch. Pollard was a senior figure in the intelligence community, who had worked for the British in Ireland, Mexico, and Morocco. It's inconceivable that his bosses didn't know about and approve the project. Bolin became Franco's press officer and chief censor, and Pollard the chief of the MI6 station in Madrid, Bebb received an assortment of medals from Franco. Jerrold was a tireless propagandist for the nationalists during the Civil War, and later also worked for MI6.

Having failed to intimidate the left in the regions, the B.U.F turned its attention to provoking the Jewish community in East London. The fascists had a considerable following in Bethnal Green from which anti-Semitic incursions would take place; the area became a daily battleground.

"An informal anti-fascist bloc had developed in the East End. It spanned the political spectrum from left to centre and included Jewish anti-fascist bodies. On the left of the bloc stood the CP the YCL, the ILP, the NUWM, various trade union bodies, and the Labour League of Youth. The LLY continued to organise with the YCL despite the disapproval of its parent body. At its Manchester conference in April 1936 it agreed that 'the possibilities of war and Fascism looming ahead of the workers demand a united front of all working-class youth organisations.'"

—Dave Hann, antifascist: 'Physical Resistance. A Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism.'

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1936 the East End rose as one to stop Mosley's Blackshirts marching from the City of London to Bethnal Green. The extraordinary cohesion, in particular the solidarity between the Jewish and Irish communities, that made this possible had been forged during the Great Unrest that preceded the First World War, when striking dockers and tailors had supported each other's families. The Ex-Servicemen's Anti-Fascist Association already had police permission to hold a march and meeting that day, but the cops insisted they make way for the fascists. Both the official Labour Party and the Board of Deputies of British Jews opposed the counter-mobilisation. The Communist Party initially opposed it then jumped on the bandwagon when it became clear its members were going to do it anyway, the instrument of Stalin's foreign policy being powerless without its rank and file, who had a taste for self-organisation and wanted to bring the revolution home.

"This attitude clearly reflected what I already knew was the London District Party leadership's position on Mosley. I was furious. I could hardly believe what I was reading. I had been fighting their ideas for years. Here was the confrontation and I could not withdraw. On the contrary, I knew that if the DPC line was carried, a heavy blow would fall on the workers of East London and workers everywhere. It would also be the end of me. I had nothing to lose and everything to gain by fighting these pernicious tactics. ...

... We in the CP were supposed to tell people to go to Trafalgar Square and come back in the evening to protest after Mosley had marched. The pressure from the people of Stepney who went

ahead with their own efforts to oppose Mosley left no doubt in our minds that the CP would be finished in Stepney if this was allowed to go through as planned by our London leaders.”

—Joe Jacobs, antifascist: ‘Out of the Ghetto’ London 1978.

In the East End, materials were being collected for barricades and missiles, runners and spotters were recruited and fifteen first aid posts set up. Seventy years before the Internet and text messages, with few telephones and no television, the whole thing was organised in less than a week. The planned route along Whitechapel road was blocked on the day by a vast crowd, the only alternative, as antifascists had anticipated, was via Cable Street.

“Now because we’d suspected that the police might try to use this route as a secondary means of getting Mosley to his destination, we went round there the week beforehand to see what was cooking. We found a very convenient builder’s yard on the corner of Christian Street and, on several evenings leading up to October 4, the dockers came along and dumped little parcels there. It was agreed beforehand that the dockers would be responsible for preparing barricades in Cable Street should they be required. We sent a team with the dockers so that it was all organised.”

—Ubby Cowan. Quoted by Dave Hann. (*op. cit.*)

Most of the fighting was not with fascists, but with the police, who had orders to drive the B.U.F.’s paramilitary columns through at any cost. It was nothing more or less than a demonstration of state power in the face of the organised Working Class, it failed.

“The pavements were packed, the whole street — Aldgate High Street — was packed solid. Crowds were everywhere as far as we could see. It was impossible to make any progress. Parked in the middle of the street, towering over the crowds was a line of tramcars — marooned and empty. They could not have moved, even if anyone had wanted to move them.

The rumour went that the first tram in the line had been deliberately driven to the point by an anti-fascist tram driver, placed there to form a barricade against the fascists ... My comrades and I never had a chance to get within a mile of Cable Street on that afternoon. In between us and Cable Street was a solid mass of people. Estimates afterwards said there was anything up to half a million people out on the streets of the East End that day. But no one could possibly have counted them ... we gathered that the first protesters had been up early in the day and had been preparing a reception for both the police and the fascists long before either had arrived.

The fascists were assembling by the Royal Mint and police started to make baton charges, both foot and mounted, to try to clear a way for them to escort a march. They did not succeed. A barricade started to go up. A lorry was overturned, furniture was piled up, paving stones and a builder’s yard helped to complete the barrier. The police managed to clear the first, but found a second behind it and then a third. Marbles were thrown under the hooves of the police horses; volleys of bricks met every baton charge.”

—Reg Weston, antifascist, London, North Africa and Italy:

from Libcom.

The following excerpts are from accounts quoted by Dave Hann in ‘Physical Resistance. A Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism’.

“One of my jobs, because I had a motorbike, was to go around the periphery of the crowd and report what was happening to the committee. ... We had one doctor who was member of the Communist Party, Doctor Faulkner, who dressed up smart and went to where the Blackshirts were assembling at the Minories. The Minories was the main thoroughfare between Aldgate and the City and the fascists were all lined up there, about three thousand of them. He infiltrated them and said he was there to help out, but in fact he slipped away and passed information on their plans to the committee ... Well, Doctor Faulkner very sensibly managed to get word to headquarters of what the fascists were up to and I was immediately told to go around and tell people to go down to Cable Street, not everyone, but enough to help the people already down there.”

—Lou Kenton, antifascist: London and Spain.

“When the police started to move towards Cable Street, one runner ran ahead to warn them while another came to tell us. When we heard what was happening, we made a dash for cable Street and, when we got nearer, we could hear the sound of shouting and smashing and Lemonade bottles exploding. The barricades were up. They were quite high and the police were trying to climb over them but couldn’t, because people on the roofs were throwing bricks and water and goodness knows what else at them. We all started throwing whatever rubbish we could find and after about three-quarters of an hour someone on the roof shouted “They’re leaving.” We said “Who’s leaving?” and they said “The coppers.” So we climbed up the back of the barricade and the street ahead of us was littered with broken bottles and stones and all the rest of it but we could just see the back of the police horses as they were turning the corner.”

—Ubbay Cowan, (*ibid*)

“Barrow boys used their barrows to block the way. People were even throwing piddle pots out the windows. The main thing I can remember because I was only nine at the time, was all the people fighting with the police. Because, of course, the police came in first and tried to clear the way for the Blackshirts. I can remember my grandfather fighting the police and I was very frightened because I thought he would get arrested because being black he would stand out.”

—Betty Davis, antifascist. (*ibid*)

The police were forced to withdraw and re-route the Blackshirts along the embankment. With red flags flying the antifascists marched to Bethnal Green instead of Moseley and his reception committee fled before them. The following day he flew to Berlin to get married at Dr Goebbels’ house, returning a week later to Liverpool and another hail of bricks from the locals.

“Mosley was finished in the East End after Cable Street. You could see the change in the ordinary people going about their day-to-day business. People were no longer scared of the Blackshirts. They were still wary of course, but they weren’t terrified anymore. Fear had allowed fascism to grow in the East End but once everyone had seen the Blackshirts beaten and humiliated, the fear disappeared. It was still dangerous to be a Jew on your own in some areas, but there was no longer this awful fear of what the future might bring.”

—Lou Kenton. (*ibid*)

The battle of Cable Street sent ripples across Europe and down the years; it demonstrated that ordinary people could organise themselves in defiance of their political leaders and take on the state. The Public Order Act became law in January 1937, banning political uniforms and establishing the police power to enter public meetings and ban demonstrations. Many on the left were in favour; however the new legislation would be used more often against antifascists than the far right. Mussolini cut off his funding to the B.U.F. forcing Mosley to go cap in hand to Hitler; his anti-Semitism became ever more rabid as Gestapo agents delivered regular payments from Goebbels.

“One week after 4 October, 5,000 anti-fascists celebrated with their own march, which gathered more and more numbers as it wound its way from Tower Hill to Victoria Park. With police attention, as ever, directed towards the anti-fascists, the Mile End Pogrom took place. A hundred youths ran the length of the road assaulting individual Jews and smashing the windows of Jewish owned businesses. A car was set alight. A man and a seven-year old girl were thrown through a shop window.”

—Dave Hann: (*op.cit.*)

The Communist Party was briefly kicked off the fence, a short-lived anti-fascist alliance was formed with the Independent Labour Party, the National Unemployed Workers Movement and the left of the Labour Party, the latter subsequently caved in when threatened with expulsion. The C.P. drifted away from opposing fascism at home in favour of aiding the republican government in Spain, but notwithstanding the valour of the International Brigades volunteers, Stalin had long since given up the idea of world revolution and would eventually hand victory to Franco for the sake of the internal security of the U.S.S.R.

The attempted military coup in Spain and resulting Civil War are significant for several reasons. The selfless solidarity it engendered in sections of the international Working Class, and the spontaneous social revolution that took place in those regions where the coup failed. It's instructive with regard to the pitfalls of trying to oppose fascism within the parameters of the bourgeois state. It was the first conflict in which mass media, radio broadcasts and newsreels would allow the deployment of propaganda in real time. Whatever your perspective: anarchist, Trotskyist, liberal, Stalinist or fascist, you can find an account of it that will support your own conclusions.

“The masses make history, they do not write it. And those who do write it are nearly always more concerned with ancestor worship and retrospective justification than with a balanced presentation of the facts.”

—Maurice Brinton: ‘The Bolsheviks and workers’ control: the state and counter-revolution’

I’ve really tried, in the interests of impartiality, reading Communist Party histories, such as the polemics of the unrepentant Stalinist Bill Alexander, who fought fascists from Cable Street through Spain, Africa and Italy to the liberation of a German death camp; and Arthur Landis’

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander went to Spain after the May events so would have been well-primed with Comintern propaganda before setting foot in the country. Landis too was an antifascist who fought with distinction, he wrote an oral history of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from eyewitness accounts and correspondence; he also had a career as an author of science fiction and fantasy.

heavily fictionalised: 'Spain, the unfinished revolution'.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless the utter disregard for truth is just demoralising, and discredits any valid critique of the other factions. I had thought it might be useful for cross checking dates and places but frankly I haven't the confidence to cite any of it, the Third International elevated lying to a craft skill. It's pure propaganda, and outdated propaganda at that, referential to a narrative that had worn thin long before I was born. What's the point in having the other side of the story if it's all made up?

"In April 1937, at 19, Landis went to Spain to fight in the Spanish Civil War. He worked as a scout, a typographer, and an artillery spotter with the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion, and fought in the battles of Aragon and Teruel, where he was injured. Landis also worked for a stint for an intelligence unit, and participated in an aborted operation to blow up the Italian Fleet headquarters. Just before Barcelona fell to Franco, Landis helped load the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade Archives onto a Soviet ship. He sailed back to the U.S. on the R.M.S. Ausonia in December 1938."

—Taken from the online archives of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

I imagine if you've risked everything for a movement that claimed to stand against oppression and barbarism, but somehow managed to kill more of your own side than the enemy, clarity is not your friend. Antony Beevor wrote: "*It is perhaps the best example of a subject which becomes more confusing when it is simplified.*"<sup>6</sup> Liberal historians like Beevor try to write dispassionately about the conflict, reserving their moral ire for the human tragedies, the ambition, duplicity and cowardice of the political figures. But they write from a standpoint that takes certain things for granted: that property-owning parliamentary rule is normal, fair and desirable; that states should have a monopoly on violence and their legal constitutions justify its use; that all attempts to subvert these things are somehow aberrant. In rejecting these precepts, I cannot be impartial after all.

Spain's humanitarian catastrophe went on to engulf the entire world and lasted another forty years. With capitalism in crisis, the Working Class were ready to leave it behind for something more natural and benign, and to defeat fascism once and for all. Had the social revolution succeeded in Spain, World War Two and its accompanying genocides could have been averted. Had it spread into France, Portugal, Morocco, even Britain, it might have become unstoppable, and perhaps inspired the Russian Working Class to overthrow its masters and finish what it started in 1917. Instead two thirds of the world groaned under vicious dictatorships for the rest of the century. To the extent that liberal-bourgeois-military-economic hegemony is normalised, we are all still paying the price. Only at this distance, with passions cooled, illusions shattered, and the players having left only their deeds to speak for them, can we clearly analyse the Spanish conflict and apply its lessons to the task in hand.

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<sup>6</sup> 'The Spanish Civil War' 1982



## 20. Fascism and antifascism. Part two. Spain: Working Class antifascism versus Stalin's counter-revolution.

"If order is restored, we say, the social democrats will hang the anarchists; the Fabians will hang the social democrats, and will in their turn be hanged by the reactionaries; and the Revolution will come to an end."

—Pyotr Kropotkin: 'The Conquest of Bread 1906.

"A government which sends boys of fifteen to the front with rifles forty years old and keeps its biggest men and newest weapons in the rear is manifestly more afraid of the revolution than the fascists".

—George Orwell, antifascist: 'Eye Witness in Barcelona', Controversy: The Socialist Forum, Volume 1, no 11, August 1937

In February 1936 the broad-left Popular Front had narrowly defeated a right-wing National Bloc comprising monarchists, the Catholic Church, and the fascist Falange party. The election was an irrelevance as Spain had for decades been sliding inexorably into all-out class war. The right never had any intention of accepting the result and many of the people who voted for it didn't believe in government at all.

"Between the election in February and the fascist revolt in July there were 113 general strikes, 228 partial general strikes, 145 bomb explosions, 269 deaths, 1287 wounded, 215 assaults and 160 churches burned. ... On June 13<sup>th</sup>, 30,000 Asturian miners struck; on June 19<sup>th</sup> 90,000 miners throughout the country were on strike. Every city of importance had at least one general strike. Over one million were out in the first days of July."

—Eddie Conlon: 'The Spanish Civil War: Anarchism in Action.'

The anarchosyndicalist National Confederation of Labour (C.N.T.) and its sister organisation the Iberian Anarchist Federation 'The FAI' having been in open revolt against the republic and the monarchy before it, called on rank and file socialists and union members to join them in a revolutionary alliance against the imminent fascist coup. The country was bitterly divided between the workers and peasants on the one hand, and the church, army, landlords and industrialists on the other. Their interests lay in diametrically opposite directions, as Durruti put it:

"There are only two roads, victory for the Working Class, freedom, or victory for the fascists which means tyranny. Both combatants know what's in store for the loser. We are ready to end fascism once and for all, even in spite of the Republican government."

—Buenaventura Durruti, antifascist: quoted in the Toronto Star: 'Two Million Anarchists Fight for the Revolution.'  
24<sup>th</sup> July 1936.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> July, three days into the rebellion, the socialists/republicans realised they had nothing left to lose and the third Popular Front government in as many days recognised the workers' militias as a *fait accompli*; a little background is in order.

The Spanish workers' organisations had followed a very different path to those in Britain and Germany. From the 1840s onwards they were influenced by the libertarian ideas of Proudhon, and later Bakunin. The Spanish Workers' Regional Federation (F.T.R.E.) advocated social revolution, federalism and extra-parliamentary (direct action) methods, affiliating to the International Working Men's (*sic*) Association until the split, in which it naturally took the anarchist side. With three hundred thousand members the F.T.R.E. participated in the short-lived First Republic and set up an anarchist commune at Cartagena. After the restoration the movement went underground but conducted a vigorous resistance, a small statist party, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (P.S.O.E.) also emerged and founded the General Workers Union (U.G.T.). Spain's defeat by the U.S.A. in 1898, amounting to the death of one imperial power and the birth of another, intensified the class antagonism, casualties were enormous, mainly from disease.

"The ships that brought our men back to our shores have not been like boats from the Motherland, but something closer to Charon's boat, taking them to a hell of misery and sufferings. It's clear to all that the blood of the poor is cheap and their death matters very little."

—Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, writer and early Republican politician.

The military and religious elites blamed the militant proletariat for the loss of their colonial possessions in the Americas and the Pacific, and turned their famous brutality inwards. In industrial Barcelona, the workers' anger and aspirations of regional autonomy collided with the emerging bourgeoisie, who in 1901 adopted '*el pacte de la fam*', — the hunger pact — blacklisting of activists, in February 1902 a general strike was declared, martial law imposed and pickets fought the army leaving seventeen dead, forty-four injured and three hundred and seventy-one imprisoned.

Barcelona rose again in July 1909; a general strike over the war in Morocco spontaneously became an insurrection called the '*semana trágica*' in which the people built barricades and burned down fifty churches. The colonial war was a serious bone of contention; ill-equipped and poorly trained conscripts suffered heavy losses against the superior Berber troops, but the rich could buy off the draft. The church symbolised centralised power and imperialism, and had an effective monopoly on education, with illiteracy running at over fifty percent in the Working Class districts. Following the execution of five prominent anarchists, including the education pioneer Francisco Ferrer, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo was established with almost half its members being Catalan. At its 1919 congress it formally declared its commitment to anarchist/libertarian communism. The socialists and anarchists often worked together but the C.N.T. was wary of Moscow and retained its libertarian character. After a delegation visited the U.S.S.R.<sup>1</sup> it revoked its provisional membership of the Comintern and instead joined the International Workers Association, building its membership to over a million.

Throughout its history the Confederation was repeatedly banned or suppressed; there were waves of strikes, sabotage, lockouts and arrests, alongside tit-for-tat assassinations of militants, bosses and government officials. In response to the insurrectionary general strike of 1917 the government installed army officers in the regional administrations, and enacted the '*ley de fuga*'

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Eleven.

or 'law of flight' which allowed police to shoot suspects while escaping custody. Being easy to fake this opened the way for extra-judicial executions. The church and the employers' associations funded 'Sindicatos Libres' — scab unions — which hired gangsters, 'pistoleros' to shoot confederals, necessitating the formation of armed defence committees. This urban guerrilla wing, self-funded by armed robbery, existed uneasily alongside the pure syndicalists, who preferred to operate within the system towards economic issues, believing that the time was not right for revolution.

The class collaborationists lost the argument with the murder in broad daylight of one of their own, the moderate and legally-minded Salvador Seguí. The Libres were targeting syndicalists as the most immediate threat; meanwhile the more combative elements in the union were resolved to punish the pistoleros and their sponsors. The prominent gangsters Juan Languia and Joan Serra were assassinated along with former Police chief (and German agent) Bravo Portillo, the Prime Minister Eduardo Dato, the president of the Owners' Federation Félix Graupera, the former governors of Barcelona and Bilbao and the Cardinal Archbishops of Toledo and Zaragoza. They only narrowly missed getting the King.

"Several other anarchist groups decided to launch an attack on the Hunters' Circle, a pistolero refuge and meeting place of the most vicious employers. The raid had a devastating psychological effect. They never imagined that more than fifteen people would audaciously burst into their lounge and fire at them at point-blank range, but that is exactly what happened. The bourgeoisie asked for police protection and many pistoleros fled Barcelona.

There was tremendous confusion in the city. The poor supported the radical workers and greeted police invasions of their neighbourhoods with gunfire. It was a bitter war, and Durruti and his friends were destined to live out one of the most dangerous and dramatic chapters of their lives. Years later a witness observed that "it had no precedent other than the period experienced by Russian revolutionaries between 1906 and 1913. These youths disregarded the adults' prudent recommendations and became judges and avengers in Spain's four corners. They were frequently persecuted by the state and had no support other than their own convictions and revolutionary faith."

—Abel Paz, antifascist: 'Durruti in the Spanish Revolution'.

The central government pulled the plug on Catalan state terrorism, for a little while, but the violence had taken its toll on the C.N.T.'s membership and resources. However, it was these insurrectionist affinity groups and defence committees who would go on to rally the people into one of the most significant conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The disastrous conduct of the Moroccan war de-stabilised the constitutional monarchy, which had to be rescued in 1923 by the bloodless coup of General Primo de Rivera, ending one general strike and provoking another. Although the dictator took office with no discernible ideology beyond preservation of the status quo — monarchy, property and church, both he and King Alfonso visited Rome within two months of the coup.

"It has not been necessary to imitate the fascists or the great figure of Mussolini, though their deeds have been a useful example for everyone."

—Miguel Primo de Rivera, quoted in  
'The Franco Regime 1936–1975' By Stanley G. Payne.

His sentiments were in step with most of Europe's ruling classes at the time, his son José would go on to found the explicitly fascist Falange party during the second republic. In 1926 the labour minister, having made a study of Italian corporatism, began dividing Spain's economy into twenty-seven economic corporations on the fascist model, with compulsory state-supervised arbitration between capital and labour — a sham as the most popular union had been driven underground. The bourgeoisie had exploited Spain's neutrality to generate large profits from WW1, and the relative prosperity of the 1920's allowed for economic growth and modernisation of the infrastructure, but overall wages declined and the conditions of the rural poor became ever more wretched. The Moroccan war ended by chance, when separatists following the Rif leader Abd-el-Krim invaded French Morocco, prompting a military alliance between France and Spain.

The military dictatorship ended co-operation between the C.N.T. and U.G.T., the former maintaining an armed struggle with many of its members imprisoned or exiled. The U.G.T. secretary Largo Caballero opportunistically entered the government to oversee the compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes, illustrating the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the Second International. For once the phrase 'social fascist' was entirely apt. During this period Spanish anarchists involved themselves in class struggles in Latin America, and made alliances with comrades around the world. The need arose to co-ordinate the activities of anarchist affinity groups across the Iberian Peninsula, in order to balance the day-to-day battle for material improvements with the maintenance and promotion of anarchist principles. Discussions initiated by Portuguese anarchists with Spaniards in exile led in 1927 to the inaugural congress of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI); its task, as well as co-ordinating resistance to the dictatorship and the bosses, was to keep the union revolutionary in both theory and practice.

The U.G.T. having accepted the invitation to participate in the dictatorship, there were those within the Confederation who wanted legal recognition to compete with it. The C.N.T. was first and foremost a labour union whose membership on occasions reached two million. Its militancy and direct action methods got results, and since the situation of the workers was desperate, it was bound to attract people who just wanted to eat; so from time to time reformist tendencies crept in which could be satisfied by some semblance of democracy. The Marxists, republicans, separatists and all those who feared the power of the Working Class courted these people, deluding them that they had any influence, but ultimately gave them no respect since they had voluntarily tied their own hands.

Towards the end of the decade the rebellion broke into the open again and Rivera, having lost the confidence of the army, went into exile, but the king remained tainted by his support for the dictatorship. A year later municipal elections were called, which were contested by a republican alliance as a de-facto referendum on the monarchy; they won by a landslide. The government resigned and was replaced by a very broad<sup>2</sup> Socialist–Republican coalition.

As the king fled the country, the Second Republic was declared on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1931, it was doomed from the start. Primo de Rivera's self-aggrandising government by decree had wrecked Spain's economy internationally, halving the value of the Peseta. The Depression badly hit both agriculture and industry, the value of exports fell, wages were cut still further, prices and unemployment rose and land fell into disuse while the people starved; the money economy was not working for most Spaniards and libertarian communism offered the only practical solution. As in the rest of Europe, the ruling class looked to fascism. Some commentators have pointed to

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<sup>2</sup> The Republic was supported by many figures that would subsequently fight on opposite sides in the Civil War.

the uniquely clerical character of the Spanish far right as somehow setting it apart from mainstream fascism, but fascism never needed a coherent ideology, insofar as it is reactionary ultra-nationalism, it will necessarily exploit regional obsessions, from the weird folk paganism of the Nazis to Hirohito's 'Era of enlightened peace', they make it up as they go along.

The socialists hoped to increase their influence amongst the Working Class by improving their lot, but all the power in the land was held by forces opposed to change. The Catholic Church was state-subsidised and controlled a third of Spain's wealth, it also presided over the subjugation of women, a terrific subsidy to the bourgeoisie. Agricultural land was in huge estates held by the monarchist aristocracy, the same class that dominated the army and navy. Ten per cent of the army were officers, which like the church provided employment for the useless offspring of the rich. Landlords were able to fix wages, prices and rents within their domains and could hire and fire at will. The Carlists<sup>3</sup> just wanted a different king. Between these poles were the extremists of the centre who hoped liberal democracy would lead to a modern capitalist market economy. The industrial Basque and Catalan bourgeoisie wanted independence to free themselves from the old feudal relations. Neither the little Spanish Communist Party (P.C.E.) of a few thousand members, nor the embryonic Falange exerted much influence to begin with.

So the survival of the republic depended on the collaboration of all these conflicting interests, none of whom could budge an inch without upsetting the applecart. Nor could it function without the acquiescence of the Working Class, in whom it had raised expectations the state would never be able to deliver. Miguel Maura was Interior Minister:

"Our problem was as follows: The monarchy had committed suicide, and so we either had to join the nascent revolution to defend within it legitimate conservative principles, or we had to let the left wing and the workers' organizations have a free hand, a very dangerous alternative."

—Miguel Maura: 'How Alfonso XIII fell' Mexico City, 1962

The honeymoon didn't last long; the instability in the new republic was highlighted when a group of right-wing Civil Guards opened fire on the May Day rally in Barcelona, in the gunfight that ensued, some infantrymen sided with the workers. A split likewise opened within the Confederation, as the 'legalisers' resorted to airing the union's internal disputes in the bourgeois press, which delighted in publishing their attack on the FAI. The 'thirty' had to be expelled and set up opposition unions and a political party.<sup>4</sup> The Socialist Workers' Party dominated the government although its union had fewer members and having collaborated with the dictatorship had become simply a top-down, reformist, scab union. It received preferential treatment as a tool of the government. Anti-union laws were enacted and a new paramilitary police force the Guardia de Asalto, 'assault guards' created to be used against strikers.

For the Confederation it was business as usual as it went into action against another round of state repression, the workers were growing in confidence and strikes led to land occupations and armed insurrections, there were several declarations of libertarian communism, and mines were occupied in Catalonia. The usual suspects were deported to the Spanish colonies without trial, although these actions were rarely initiated by union officials or even the FAI but by the rank and file, as the bureaucracy struggled to keep pace with the militancy of its membership. The revolu-

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<sup>3</sup> A cult of ultra-conservative, monarchist, religious fanatics hung up on royal bloodlines and such.

<sup>4</sup> The Syndicalist Party participated in the popular front of 1936 and the opposition unions were re-admitted just prior to the coup.

tion gathered momentum throughout 1932; an atrocity by the Civil Guard in Rioja resulted in the demotion of their commander General Sanjurjo, who began to plot with the Falange. Sanjurjo's attempted coup was defeated by the prompt action of the C.N.T. defence committees, effectively saving the Republic, which showed its gratitude by driving the union underground again. In January 1933 insurrections in Catalonia, Andalusia and Levante ended with the massacre by Assault Guards of unarmed peasants at Casas Viejas, some of whom who were burned to death in their hovels, further hardening attitudes to the Republic. The FAI claimed responsibility for the uprising as a political gesture although it had in fact been planned by the confederal defence committees. It invariably got the blame anyway for any militant activity from the socialists and the gradualist elements in the union.

The P.C.E. stuck steadfastly to the Comintern's 'class against class' line — social democracy equals social fascism. The republican government was "not to be defended or supported under any circumstances".<sup>5</sup> The position changed over the course of 1933 after Hitler's accession brought about the annihilation of the German labour movement. Henceforth Stalin courted the liberal democracies of the west, diplomatic recognition by the U.S.A. followed assurances that Communist subversion in that country would cease. Germany's pact with Russia's old enemy Poland, made an alliance with France imperative, so the French Communist Party began to make overtures to the very reformist Socialist Party, leading to the first popular front.

In September an election boycotted by over a million C.N.T. members returned a right-wing coalition and the anarchists responded with a new offensive, briefly capturing several cities. The Confederation sought an alliance with the General Workers union, but without the influence of the Socialist Workers' Party, since it had no interest in installing another authoritarian government. This only happened in Asturias, where the rank and file made a pact in defiance of their respective leaders. The socialists now found themselves persecuted using the very legislation they had devised to thwart the anarchists. The following year they attempted a coup together with bourgeois Basque and Catalan separatist elements; cynically however, they knew the confederals would not scab on their general strike. The Catalan administration, the Generalitat, which had been given a degree of autonomy in 1932, continued to repress the C.N.T. and lacking the resources to take on the army, its declaration of independence was a flash in the pan. To the socialists' astonishment, in Asturias they lost control of the revolt to the workers, who declared libertarian communism, running the munitions factories day and night to arm their militia. After two weeks of fierce fighting the province was re-captured by General Franco's African Legion, which massacred three thousand people. The mining districts were the last to fall, at the end there were thirty thousand political prisoners.

The national committee of defence committees, in a presentation to the October 1934 congress noted that the tactic of spontaneous, improvised insurrection, often called 'revolutionary gymnastics' had run into a law of diminishing returns and recognised the need to prepare for a protracted civil war against the modern military-industrial state. The requirement for 'propaganda by the deed' to precipitate a revolutionary situation had passed, since the conflict was now inevitable and the anarchists were going to bear the brunt of it. The left politicians, even from their prison cells, still harboured dreams of defeating the right through constitutional means with a broad electoral coalition, as if the lessons of Italy and Germany were still to be learned.

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<sup>5</sup> Party officials who defied Moscow to rally their members against Sanjurjo's coup were replaced.

The decision was taken to formalise the structure of the defence committees to fulfill their role as the clandestine military apparatus of the union. The C.N.T. was organised as a confederation of trade rather than industrial unions so the defence committees would be embedded in, and funded by these unions, but answer to the national committee. A district committee would be made up of little cells, each with half a dozen members of the same trade union, well known to one another, who would each take on a specific area of intelligence-gathering, planning and co-ordination. They would collectively amass the detailed local knowledge necessary to conduct a guerrilla campaign in their neighbourhood, identifying potential threats, targets, vantage points, supply routes, arms caches, storage depots and so on. Those unions responsible for infrastructure, especially transport, communications and power, would co-ordinate on a national level to enable them to quickly take control of their respective functions. Plans would be laid for rapidly transforming manufacturing industry into war production. A special department was dedicated to infiltrating the military.

A month before the 1936 elections the P.S.O.E. joined with the Communist Party in the Popular Front, promising an amnesty and land reform. Throwing in their lot with them were some liberal bourgeois republican parties and the Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) a newly-formed group of independent communists estranged from the socialist Second, the Stalinist Third and the Trotskyite Fourth Internationals. This time, the confederation pragmatically didn't bother organising a boycott,<sup>6</sup> they knew they would be fighting fascists before the year was over and it would be harder to get support if the enemy could claim any democratic legitimacy, plus they needed those prisoners out.

The incoming Popular Front government restricted its amnesty to purely political prisoners, excluding those anarchists who had committed common law offences during the insurrection. It banned the Falange and demoted Generals Franco and Mola who met in March to plan the coup; they chose as their figurehead General Sanjurjo, whose 1932 takeover had been foiled by the Working Class. With characteristic incompetence, the government posted the conspirators to Spain's periphery so they could plot with impunity. Manuel Goded was sent to the Balearics, where Mussolini would establish naval and air force bases. Emilio Mola, the brains behind the operation, was made military governor of Pamplona, with its eight thousand fanatical Carlist Requetés, busy drilling in the Pyrenees. The Carlists established a military council on the French side in contact with officers of the right-wing Spanish Military Union, and the Falange. Despite their relatively small numbers, both groups had wealthy backers, and were able to purchase significant quantities of arms from overseas.

The bourgeoisie were out of control, ignoring the new land reform legislation and refusing to re-employ sacked militants; a cartel of wealthy Spaniards speculated against the Peseta on the foreign exchanges. Crops were left in the fields or fed to animals, creating an artificial famine. The people took matters into their own hands by opening the provincial prisons and occupying unused land, much of which was wastefully allocated to raising fighting bulls. Aristocratic landowners panicked and fled to the cities or overseas. In Badajoz on 25<sup>th</sup> March:

"some sixty thousand peasants-more than half of the adult male rural population of Badajoz-marched upon some three thousand previously selected [large] farms. [crying] "Viva la Republica" marked out the limits of the areas they were to cultivate and began to plow. The precision and perfect order with which this gigantic mass of people acted were impressive."

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<sup>6</sup> They held discussions with the politicians. Their price for supporting the Popular Front was sufficient arms to

The C.N.T.'s national congress opened in Zaragoza on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1936. On the mandate of a countrywide referendum, the opposition unions were invited to Zaragoza and allowed to speak. The 'manifesto of the Thirty' issued at the dawn of the second republic by the syndicalists, had sparked a bitter feud, with expulsions and even violent clashes between rival unions. The Thirty had criticised the revolutionary gymnastics of the anarchist action groups, and wanted a plan for industrial reconstruction to precede social revolution. The situation had moved on in the interim, however. The sequence of failed insurrections had led the Confederal defence committees to undertake a methodical structural reorganisation, equipping them to defeat the military street-by-street with minimal resources.

A working party<sup>7</sup> had drafted a lengthy motion entitled: 'The confederal concept of libertarian communism'. It was a sincere attempt to create a platform on which the different strands of the anarchist and syndicalist movements could unite to take on the fascists. It was also intended to present a coherent position that the authors hoped would allow for a revolutionary alliance with the U.G.T. The motion was adopted and agreement was reached with the opposition unions, who were re-admitted to the Confederation just in time. In ten weeks the Confederation would be at war, and the 'Zaragoza programme' formed the blueprint for its social revolution. This generosity of spirit would lead the anarchosyndicalists to collaborate honestly with the partisan factions of the Popular Front: republicans, social democrats, Bolsheviks, Stalinists, Basque and Catalan Nationalists — and would eventually cost them their revolution.

On 1<sup>st</sup> June the Madrid U.G.T. and C.N.T. construction unions brought seventy thousand builders, electricians and lift operators out, The U.G.T. accepted an increase in wages and the reduction of working hours but the confederals wanted to defeat the bourgeoisie once and for all and escalated their demands. July opened with a wave of terrorism from the Falange, notably the occupation of Radio Valencia on the 11<sup>th</sup> and the assassination of Assault Guard Lieutenant José Castillo the following day. The socialists retaliated immediately by killing the Leader of the Opposition Calvo Sotelo. The government had patently lost its grip; rebellious army units took orders only from General Mola whilst those loyal to the Republic looked to the workers' organisations for a lead. On the 13<sup>th</sup> July anarchist agents in the barracks obtained the army's final plans; on the 14<sup>th</sup> the government unhelpfully tried to placate the military by ordering all union locals to be closed. On the 15<sup>th</sup> the funerals of both Castillo and Sotelo took place in Madrid in an atmosphere of great tension.

In Barcelona there were some twenty thousand militants organised in over two hundred C.N.T. district committees, plus anarchist affinity groups of the FAI, Mujeres Libres (Free Women) and Libertarian Youth. There was a desperate shortage of weapons, some had been captured during the previous uprising but nowhere near enough to go round. A liaison committee had been mandated to negotiate with the Generalitat. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July their regional assembly resolved to call for a united revolutionary front with the other unions and proletarian parties; they would request arms from the state, but make plans to seize what they needed as soon as the army rose. The chemical workers' union began to manufacture explosives. Over the next three days

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defeat the military rising. They were turned down and decided to simply stay out of it.

<sup>7</sup> The working party consisted of Eusebi Carbó, Joan López, Federica Montseny Mañé, Juan García Oliver, and Dr Isaac Puente. The resolution is quoted in full in Volume 1 of 'La CNT en la Revolución Española' by José Peirats Valls.



the Popular Front government in Madrid frantically tried to placate the military, offering General Mola a ministerial post, arresting armed anarchist patrols and censoring the C.N.T.'s call to action, which had to be distributed by hand. Two Prime Ministers resigned in rapid succession rather than arm the workers, who by now were sleeping in the union halls, ready to go.

Each committee would be responsible for the defence of its own area, and collectively the unions would seize the infrastructure. The subway and drainage workers would manage the movement of personnel and equipment beneath the city. The army was mainly stationed at the outskirts, so they would have to meet up in the centre to take the government buildings, telephone exchange and radio transmitter then carve out a route to the port. The plan was to halt each regiment's advance just far enough away from its base to isolate and overwhelm it. The regional defence committee comprising the Los Nosotros affinity group, whose names were already well known throughout Spain and elsewhere: Ascaso, Durruti, Fernández, Ibáñez, Jover, Oliver, Ortiz, Ruiz, Sanz; was housed in the construction union offices. They fitted out two lorries as mobile headquarters. They were in close contact with Sergeants Gordo and Manzana at the Atarazanas barracks, plus some comrades at the El Prat airfield, who arranged reconnaissance flights by Nosotros members. The aviators' first task would be to bomb the Sant Andreu Central Artillery Barracks so the confederals could get their hands on its arsenal. Requisition patrols cased out caches of valuables, mainly in church premises, in preparation for their expropriation.

On the 17<sup>th</sup>, the army mutinied in North Africa and quickly gained the upper hand, shooting actual and potential opponents as it went. The Madrid government insisted it had matters under control. The same day in Barcelona the C.N.T. maritime transport workers' union boarded two vessels anchored in the port, and liberated a few hundred rifles and pistols. Some three hundred lever-action Winchester '73s were in the hands of the municipal workers having been dropped into drains by fleeing separatists two years earlier. An old Hotchkiss machine gun, stolen piecemeal from the Atarazanas barracks, was mounted on one of the lorries. Delegates approached the Catalan interior minister; if he would equip at least a thousand of the most experienced guerrillas the confederation could guarantee the defeat of the coup. He knew only too well whom he was being asked to arm; Barcelona's anarchists, feared, reviled and persecuted, thrown into jail on the slightest pretext, condemned to the most menial jobs and the worst housing, offered their lives to hold hell at bay. But once they had slain the monster before which their masters cowered, who would hold back the social revolution? The choice had been spelt out often enough: fascism or libertarian communism. The minister insisted he had nothing to spare; the defence of Barcelona was to be left to the socialists' Assault Guards, the more conservative Civil Guards, and the Generalitat's security police.

On the 18<sup>th</sup>, when the military rebellion had spread to the Canary Islands and Seville, the C.N.T. and U.G.T jointly announced their revolutionary general strike. Firearms were retrieved from under floorboards, home-made grenades were assembled; gunsmiths were raided, and some youths relieved the night watchmen of their pistols. In Madrid the Defence Committee organised five-man patrols with pistols and grenades, and hijacked an army truck. The unions began to requisition vehicles and paint them with their initials. The Naval N.C.O. Benjamin Balboa, having intercepted a telegram from Franco, alerted the fleet to the mutiny. Sailors convened workers' councils aboard ship, and overnight around three quarters of the aristocratic officer class, being fascist sympathisers, were shot. The Air Force would fight for the republic although some officers deserted at dawn with their aircraft.

The British Dragon Rapide landed in the French territory of Casablanca, where it was met by Bolin, Franco then flew on to Tetouan once the air force base there had been secured, a group of co-conspirators awaited him. All Republicans and union members were rounded up, and squads of Falangist volunteers brought in every day to shoot them. He despatched Bolin to buy arms on the open market, and having unexpectedly lost the Navy, urgently requested German transport planes to bring his African mercenaries to the mainland. The Moroccans were accomplished shock troops whose characteristic skill was for moving stealthily over open ground. They had every reason to hate Spaniards after years of colonial brutality, had been told the godless Republicans wanted to ban Islam, and were given licence to rape and pillage. To encourage recruiting, the Luftwaffe would carry their loot back to their families.

Around midnight Julián Gorkin of the POUM went to Barcelona's central police station to demand arms. The liaison committee returned to the Interior Ministry; at their instigation an angry crowd of dock workers from nearby Barceloneta was pouring into the square, facing three companies of assault guards. At the last moment an official acting on his own initiative diverted a hundred pistols from the building to the FAI delegate Diego Abad De Santillan, who brought them to the construction union. Confined in their barracks, the soldiers were told that anarchists had risen against the Republic; this would lead to confused fraternisation with the assault guards, who initially took them for loyalists. It would also cause many to turn their fire on their officers when the lie was discovered. A thousand Falangists entered the barracks and put on uniforms, armed priests took up positions in the church towers, ready to fire on the Working Class.

Just before dawn on the 19<sup>th</sup>, Barcelona's factory sirens alerted the workers that troops were leaving the Pedralbes barracks and the barricades went up. The crowd surrounding the government offices fell quiet; an assault guard carrying a rifle took his pistol from his belt and handed it to a stranger, others followed suit. At street level, the rivalries between anarchists, socialists and Catalanists were being set aside. Betrayed by their institutions and abandoned by their government, the people at once realised they had nowhere to place their faith but in themselves and each other. Flying the red and black flag, the regional defence committee's two mobile command posts set off from the Jupiter football field in Poble Nou with the cabinetmaker Antonio Ortiz and the builder Ricardo Sanz on the machine gun behind the cab of the first vehicle. The confederals fell in behind as it passed, singing their revolutionary anthems, all their lives had prepared them for this moment. Watched by the chief of police from his balcony they made their way to Las Ramblas, home of the transport and metalworkers unions, a vital conduit between the outlying barracks and Atarazanas, the military offices and the docks. The soldiers were allowed to approach as far as the city centre where they were met by sniper fire from the rooftops and the proverbial bomb-throwing anarchists.

Valeriano Gordo and Martín Terrer<sup>8</sup> tried unsuccessfully to take over the Atarazanas barracks; instead they opened a side door, passing out machine-guns, rifles and hand-grenades, exchanging fire with the defenders as they made their escape, then set up a gun emplacement at the nearby Plaza Del Teatro, where one of the command trucks was parked.

At the Plaza de Cataluña the infantry were driven into the hotel Colón and the lower floors of the telephone exchange, which they sand-bagged and defended with machine guns. The largely

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<sup>8</sup> Agustín Guillamón. 'Barricades in Barcelona: The CNT from the Victory of July 1936 to the Necessary Defeat of May 1937.' Most sources have it that José Manzana accompanied Gordo in this action. According to Guillamón however, Manzana was already under arrest on the 19<sup>th</sup> and was only freed after the fighting. See also: Marquez and Gallardo, 'Ortiz, General sin dios ni amo', Hacer, Barcelona, 1999, p. 101.

female telephonists' union barricaded themselves upstairs to prevent the equipment from falling into the hands of the enemy, and listen in on their calls. The committee that had occupied the main post office on Saturday night intercepted fascist telegrams routed through a French contact, and altered the content to create extra confusion. An infantry company that attempted to reach the radio station on Casp Street was massacred apart from a few who took refuge in the Ritz.

The army had its only success on the Via Parallel, which linked the Plaza de España with Atarazanas and the docks. A squadron of the Montesa Cavalry entered the Plaza shouting "long live the republic", which as elsewhere, had the intended effect. The assault guards initially joined them and in the confusion that followed they were able to take prisoners including women and children.<sup>9</sup> The Sappers' Regiment entered the Plaza from a different direction and attempted to pass the barricade blocking the road. Two cannon were deployed against workers armed with pistols and shotguns, leaving body parts hanging in the trees and trolley cables. The sappers made it through to the docks and routed a company of assault guards; thus they were able to reinforce the barracks and set up machine guns at the Columbus monument. The woodworkers union, housed on a side street hastily assembled a huge barricade where it joined the Parallel at Brecha de San Pablo. Here the Cavalry, shielding themselves with their hostages, swept the street with machine gun fire and drove the workers back, to occupy both the local and the barricade. Their position was purely defensive however, as the surrounding streets were controlled by the Working Class, they were going nowhere; the battle here lasted six hours. A further squadron of cavalry accompanied by a group of Falangists occupied the university building where it eventually succumbed to the POUM.

The first four trucks which set out from Sant Andreu Artillery Park were ambushed and ransacked. Now the Seventh Light Artillery taking the same route ran into a company of assault guards on Diputació Street; they set up their battery protected by a row of machine guns and held out for a couple of hours, resisting the best efforts of a gathering crowd to dislodge them, the machine guns creating heavy casualties. This tragic impasse was broken when the workers loaded up with grenades and clambered aboard the flatbeds of three trucks, which were then driven flat out into the machine guns. The longshoreman Manuel 'El Artillero' Lecha hauled his captured cannon to the Plaza de Cataluña, then around Barcelona's hot spots throughout the day and night of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

The Mountain Artillery Regiment, whose barracks were at the docks, advancing on Icaria Avenue towards Barceloneta found itself impeded by five hundred tons of spooled paper that had been unloaded in half an hour with electric forklifts from one of the ships. Nearby some assault guards were handing out rifles to anyone who could produce a union card. The battery was bombarded with mortar fire from the roof of the government building then forced back up the road as the dockers rolled the spools forward whilst their comrades fired from behind and lobbed grenades over the top. Relieved of their officers and artillery they retired to barracks and a barricade was erected to keep them there until they were ready to quit. Simultaneously at the woodworkers' barricade reinforcements had arrived and a counter-attack was underway; the army was caught in a pincer movement organised by Francisco Ascaso and Garcia Oliver. After

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<sup>9</sup> Terrorist tactics against civilians (the 'Mola Plan') were integral to the nationalists' strategy, so the army had orders to take non-combatant hostages wherever possible. Later in the war, his plan would be implemented with devastating effect using air raids on residential districts. The right never expected an easy win, and for the economic regime they had in mind, the Working Class were not only too militant, but too numerous.

Ascaso shot their commanding officer another stepped up only to be brought down by a cavalry corporal.

‘While Francisco Ascaso was jumping for joy and waving his rifle over his head, García Oliver was shouting over and over, “Look what we did to the army!”’

—Agustín Guillaumón: ‘Barricades in Barcelona: The CNT from the victory of July 1936 to the necessary defeat of May 1937’.

In the afternoon, the fascist general Manuel Goded flew in by seaplane from Majorca to find his forces divided and surrounded. Ignoring his assistant’s advice to turn back he landed at the naval base which was still in fascist hands, and was driven by armoured car to the army headquarters. Through all this the Civil Guard had remained in their barracks, they were technically under the Catalan Interior Ministry and their commander, General Aranguren had declared for the republic, but their loyalties were uncertain. Now they were sent to Plaza de Cataluña, teeming with armed workers who regarded them with the utmost suspicion. They joined the assault on the Hotel Colón with a group of POUM militia led by Josép Rovira and artillery support from Manuel Lecha; after thirty minutes and heavy casualties, white flags appeared and the POUM occupied the space. At the same time a large crowd headed by Buenaventura Durruti and the Mexican anarchist Enrique Obregón (who died in the attack), invaded the telephone exchange. Lecha turned his cannon on the Ritz and its occupants surrendered to the assault guards.

Goded sent reinforcements to the Icària barracks, where they were hammered by the Dockers’ captured artillery; his last hope was General Aranguren, who was having none of it. Goded was given half an hour to surrender then his headquarters were shelled from all sides, Lecha was there. Taken into custody for his own safety he was persuaded to broadcast a statement over the radio freeing his command from their commitments, to avoid further bloodshed. Leaflets dropped from the air explained that the uprising had been started by the generals, and the presence of the conservative Civil Guards amongst the workers confirmed this, so those troops still besieged by the masses began to turn on their officers and open the doors. The mechanics at the naval base did likewise. Rebels hiding in the Carmelite monastery agreed to hand themselves over to the Civil Guard in the morning. Groups of FAI activists occupied the Bruc barracks at Pedralbes and renamed it the Bakunin, the first war committee was formed here.

As each barracks fell, more workers were armed; Sant Andreu surrendered around midnight yielding thirty thousand rifles. The civil guard, who were still walking the line between republic and revolution, had been sent to guard them for the Generalitat, but balked at firing on the crowd. Power now lay in the street; the district committees came into their own, organising communications, food and supplies to the fighters. Assault guards and loyalist troops removed their uniforms to blend in with the workers, and were incorporated into new revolutionary committees. General Mola’s brother shot himself overnight; by morning only Atarazanas remained in the hands of the army. With the burning churches illuminating the new world in their hearts, the metalworkers’ union refused any assistance from the forces of the former state. The Nosotros militants joined them to storm the fascists’ last bastion in Barcelona, the action in which Francisco Ascaso lost his life.

“The attack was redoubled. Now Ascaso had found shelter on Mediodia Street behind a truck which was riddled with bullets. Wanting to eliminate a “sniper” who kept him from advancing, he leaned against the hood of the car. A bullet hit him full in the face and he was killed instantly.

Durruti was overcome by the death of his comrade. Already when Obregon was killed during the attack on the Central Telephone Exchange, Durruti's anger had burst out and had pushed him forward to the very doors of the exchange. Now his fury was unleashed. Without looking at anyone, he left for the barracks. The other fighters fascinated followed him. The soldiers terrified by this tidal wave surging towards them hastened to raise the white flag."

—Abel Paz: 'Durruti, the people armed'.

It was one p.m. In thirty-three hours the coup had been defeated in the city and the workers were in control. As this news spread throughout Catalonia, demoralised mutineers abandoned their posts to the people. Ricardo Sanz carried Ascaso's body to the Transport Workers Union, just one of the four hundred revolutionaries who had perished in the battle. The regional committee convened in the Construction Union, a hive of activity. Amid the chaotic comings and goings and enquiries, a telephone call was received from the Generalitat, requesting a delegation to see the Governor, the Regional Secretary Mariano 'Marianet' Vasquez answered sarcastically: "OK. We'll get right on it." Representatives of the unions met a couple of hours later to discuss the options.

— Luis Romero: 'Tres días de Julio.'

The meeting was split between those who wanted to push for full social revolution in the hope that it would spread through the rest of Spain, (Garcia Oliver used the phrase "going for everything") and those who believed it was necessary to collaborate with the statist parties that held sway elsewhere in the country, to be sure of beating the fascists. There was a well-founded fear of foreign intervention if the state were to be abandoned altogether, there were British war-ships moored at Gibraltar, and much of Spain's industry was owned by British capitalists. Oliver alone argued for immediately proclaiming libertarian communism. Manuel Escorza suggested they might use the Generalitat to socialise production, so that it would quickly render itself obsolete. That sounded suspiciously like Marx's idea of the state 'withering away'. The delegation representing the workers of Bajo Llobregat rejected the idea of collaboration with political parties altogether, but would stop short of taking power.<sup>10</sup> Covered in dust and armed to the teeth, the liaison committee entered the palace of the Generalitat, to confront the regional governor, Lluís Companys.

My grandad used to say: "Every dog has his day; it's knowing when you're having it that counts". The liaison committee was not of the class collaborationist tendency; its members were experienced labour organisers and veterans of numerous street battles with the cops and the bosses' pistoleros, but were about to be outmanoeuvred by the devious Companys, a union lawyer turned career politician who had just been informed by his exasperated Chief of Police that his authority extended no further than the walls of his office.

Having hitherto been prepared to abandon Catalonia to fascism rather than risk social revolution, the governor embarked on an exercise in damage limitation. He had already assembled representatives of the political parties in an adjoining room. He apologised profusely for his lack of faith in, and persecution of the confederals, congratulated them on their victory, and offered his services, either as a common foot soldier, or as governor administering the province on behalf of an antifascist coalition, reminding them that his own party, plus the civil and as-

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<sup>10</sup> Oliver later clarified that taking revolutionary power was indeed what he had in mind, but he was careful with his language. He was regarded as, in Montseny's phrase: "the most Bolshevik of all of us".

sault guards had also played their part in liberating the city. With hindsight they ought to have shot him, or conceded his obsequious request to serve at the front: "Yes mush, right at the front, missing you already". The revolt of the military, supported by the church and the aristocracy, had shattered the fragile illusion of legitimate authority, and it was not going to return by itself. Whilst the anarchists went to seek a mandate from their unions, the politicians plotted their counter-revolution.

Companys' offer presented a perennial anarchist dilemma: what to do with power until such time as it can be dissolved forever. Logically, it can only be exercised, shared with others who have a different agenda or given away by default. Even in Catalonia, where the C.N.T. accounted for sixty percent of the Working Class, imposing libertarian communism by decree would create a fantastic paradox, dismissed by Federica Montseny as an 'anarchist dictatorship'. That in fact was Companys' zero option; leaving Catalonia in the hands of the libertarian and POUM militias without formal oversight, in the hope that they would fuck it all up, be judged harshly by the people and that European capital would eventually intervene. One alternative would have been to throw open the union membership to all, so that its directly democratic, federalist structure could be used for decision making, but it would have the input of Marxists, Stalinists, separatists and other bourgeois. The incorporation of groups with partisan axes to grind would inevitably force it into a representative role.

Shamefully, the question was never put to the rank and file but decided in haste by the delegates to the Plenum of the Catalan Regional Confederation, exceeding their mandates in defiance of federalism. After fierce argument, the meeting voted to participate in a 'committee of antifascist militias', but crucially allowing the Generalitat, which presently existed in name only, to survive with its support, on condition that executive power was vested in the committee. The Generalitat would keep responsibility for relations with the equally ineffectual Madrid government. Neither body openly acknowledged the reality of dual power; in fact Companys' decree legalising the 'citizens militias' made no mention of the committee at all.

Durruti it's said was uncharacteristically quiet. It's worth bearing in mind that he'd just lost his best friend, and nowhere can I find any account of him having slept since he discharged himself from hospital on the 14<sup>th</sup>, he was supposed to be convalescing from a hernia operation.

The strategy, outlined by De Santillan, was of 'democratic collaboration', to deceive the rest of Spain and Europe that libertarian communism had been set aside, that property was real and the bourgeoisie still had a voice, at least until the situation had stabilised enough for the fascist gains to be assessed, and the reaction of the international proletariat made known. However the political composition of Catalonia did not allow for any kind of proportional representation. In their magnanimity, the anarchist majority would give equal say to the tiny socialist parties and U.G.T., and to the liberal-bourgeois Catalanists. So libertarian communism would be postponed for the duration of the war, which would be prosecuted under the nominal legal authority of the republic. The spectre of substitutionism loomed, in that a party substitutes itself for the class and claims to speak on its behalf without having the faintest idea what it wants.

Of course, the decision was no longer theirs to take, the people were already collectivising the factories and the fields, blissfully unaware that their revolution was about to be betrayed by the very pioneers whose example had inspired them to achieve the impossible. As anarchists they should have anticipated, that freed from the impositions of government, religion and property, the workers and peasants would spontaneously organise to take their lives into their own hands. Even the historic 20<sup>th</sup> July issue of the C.N.T.s daily paper, 'Solidaridad Obrera', distributed on

the barricades, was published by a group of workers who just happened to pass by its empty premises and took it upon themselves to write, lay out and print the journal. The railway workers announced the socialisation of their industry on the 21<sup>st</sup> July, public transport on the 25<sup>th</sup>, water electricity and metallurgy the following day. In the vacuum left by the bourgeoisie, numerous factories had been expropriated by the time the federation of Barcelona unions announced the return to work on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

“What the CNT-FAI leadership had failed to take on board was the fact that spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direction of its own. On their own initiative, without any intervention by the leadership of the unions or political parties the rank and file militants of the CNT, representing the dominant force within the Barcelona Working Class, together with other union militants had, with the collapse of State power, superseded their individual partisan identities and had been welded — Catholics, Communists, Socialists, Republicans and Anarchists — into genuinely popular non-partisan revolutionary committees wielding physical and moral power in their respective neighbourhoods. They were the natural organisms of the revolution itself and the direct expression of popular power.

The assumption that political power in Catalonia had passed to the higher committees of the CNT-FAI was, probably, the principal blunder which was to undermine the revolutionary process. By failing to displace the ‘legitimate’ political element within the state the military provoked the collapse of State power. It was the people, led by the militants of the defence committees, who had stood firm against the reactionaries while the government had dithered. In doing so it lost its right to rule. The people now wielded power — in the Working Class quarters and at the point of product and distribution — not the State or the union leaders who had now outlived their usefulness to the revolutionary process. A dual power situation existed — diffused popular power against centralised political and union power.”

—Stuart Christie, antifascist: *We, the Anarchists! A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), 1927–1937*

In hindsight it’s like watching a car crash in slow motion, but in the heady days of 21<sup>st</sup> July, with the people armed and throwing boxes of banknotes into bonfires, probably the anarchists genuinely didn’t consider the composition of any political body to be important, it was all for show, wasn’t it? Certainly Durruti considered the committee an irrelevance, and only attended one meeting. Thus the anarchists, having led by example, beaten the army, and drawn the Working Class of all stripes into their revolution, not only ended up as a minority faction in a government maintained entirely by their own efforts, (liberal democracy, in other words) but through their participation in this sham, ceased to be anarchists!

To put these decisions and their consequences in context, I think it’s worth casting back to two statements that were made in January of that year, when the politicians were assembling their Popular Front, and the C.N.T. was seeking a fraternal pact between trade unions that would side-step it. The first is a resolution of the latter’s Regional conference that took place on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1936.

“UGT must recognize that the emancipation of the workers is only possible through revolutionary action. Accepting that point, it must break off all political and parliamentary collaboration with the bourgeois system. ... For the social revolution to be effective, it must completely destroy the regime that presently controls Spanish economic and political life. ... The new social relations

born of revolutionary victory will be governed by the express will of the workers, gathered publicly and with complete and absolute freedom of expression for all. ... The defence of the new society requires the unity of all forces and that the particular interest of each tendency is put aside.”

—José Peirats, antifascist: ‘Frente Libertario’, Paris, September and October 1972.

The statement concluded by calling autonomous organizations to join either the C.N.T. or U.G.T. in accordance with their affinities. Given the short notice with which this assembly was convened, most of the union locals were still closed, so activists expressed personal views without mandates, leading to harsh criticism and an unsuccessful procedural challenge; however, once on a war footing this less federal decision-making process would become the norm.

The second voice is that of the U.G.T. boss Largo Caballero:

“Preventing the Socialist Party from being the sole leader would betray the Party’s very essence. ... When the dictatorship of the proletariat is established, the government will have to fight anyone who disagrees with it, just as the Bolsheviks permitted no opposition and destroyed their opponents.”

The political landscape may have changed beyond recognition in the month of July but the gulf between these two perspectives was always unfathomable.

For what it’s worth, the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias of Catalonia was constituted as follows: Three Delegates from each of the C.N.T., the U.G.T. and Esquerra Republicana (Company’s party); one each from the FAI, the POUM, the P.S.O.E., Catalan Action, Union de Rabassaires (Catalan smallholders’ party). The Generalitat was represented by a commissioner and a technical military adviser, Jesus Pérez Farràs.<sup>11</sup>

So roughly half the C.C.M.A.C. represented the people of Catalonia, the remainder spoke for the former central and regional governments (both of which had spectacularly failed in their allotted task) foreign capital and the bourgeoisie. During the month of August, it busily established councils and commissions for war industries, food, transport, propaganda and so on, which looked suspiciously like government departments. However the day to day running of the city, and therefore of production, was a matter for the revolutionary committees, one for each of the thirteen wards, which practiced de-facto libertarian communism and were now open to the participation of all citizens. The pre-existing defence committees co-opted whoever and requisitioned whatever they needed. Together they recruited and provisioned the militia and their dependants as well as the injured, sick and infirm. They organised hospitals, transport and communications. It’s a truism that the first task of the revolution is to feed the people; if they are worse off than before, they will soon fall prey to reaction.

“Thus the really practical course of action, in our view, would be that the people should take immediate possession of all the food of the insurgent districts, keeping strict account of it all, that none might be wasted, and that by the aid of these accumulated resources every one might be able to tide over the crisis. During that time an agreement would have to be made with the factory workers, the necessary raw material given them and the means of subsistence assured to them while they worked to supply the needs of the agriculture population.”

—Pyotr Kropotkin: ‘The Conquest of Bread 1906.

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<sup>11</sup> Farràs was Company’s man, a Catalanist and former commander of the Generalitat’s city guards, who at some risk to himself, had saved General Goded from lynching to broadcast his surrender on the radio.



There were thirteen distribution warehouses for staple foods, fuel and other essentials; a network of supply committees federated in a central supplies committee. It would be months before the volunteers could draw any pay with which to provide for their families, so each ward had a free canteen where anyone could eat. Once these needs were met, the remainder was passed to retailers at prices fixed by the committee.

“The Central Committee of Antifascist Militias of Catalonia was “legalized” by decree of the Catalan government. The government itself was reduced to the role of ratifying things that already were in effect. All of the bodies created by the revolution had the legal approval of the government: Committee for a New Unified School; Economic Council of Catalonia; Supply Committees; Patrols (militia police); Control Committees for non-collectivised industries; Factory Committees of collectivized industries; Committees of Workers and Soldiers (control over the officers in the old army) and others. The Catalan government resigned itself to a purely decorative and paternal participation in this process in hopes of better times. The better times were not long in coming.”

—José Peirats: ‘The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution’

An important consequence of the democratic collaboration was the amalgamation of two very different organisations; the FAI, a federation of autonomous affinity groups, and the C.N.T., a trades union open to anyone who would accept its principles and abide by its decisions. The ideological and propaganda functions, and the muscle, were brought under one roof and given the acronym CNT-FAI. Its Catalan regional committee took up residence in the former Banco de Cambio on Via Layetana, henceforth known as ‘Casa CNT-FAI’

The Spanish Communist Party was insignificant at the start of 1936, with fewer than 100,000 members, mostly among the professional classes. By offering some insurance for private property, status and wage differentials in the face of the growing social revolution, it was able to boost its membership to over a million by the end of the year. Within days of the coup, its tiny Catalan counterpart, the P.C.C. ate the region’s Socialist Workers’ Party and sucked in a couple of other left groups to form the P.S.U.C., it immediately affiliated to the Comintern and Stalin got a seat at the table.

Madrid was dominated by the Montaña Barracks; the officers there prevaricated over joining the coup owing to poor communications and an understandable desire to be on the winning side. The garrison’s commander refused to open his armoury to the militias, neither would he declare for the rebels. On the morning of 19 July the C.N.T. demanded the release of all their prisoners within three hours, or they would see to it themselves. Prime Minister (since 7 a.m.) Giral caved in to the inevitable and emptied the prisons. One of the first out was the bricklayer Cipriano Mera, recently imprisoned for his part in organising the builders strike, he went straight to his union to get on with the job. The new government issued 65,000 rifles to the unions but all but 5000 of the bolts were held in the barracks. The fascist General Fanjul, who had also participated in the 1932 coup, arrived at the Montaña and attempted to persuade its officers and men to join the nationalists and impose martial law on the city, reassuring them that General Mola’s Army of the North were only 50km away over the Guadarrama mountains and would shortly be in the capital. In the event, Mola’s advance on Madrid was halted in the Sierra by lightly armed peasants. By the time the inhabitants of the Montaña had made up their minds, anarchist and socialist militias were in position alongside the assault guards; fighting broke out with Falangists

in the city and shots were exchanged with the troops. The following morning the barracks came under fire from loyalist aircraft and a couple of field guns supervised by a retired artillery officer. A white flag appeared, but as the workers surged forward they were shot at. An enraged mob of CNT-FAI and Young Socialists swarmed through the gate under heavy machine gun fire with Assault Guards bringing up the rear. In the melee that followed some defenders managed to surrender, others were summarily executed, thrown from windows or committed suicide, there was great loss of life on both sides. Mera assembled a militia column to clean out the fascists to the North of the capital; his aptitude for military strategy would earn him the confidence of the Republican generals and lead to him taking command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

The coup was soundly defeated in those areas where Working Class militancy had reached a tipping point, sufficient to give the socialists confidence to commit themselves, and the paramilitaries to take the people's side; much of the military and police were simply hedging their bets, and changed sides in both directions. Zaragoza had been a C.N.T. stronghold, but the leadership was on the reformist side and too cosy with the government; arms were promised but never delivered. It was also the military headquarters of the region, whose commander General Cabanellas played a double game until the 19<sup>th</sup> July when he declared war on the people. The Assault and civil guards went over to the nationalists and the city was lost. Striking workers were shot; a mass grave uncovered in 1979 revealed seven thousand bodies.

A similar act of duplicity cost Oviedo, the capital of Asturias; Mola's orders were explicitly to delay confrontation with the Working Class until the garrison could be reinforced. The commander Colonel Aranda had convinced the civil Governor of his fidelity to the government, and would not release arms to the people without orders from Madrid. The workers' organisations could not agree to act against him, leaving him a free hand to move his personnel and artillery around. When ministers asked the miners to come and help defend the capital Aranda was enthusiastic, and the Governor assured them the city was in safe hands. Once two columns had left, taking most of the rifles and dynamite in their possession with them, he walked out of a council meeting and launched his own mutiny. One of the columns was ambushed by Civil Guards in Leon. Oviedo was surrounded but remained in enemy hands, the mass executions commenced with the civil Governor. The second largest city, Gijon, was taken by anarchist dockers. In Seville, where the Communist Party controlled the U.G.T., fighting broke out between the unions, allowing the nationalists to take the city by default.

A moment of black comedy was provided by the pompous General Sanjurjo, when the light plane sent to collect him from exile in Portugal, weighed down with all his dress uniforms, accoutrements and medals, failed to clear the trees at the end of the runway, so the fascist and his finery went up in flames.

The loss of Zaragoza was keenly felt. Durruti and Oliver were unhappy with the decision of the Plenum and the way it had been taken. Oliver proposed they overthrow the Generalitat at their earliest convenience, Durruti insisted the priority was the liberation of Zaragoza and the thirty thousand confederal prisoners presumed to be held there (who were as good as dead if they delayed), so the column that was to bear his name set off for Aragon on the 24<sup>th</sup>, after his famous interview with the Toronto Star.

"There were a dozen youth at the head on a truck. The Herculean José Hellín stood out among them, waving a black and red flag. He will die defending Madrid on November 17 while blowing up Italian armoured personnel carriers. The centuria led by the metalworker Arís followed behind. Five centurias came next: there were the miners of Figols and Sallent, who would soon

distinguish themselves as an elite force of dynamiters, and also sailors from the Maritime Transport Workers' Union led by Setonas, who will prove to be outstanding guerrillas. "El Padre," an old militant who fought with Pancho Villa's during the Mexican Revolution, led the Third Centuria. Textile worker Juan Costa was responsible for the Fourth Centuria and the nineteen year old libertarian Muñoz represented the Fifth Centuria, formed exclusively by metalworkers."

—Abel Paz: 'Durruti in the Spanish Revolution'.

The column was organised prefiguratively, reflecting the classless free society it was fighting for. Durruti maintained that the volunteers could not fight fearlessly against the enemy if they were motivated by fear of their officers, and history shows that conflicts involving conscripts under coercion become exercises in mass skiving and shirking responsibility. Villages liberated along the way were encouraged to collectivise, which they embraced with enthusiasm and ingenuity.

Two days later the column was within twenty miles of Zaragoza, and the militians experienced their first taste of the fascists' blitzkrieg tactics. An attack by three Italian planes left twenty dead and caused some of the workers to panic and run. The more experienced guerrillas grabbed and held them to prevent a rout. Durruti halted the column and addressed the militia in the square at Bujaraloz; he reminded them of their doomed comrades languishing in Zaragoza and invited anyone who couldn't handle the situation to leave their weapon and return. Those who remained would take Zaragoza or die in the attempt, but they must do so as anarchists, of their own free will; no one left.

Company's military adviser, Pérez Farras, and Colonel Villalba, who commanded the Barbastro garrison, prevailed upon Durruti to halt the advance until its flanks were secured. In a couple of weeks it had stabilised the front line from Velilla de Ebro to Leciñena, seventy-eight kilometres, but run out of ammunition. With the political parties on board, neither the C.C.M.A.C. nor the government in Madrid had much enthusiasm for liberating thousands of anarchist militants, possibly linking Catalonia and Aragon with the notoriously militant Asturias. Straightaway the anarchists found themselves fighting on two fronts as the Stalinists had begun to misbehave; eight machine guns hidden in the offices of the P.S.U.C. were hastily returned when the column threatened to come and collect them.

The ill-conceived raid on Mallorca led by Captain Alberto Bayo, a Cuban-born aviator and adventurer,<sup>12</sup> but not endorsed by the C.C.M.A.C. had ended in failure with considerable losses. It threatened to open another front perilously close to Barcelona.

García Oliver told Durruti that the situation demanded the committee switch attention from the Aragón front to the Italian occupation of the Balearics:

"We have to postpone the attack on Zaragoza. First, because the Columns south of the Ebro River and around Alcubierre have not achieved their objectives and we needed that to occur before launching the frontal assault. Second, because of the expedition to Majorca (*sic*), which could prompt the Italians to intervene in order protect their bases in the Balearic Islands. England would not remain impassive if Italy acted imprudently in Majorca. If England intervenes, the war will have a new dimension. The fate of the Spanish revolution, García Oliver said, is being decided outside of Spain. We have to set our sights on Majorca and Morocco."

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<sup>12</sup> Bayo had a career as a military instructor in Mexico and Latin America after the war, training Fidel Castro and Che Guevara amongst others.

Durruti argued that the French and the British would be able to get along very well with the Italians in an effort to avoid an extension of the conflict. In addition, the operation in Majorca might end in a fiasco and they risk losing precious time in Aragón if they delay the attack. The enemy would doubtlessly use that time to reinforce its positions: it was well aware of Zaragoza's importance for the future of the war. Durruti asserted that it was essential to take the city at all costs. It was the link with the north and the war will be won once contact is reestablished with it, since that will enable them to focus all their efforts on the troops that Franco is unloading in Andalusia. As masters of the Peninsula, Durruti said, they will be able to resist whatever obstacles the international capitalists might impose.”

—Abel Paz (*op.cit*)

It was clear from the outset that the outcome of the war, and the fate of the revolution, would not be decided on the Spanish battlefields but overseas. If an Italian intervention were provoked, it was believed Britain would side with the republic.<sup>13</sup>

The international proletariat would have to be drawn into the struggle. In particular, the fascists must be defeated in their Moroccan base. Oliver first tried to persuade the Madrid government to declare the protectorate independent then began talks with Arab activists in exile. Meanwhile time was running out for Zaragoza, the people were not armed and the General Strike was being weakened by nationalist violence. The U.G.T. was trying to negotiate its way out and went back to work leaving the anarchosyndicalists isolated.

Given the shortage of equipment much of the column's military activity was limited to reconnaissance missions and small-scale commando raids. Cartridge cases had to be collected and returned to Barcelona for re-loading. Approximately a quarter of the militia did not have weapons at any one time so they occupied themselves with agricultural work, giving industrial and rural workers a better understanding of each other's needs. A reciprocal arrangement developed with peasants receiving military training, some eager volunteers had to be recalled from the front as their expertise was needed in the fields. The fearless libertarian experimentation of the Aragonese peasantry and the revolutionary zeal of the column potentiated each other, enabling both to fully appreciate the essence of the war as defence of the social revolution. These contacts would lead to the formation of the Defence Council of Aragon, to integrate provisioning the columns into their libertarian socialist economy and to resist the encroachments of government.

In Valencia a curious standoff had developed, a joint U.G.T./C.N.T. general strike was called and the strike committee took over the running of the city. The troops remained in their barracks; whilst the governor insisted they were loyal, there was evidently some kind of debate going on and shots were heard from inside.

“In Valencia we had a governor who was the very embodiment of political ineptitude and frivolity. He was so inept that, only a few days prior to the fascist military revolt — and following the murder of Calvo Sotelo and the spread of alarming rumours to the effect that the mutineers were stirring — he asserted that, in the view of the Valencia authorities, there was not even a shadow of a doubt regarding the loyalty of those same military forces to the republican regime”

—Juan Lopez: ‘El 19 Julio Levantino.’ From the anniversary edition of ‘Fragua Social’ 19<sup>th</sup> July 1937.

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<sup>13</sup> Hitler and Mussolini were both testing Britain, when it became clear the latter wasn't going to do anything,

Representatives of the Popular Front parties resolved to dismiss the governor for incompetence and convened their own revolutionary committee in his office. Armed clergy and Falangists were agitating for mutiny and rumours flew; these reached the C.N.T. strike meeting, who approached the parties and offered to join them in an Executive Committee provided the community was put on a war footing, the telephone exchange, post office and radio transmitters secured and the military disarmed. Antifascists and Assault guards were to operate in a ratio of two to one so the workers could retain control, and three to one for Civil Guards.

The proposals were accepted, and with weapons donated by the Barcelona and Centre Confederations, the barracks cordoned off. The officers inside remained in contact with both ministers and the Falange. The ousted governor appealed to Madrid and there began a to-ing and fro-ing of delegations; a Government Delegate Council arrived to assume responsibility and disband the Executive Committee but fell at the first hurdle. The unions refused to consider calling off the strike until the garrison had been disarmed; food production and distribution would resume but all other trades were to remain mobilised. The people expressed their frustration by burning the churches and shooting the odd priest. David Antona, acting National Secretary recalls:

“After hearing the report [of delegates from the Valencia C.N.T.] and given the grave implications for Madrid and for the revolution should Valencia fall into rebel hands, I sought an audience with the interior minister in my capacity as secretary of the national committee. At our interview, we spoke at length of the situation in Valencia. The minister assured me that *the Valencia garrison, if not completely loyal to us, might be regarded as a neutral factor in the struggle*. I repeatedly urged him that the rifles stored in the government depot in that city should be issued to the people to guarantee the revolution.”

—David Antona: quoted in Peirats ‘The CNT in the Spanish Revolution’

My italics; an extraordinary statement, given the strategic importance of the City, and further proof that the government was in no way fit for purpose. The minister was supposed to intercede with the Civil Guard to get the rifles released, but none were forthcoming so the National Committee sent what it could spare from Madrid. The Government Delegate Council hastily assembled a column to secure Teruel; contrary to the stipulation of the Valencia Executive Committee the workers were outnumbered three to one by Civil Guards. Once on the road the paramilitaries opened fire on the militians and held Teruel for the nationalists.

It was decided to enter the barracks by force on the first of August; the Governor formally resigned and the Government Delegate Council disbanded. Three confederal columns assembled for the Teruel front: the Iron Column, the Torres-Benedito, and the Thirteenth; plus the U.G.T.’s Eixea-Uribes. Roque Santamaria was a FAI activist and secretary of the Valencia barbers’ union who joined the Iron Column.

“I found that my comrades were forming a century to join up with the Iron Column, which was being organised in Las Salesas. The people from my union who belonged to that century were all very young: less than 25 years old.

Whilst the Iron Column was being formed by the most extremist elements of the CNT and the FAI, another column (the symbol of what was then called ‘confederal reformism’, a tendency

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they started to take the piss.

<sup>14</sup> The ‘Treintistas’ after the thirty signatories to their manifesto against the FAI.

—Roque Santamaria, antifascist: quoted by Abel Paz.

that caused a schism in the CNT<sup>14</sup> which was healed at its congress in Zaragoza that year) was being raised alongside it, which took the name Torres-Benedito.”

When the dust had settled from the uprising the nationalists held two unconnected areas amounting to about a third of the country, the remainder was either loyal to the republic, controlled by the workers, or in a fluid state. Scores were settled in both territories. In the nationalist zone an estimated between one- and two- hundred thousand executions of trade unionists, loyalist military including seven generals and an admiral, freemasons, atheists, artists, intellectuals, teachers, members of popular front parties and civic officials took place. Less than half the population supported the uprising, the rest would have to be silenced one way or another. Mola’s instructions were explicitly to liquidate anyone whose loyalty could not be vouched for, and that it was preferable to kill the innocent than spare any of the opposition.

On the other side, the reprisals were more spontaneous, against the background of sniping attacks on the workers which continued for a week, and a general desire to get in on the act. The targets were clergy, landlords and aristocrats, along with known informers, scabs and unsavoury characters like the Carlist pistolero boss Ramon Sales. In view of what happened later, arguably, they didn’t shoot enough of them. The requisition patrols went into action with a vengeance. After the initial excitement, CNT-FAI did their best to rein in the membership and a few militants were executed for acting unilaterally, including the secretary of the Barcelona builders’ union and the president of the catering union. On the other hand there are many documented instances of clergy receiving assistance to emigrate, or being allowed to continue with non-religious work, and millions of pesetas of confiscated valuables were conscientiously handed in to the district committees by penniless workers.

“Militarily speaking, the rebels had all but lost the war on 19 July. One need only glance at a map of Spain to appreciate the critical situation facing the rebels. Antifascist Spain held two-thirds of the nation’s territory. Comprising farmlands and industries, along with the bulk of the population, this antifascist zone accounted for the wealthiest part of the country. The seaboard, as well as the passable frontiers with Europe, was almost entirely under the control of ‘Red Spain’. This was true also of the bulk of the navy and the merchant shipping.

The rebels controlled the Castilian meseta but, with the exception of Galicia, had no access to the sea. Worse still, the entire central southern zone under rebel control was cut off from the revolt’s initial springboard, Morocco. Mallorca was neutralised by Mahón (a stronghold), while the Canaries were separated by the ocean.”

—José Peirats: ‘The CNT in the Spanish Revolution’

From Seville the fascists pushed northward along the Portuguese border, in motorised columns supported by Italian and German aircraft, securing their left flank and their supply route. In the first proper battle of the war Merida was captured, cutting off the provincial capital Badajoz. After 3 days of heavy shelling and aerial bombardment the walled city was attacked by three thousand Army of Africa and Foreign legion, the defenders comprising militia and paramilitaries but weakened by the mutiny on the 6<sup>th</sup> August of three hundred Civil Guards, and their resources overstretched by the arrival of thousands of refugees. The nationalist assault began on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 280 legionnaires stormed the Trinidad gate, the first waves being repulsed by accurate machine gun fire, only twenty two of the attackers passed, clambering over the bodies to despatch the machine gunners with knives and grenades. Armoured cars were brought in and the army found

a breach in the walls on their south side. Once they had entered the city, part of its garrison defected. Badajoz fell after a fierce street battle and the legionnaires ran amok, few prisoners were taken and those were subsequently murdered. There followed two weeks of brigandage and a purge of leftists, republicans, those bearing arms or the mark of a rifle butt. Thousands of civilians were shot by machine gun in the bullring, often condemned by word of mouth. Refugees were turned back at the Portuguese border by police and handed directly to their executioners. Several foreign correspondents witnessed the massacre, including the Chicago Tribune's Jay Allen:

"ELVAS, Portugal. Aug. 25 — ...

... I have come from Badajoz, several miles away in Spain. I have been up on the roof to look back. There was a fire. They are burning bodies. Four thousand men and women have died at Badajoz since Gen. Francisco Franco's rebel Foreign Legionnaires and Moors climbed over the bodies of their own dead through its many times blood drenched walls. ...

... Thousands of republican, socialist and communist militiamen and militiawomen were butchered after the fall of Badajoz for the crime of defending their republic against the onslaught of the generals and the land owners.

Between 50 and 100 have been shot every day since. The Moors and Foreign Legionnaires are looting. But blackest of all: The Portuguese "international police", in defiance of international usage are turning back scores of hundreds of republican refugees to certain death by rebel firing-squads.

They were young, mostly peasants in blue blouses, mechanics in jumpers, "The Reds". They are still being rounded up. At 4 o'clock in the morning they were turned out into the ring through the gate by which the initial parade of the bullfight enters. There, machine guns awaited them. After the first night, the blood was supposed to be palm deep on the far side of the ring. I don't doubt it. Eighteen hundred men- there were women, too- were mowed down there in some 12 hours. There is more blood than you would think in 1,800 bodies. „,

... Where were the government planes? That is one of the mysteries. It makes one quake for Madrid."

—Jay Allen: Slaughter of 4,000 at Badajoz, 'City of Horrors',  
Chicago Tribune 30<sup>th</sup> August. 1936

General Yague admitted to four thousand killings in Badajoz alone but most of the bloodletting took place in the countryside, where the recently expropriated aristocracy rode with the African Legion to regain their territory, exacting a terrible revenge on the peasantry. Their standing joke was that each landless labourer would get a free burial plot; on walls they painted: "your women will give birth to fascists".

France's recently elected Popular Front government proposed to supply aircraft and artillery to the Republic, but was dissuaded by the British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, whose sympathies, like most of the Tory party, lay with the fascists.<sup>15</sup> The British ambassador in Madrid moved to France for the duration of the war, and Britain unilaterally applied an arms embargo. The new French government walked a tightrope, with strikes, factory occupations and clashes

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<sup>15</sup> Eden is said to have told the French that he preferred the fascists to 'the communists', but of course the embargo resulted in the *de facto* Stalinist takeover of the Republican zone. In opposition Blum campaigned against non-intervention, and gained power again in April 1938. He lifted the embargo, whereupon his government was brought down by the right.

between militant workers and fascist groups. The Spanish ambassador declared for the nationalists; Prime minister Blum being nervous of the powerful Catholic lobby, and his own military, was keen to shift the responsibility elsewhere. Eden persuaded him that neither side could win without foreign intervention, and since the coup had been a dismal failure the republic was best served by staying out of it. France and Britain pressed for a Non-Intervention Agreement, which was eventually signed by 27 countries including Germany, Italy, Portugal, and the U.S.S.R. The French left, and Blum's erstwhile Communist Party allies brought his government down a year later.

The British government went to extraordinary lengths to discourage assistance to Spain; in December it passed the Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Munitions to Spain) Act, and on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1937, threatened to invoke the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870 against the volunteers, though this never actually happened. It was, however used as legal justification by Franco for the execution of British prisoners. Only Mexico stepped up to openly support the republic; meanwhile Germany, Italy and Portugal immediately weighed in on the side of the fascists.

"The insurgents have the advantage of getting outside help whereas the Government is getting none. The latter has applied to the French Government for permission to import arms from France, but so far at least permission has not been given. The insurgents, on the other hand, are being assisted by the Italians and Germans. During the last few weeks large numbers of Italian and German agents have arrived in Morocco and the Balearic Islands. These agents are taking part in military activities and are also exercising a certain political influence."

—The Manchester Guardian 25<sup>th</sup> July 1936.

Emma Goldman wrote to the paper at the end of October:

"The sponsors of neutrality are trying to make the world believe that they are acting with the best intentions; they are trying to stave off a new world carnage. One might, by a considerable stretch of imagination, grant them the benefit of the doubt had their embargo on arms included both sides in this frightful civil war. But it is their one-sidedness which makes one question the integrity as well as the logic of the men proclaiming neutrality. It is not only the height of folly, it is also the height of inhumanity to sacrifice the larger part of the Spanish people to a small minority of Spanish adventurers armed with every modern device of war."

"... 'Now the question is, Will France go back on her glorious revolutionary past by her tacit consent to such designs? Will England, with her liberal traditions, submit to such a degrading position? And, if not, will that not mean a new world carnage? In other words, the disaster neutrality is to prevent is going to follow in its wake. Quite another thing would happen if the anti-Fascist forces were helped to cope with the Fascist epidemic that is poisoning all the springs of life and health in Spain. For Fascism annihilated in Spain would also mean the cleansing of Europe from the black pest. And the end of Fascism in the rest of the world would also do away with the cause of war.'"

—Manchester Guardian 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1936.

Dave Hann has the figures:

"Italy sent an estimated 75,000 troops to fight on the side of Franco during the course of the Spanish Civil War, supported by 650 aircraft, 150 tanks and over 1,000 artillery pieces, as well as



huge quantities of arms and ammunition. Italian warships and submarines also patrolled the seas around Spain for the alleged purpose of implementing the Non-Intervention treaty. The Germans sent their elite Condor Legion to Spain that comprised tanks, aircraft and 5,000 highly trained troops. German aid to Franco throughout the war probably numbered about 20,000 troops, 600 aircraft, 200 tanks and 1,000 artillery pieces. Aid also came from Portugal, which allowed nationalist forces passage back and forth across its long border with Spain as well as the use of its aerodromes, ports and radio stations. An estimated 15,000 Portuguese soldiers also fought on the nationalist side. American motor manufacturers, General Motors, Ford and Studebaker supplied the nationalists with an estimated 12,800 trucks and jeeps during the course of the war. U.S. oil companies, Texaco and Standard Oil, supplied Franco with unlimited petrol on credit without which the German planes, the Italian tanks and the American trucks would have been useless.”

—Dave Hann: (*op.cit.*).

From the beginning of August there were constant diplomatic exchanges between Berlin and Rome, a joint propaganda strategy was worked out based on ‘anticommunism’, and both countries committed to providing military hardware and personnel. Mussolini was after territory and lost no time in annexing Majorca — which was treated as an Italian colony for the duration of the war — commencing with an expeditionary force of Blackshirts and the murder of three thousand inhabitants. Hitler encouraged him with repeated assurances that the Third Reich had no ambitions in the region. He regarded Spain as an investment and expected his money back, every Reichspfennig, paid in Spanish copper and iron ore. Post-Rapallo, it would provide the perfect testing ground for the new German military technology and tactics, in preparation for his conquest of Europe. Provided Italy did the heavy lifting, Germany would match its financial contribution; it was agreed in September that Italy would have a free hand in the Mediterranean, and Germany in the Baltic.

Anticommunism was likewise a flag of convenience for Franco; hitherto he had been more obsessed with Freemasonry, but having bitten off more than he could chew only a trans-European fascist bloc could save him. The military had not, as they claimed, risen against ‘the reds’; the influence of Marxism in republican Spain was negligible. The rising was against the failure of the democratic republic to halt the autonomous workers’ and peasants’ movement that had been building steadily for thirty years. The Asturian commune of 1934 had demonstrated that this was in no way utopian but a practical methodology that bypassed leadership and bureaucracy, requiring only trust between workers, and the goodwill to seek consensus. Conflating this grass-roots phenomenon with the posturing of left-wing politicians just created a narrative that could be understood in London or Washington. Also the nationalists’ constituency included conservative smallholders and sharecroppers; better to scare them with ideas of a Soviet-style government nationalising ‘their’ farms, than speak of spontaneous land expropriation, lest they get any ideas. Franco’s ‘reds’ lumped in Masons, republicans, social democrats, atheists and anarchists, Moroccan, Basque and Catalan nationalists with the hypothetical Marxist bogeymen. Bolshevism died with the Rapallo Treaty, and Stalin was slow to take an interest, the first Russian arms didn’t arrive until October.

In reality the military coup and the social revolution were the two opposing classes’ responses to the futility of the Second Republic — which in turn had been a patch for the failure of the monarchy. Restoring either of these things was never an option, being desired only by minority

interests in the rival camps. Eventually, with the Comintern at the helm the republic would indeed succeed in crushing the revolution, and job done, leave the stage to Franco.

“Although the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July, 1936, was followed by a far-reaching social revolution in the anti-Franco camp — more profound in some respects than the Bolshevik Revolution in its early stages — millions of discerning people outside Spain were kept in ignorance, not only of its depth and range, but even of its existence, by virtue of a policy of duplicity and dissimulation of which there is no parallel in history.”

—Burnett Bolloten: ‘The Grand Camouflage’.

The camouflage to which Bolloten refers, was of course on the republican side. The tragedy for the Spanish workers was that on both sides, the other players including their own political class, all had incentives for dragging the war out as long as possible. In ‘the Tragedy of Spain’, Rudolph Rocker lists some of the foreign interests at stake in 1936:

“English capital is very extensively interested in the rich iron mines in the vicinity of Bilbao, ... the iron works of Desirto. The greater part of the dock facilities at Bilbao ... the railways which carry the ores to the coast.

English ship lines complete the connection between England and the Basque iron fields. Spanish iron plays a tremendous part in England’s present rearmament program. And it is a fact that from the outbreak of the Fascist revolt till the fall of Bilbao the export of iron from there went to England exclusively.

... the English Rio Tinto Company, which exploits the richest copper mines in Spain, in the Huelva province.

... the House of Rothschild, which is interested, ... in various railway lines, of which the most important is the Madrid-Zaragoza line. ... the rich quicksilver mines of Almaden in the province of Ciudad Real, ...

English capital is also prominently interested in the Spanish aluminium industry ... railway building and machine construction. ...

Vickers-Armstrong is heavily interested in the “Sociedad Española de Construcción Naval” (Spanish Naval Construction Company), in the “International Paint Company,” and in Spanish war industry.

... the [French] “Société Minière et Métallurgique de Peñarroya” ... is especially heavily interested in the Spanish lead industry. ...

... the telephone exchange at Madrid is in the hands of an American company, while the Barcelona telephone system is under the control of British shareholders. ... “

—Rudolph Rocker: ‘the Tragedy of Spain’. 1937.

Rocker postulates that, had the coup occurred before the Great War, Britain and France would have backed it wholeheartedly, but the victory of fascism in Italy and Germany had brought with it a revival of their pre-war militarism and expansionist ambitions. Britain was not yet prepared for another war, so had to bide its time while Hitler and Mussolini opportunistically got their oar in. Apart from that a military dictatorship and an eventual return to monarchy would probably have been the best outcome for British capital. Despite their public protestations of neutrality, the British gave the fascists use of their facilities in Gibraltar to communicate directly with Germany,

Italy and Portugal, and of course turned a blind eye to the fleets of Junkers and Savoias passing overhead. They even sent a warship to protect the nationalist port of Algeciras.

The U.S.S.R. was in an even more delicate position, having recently entered into the League of Nations. It had signed a mutual assistance pact with France in 1935, which was supposed to prevent either side from siding with Germany against the other, and stop the French Communist Party destabilising the mild socialist government. It had an uneasy relationship with Britain, and a shift in the balance of power could tip the latter into the arms of the fascists. The Comintern's new popular front policy was to draw 'progressive bourgeois parties' into an alliance against fascism and this required that the threat of proletarian revolution be averted at all costs. In Stalin's opinion (the only one that mattered, as the Great Purge of alternative opinions was well underway in his own party) there would shortly be a Western European conflict between bourgeois democracy and fascism in which he hoped to remain neutral, the better to pick up the pieces afterwards. The status quo must be preserved long enough for Hitler's ambition to threaten the British Empire itself, ruling out the possibility of Britain and Germany joining forces against Russia. The timing was inconvenient as well, he was about to purge the Red Army, creating a temporary weakness. However, notwithstanding the apparently limitless credulity of the C.P. membership, appearing indifferent to a fascist coup against a socialist government in which a Comintern member was, however marginally involved, would rob him of all credibility with the international proletariat.

So in the meantime Russia would fight a proxy war against Germany in Spain in the name of the popular republic to protect the economic interests of Britain and France, whilst they looked the other way. Once Russia was involved, it would seek to prolong the conflict until the start of the European war Stalin hoped would save him the bother of defeating Hitler.<sup>16</sup> Better still, the conflict presented him with a golden opportunity to do away with all the troublesome revolutionary elements who would surely flock to the cause of the Spanish workers. Soviet officials were sent to Spain with the express mission of eradicating anarchism and Trotskyism by any means, exporting the Kremlin's purge of the left and restoring the balance of power that existed prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> July. The later co-option of right-wing interests (such as the Catholic Basque nationalist party) into Stalin's Popular Front, anticipated the ultra-conservative state capitalist peoples' democracies of the post-war Soviet bloc.

The first foreign volunteers were those who had travelled to Barcelona for the People's Olympiad that had been scheduled to start on the 19<sup>th</sup> July, in protest against the official games being hosted by the Nazis in Berlin. Some were swept up in the revolutionary fervour and enlisted in the militia. One such was the swimmer Clara Thalmann who with her husband Pavel joined the Durruti Column on the Aragon front then fought with the Friends of Durruti in the May events of 1937. They were imprisoned by the Stalinists and later operated in occupied Paris as members of the Proletarian Revolutionary Group, assisting people on the run from the Gestapo. Miraculously the Thalmanns both survived to old age and set up an agricultural commune in the south of France, popular with student radicals in the 1960s. St Pancras Communist<sup>17</sup> Felicia Browne was killed in Aragon on the 25<sup>th</sup> August as she went to the rescue of a wounded Italian militiaman during a raid on a munitions train.

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<sup>16</sup> In this he was sadly mistaken, as Britain would appease Nazi Germany to the bitter end in the hope that it would first take on the U.S.S.R. In desperation, he would cut a deal with Hitler himself.

<sup>17</sup> The British Communist Party was firmly embedded in the class struggle, in the workplace, the community, the antifascist movement, amongst the unemployed, and its members were far more militant than their leadership,

Italian anarchist exiles began to arrive in Spain in August, and went straight to Aragon, most were attached to the Ascaso Column. They were organised by Camillo Berneri, former Professor of philosophy at Florence University. They went into action on the 28<sup>th</sup> at the battle of Monte Pelado — Berneri recalled: “We defended the position with 130 against roughly 600 trained and well equipped men, and that in four hours of fighting”. It is estimated from CNT-FAI records that at least six hundred and fifty Italian anarchists served in Spain. Hundreds of French and German anarchists made up the international section of the Durruti Column.

Nat Cohen and Sam Masters, clothing workers from Stepney, having cycled to the games, joined a raid on Mallorca that was foiled by the Italian Air Force, and on their return to Barcelona founded the Tom Mann Centuria. With them was the British Communist Party’s representative, Tom Wintringham, who proposed the formation of the International Brigades. In September Stalin approved the project and the Comintern began the recruitment and transport of volunteers by each of the national parties co-ordinated by the French Communist Party in Paris. A training camp was established at Albacete.

“To start the ball rolling, he ordered that 500–600 foreign Communists living as refugees in the USSR, *personae non grata* in their own countries, be rounded up and sent to fight in Spain. This action not only rid him of a long-term irritant, but also laid the foundation for the International Brigades.”

—Gary Kern: ‘A Death in Washington: Walter G Krivitsky and the Stalin Terror’.

The Tom Mann volunteers initially teamed up with the German Thaelmann and French Commune de Paris Centuria, two thirds of them died in November 1936 defending Madrid. Nat Cohen returned after being shot through the knee, his friend Sam Masters was killed at Brunete. Wintringham commanded the British Battalion at Jarama in February 1937 and was wounded twice. On his return from Spain in 1938 he was expelled from the party for having an affair, or perhaps for flirting with Trotskyism, being an advocate of the social revolution. He was instrumental in the formation of the British Home Guard during World War Two.

“Between October 1936 and September 1937, when they were finally incorporated into the Republican army as Spanish Foreign Legion units, seven International Brigades were headquartered in Albacete under the commissarship of the paranoid Comintern Secretary Andre Marty — the XI<sup>th</sup>, XII<sup>th</sup>, XIII<sup>th</sup>, XIV<sup>th</sup>, XV<sup>th</sup>, 129<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup>. Each of these, led by a brigade commander and a political commissar, consisted of four battalions of mainly foreign volunteers organised by language group and ethnic background — to avoid problems of communication. An increasing number of Spaniards were conscripted into the Brigades as the war progressed, but there was no attempt to teach Brigaders Spanish until 1937, and even then few actually bothered to learn the language or even have much to do with their fellow Spanish Brigaders. There was actually a fair bit of racism, especially in the French and German IB Battalions.

The fact that so few Brigaders understood Spanish meant they were largely dependant on the overwhelmingly pro-Soviet and virulently anti-Trotskyist and anti-anarchist International Brigade press for information as to what was happening in Spain, especially relating to the events of May 1937 in Barcelona and the NKVD-led Stalinist repression both in the Soviet Union and in

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whereas the Spanish Communist Party was constructed virtually from scratch as a vehicle for Soviet control of the republican forces. At the start few foreigners would have been aware of the underlying tension between the Spanish workers and the republic.

the Spanish rearguard. On February 16, 1937, the IB paper *Soldado de la Republica* stated that after the latest of the Moscow trials “the whole world can now see” that the Trotskyists were “agents of German-Japanese fascism...and an incredible system of provocations, sabotage and murder” who in Spain had been revealed as “the artificial mist that hid Franco’s Fifth Column... the unmasking of Trotskyists united all International Brigaders.”

Tragically, most ordinary International Brigades volunteers were unaware of the strategic geopolitical ‘great game’ they were engaged in on behalf of Stalin. They were idealists manipulated by cynics, lions led by vipers.

—Stuart Christie: ‘Call to Arms — Scots in Spain.’

In all about thirty-five thousand people from fifty-three countries joined the International Brigades and about five thousand fought with the other militias. The largest contingent were the Poles of the Dabrowski Battalion numbering about five thousand, mainly miners working in France and Belgium, they were among the first to see action arriving in Madrid on the 12<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>18</sup>

The complexities of Irish politics intersected with the conflict in a unique fashion. Republican activist and writer Peadar O’Donnell attended the games and enlisted in the militia. The I.R.A.’s split between the conservative Catholic nationalists and the radical Irish Republican Congress applied to the war also. O’Donnell returned to advocate for the republic and the news that Irish fascist Eoin O’Duffy<sup>19</sup> was recruiting for the other side moved Irish socialists such as Frank Ryan to volunteer in the I.B.s. The Connolly column comprised Irish volunteers originally assigned to the British Battalion of the Fifteenth International Brigade who were unwilling to serve alongside British personnel of a military background, some of whom were suspected of having fought on the other side in the recent war of independence. These volunteers subsequently transferred to the North American Abraham Lincoln Battalion.

Captain Jack White, who had organised the Citizens’ army during the Dublin Lockout, came from a bourgeois protestant family and hated the religious sectarianism of Irish politics, he had been decorated by the British Army in the Boer war but his personal morality caused him to draw a revolver on a fellow officer to protect a teenage captive. He travelled to Spain aged fifty-seven to set up a Red Cross field hospital and served in the Connolly column, after a dispute with Ryan he offered his services to the C.N.T. White had made a political journey through Irish Republicanism to the syndicalist socialism of James Connolly and the Industrial Workers of the World, then to the Communist Party, and he returned from Spain a confirmed anarchist.

Although the right-wing press and the Catholic Church supported Franco, the majority of ordinary people in Britain were solidly behind the republic, regarding the rebellion as an attack on democracy by the fascist movement which now menaced all of Europe.

“The awful realisation that black fascism was on the march right across Europe created a strong desire to act. The march had started with Mussolini and had gained terrible momentum with Hitler and was being carried forward by Franco. For most young people there was a feeling of

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<sup>18</sup> This is where fact meets fiction, most historians give the 8<sup>th</sup> as the date of arrival of the XI I.B. deriving their accounts of the defence of Madrid from the Pravda correspondent Mikhail Koltsov, whose journalistic integrity was somewhat compromised by having Stalin breathing down his neck, more of this later.

<sup>19</sup> “The Irish fascists, led by Eoin O’Duffy, had travelled to Spain, stayed for six months, seen little or no combat and made military history by leaving for war with 700 men and returning with 703.”

frustration, but some determined to do anything that seemed possible, even if it meant death, to try to stop the spread of fascism... This was Fascist progression. It was real and it had to be stopped.'

—Jack Jones, antifascist, Liverpool and Spain: From his introduction to 'Apprentices of Freedom' by Judith Cook.

Jones was repatriated with a serious shoulder wound sustained at the Battle of Ebro in 1938, and after the war assisted Spanish seamen stranded in British ports to emigrate to Argentina. He is best known as the General Secretary of the former Transport and General Workers' Union.

Aid to Spain committees sprung up everywhere, collecting food, clothing, blankets, etc. and raising money for medical supplies; trade unions purchased ambulances and drove them across the Pyrenees. The British Battalion of the 15<sup>th</sup> I. B. was formed in December. Britain's Independent Labour Party recruited for the POUM, its co-affiliate in the 'London Bureau' or International Revolutionary Marxist Centre, its most famous volunteer being George Orwell. Two anarchists from Hillhead in Glasgow, Ethel MacDonald and Jane 'Jenny' Patrick were invited to Barcelona to help set up an English-language information service for CNT-FAI. With no money or visas they hitch-hiked across France at the end of October. MacDonald gave radio broadcasts in English and sent back articles to her local paper, the 'Bellshill Speaker' bringing the revolution and the May events to the wider world.

The Popular Front underwent yet another change of leadership on 4<sup>th</sup> September, when Largo Caballero, the president of the U.G.T. took over as prime minister; the Communist party got two ministries, education and agriculture. The new administration's first act was to lose the border town of Irún:

"Irun fell, opening the gates to San Sebastián ... They fought to the last cartridge, the men of Irun. When they had no more ammunition, they hurled packets of dynamite. When dynamite was gone, they rushed forward barehanded and tackled each their man, while the sixty times stronger enemy butchered them with bayonets. A girl held two armoured cars at bay for half an hour by hurling glycerine bombs. Then the Moroccans stormed the barricade of which she was the last living defender and tore her to pieces. The men of Fort Martial held three hundred foreign legionnaires at a distance for half a day by rolling rocks down the hill on which the old fort is perched."

—Pierre Van Paasen:  
Despatch to Federated Press 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 1936.  
Quoted in 'Spanish Revolution'  
Volume 1 No. 3, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1936.

Starved of arms by Madrid, a delegation went to Barcelona and a consignment was duly shipped, but it had to pass through French territory and the French socialists confiscated it. The C.C.M.A.C. then set aside thirty thousand rounds of ammunition:

"They urgently requested a plane from the Madrid government, which promised to send them a Douglas. The plane never arrived. The boxes of ammunition sat in a pile in Barcelona, while the residents of Irún fired their last round, burned down the town, and fled to Hendaya. San Sebastián

fell on September 15. General Mola's troops now threatened the north as a whole. One might imagine that the government had sacrificed the north to defend the capital and, although that wouldn't have been a good strategy, it would have at least mitigated government culpability for the failure. But that wasn't the case. Talavera fell into Yagüe's hands and his Regulars found an open path to Madrid."

—Abel Paz: 'Durruti in the Spanish Revolution'.

Having been a social democrat for most of his career,<sup>20</sup> Caballero had gravitated to Marxism-Leninism, just as the Comintern was abandoning class struggle in favour of 'socialism in one country'. Caballero and his followers thought of him as the 'Spanish Lenin' and with the fervour of the newly-converted he went around banging on about the dictatorship of the proletariat. During his incarceration in 1935 he had declared, in a remarkably Leninist expression of megalomania: "You see here behind bars the future master of Spain!" After his release he had actively sought a merger with the Communist party, his delusions of grandeur convincing him that his would be the dominant party in the relationship.

Although the P.C.E. was still tiny, the Communists' well-practiced facility at propaganda and intrigue would easily get the better of him; first the executive of the Young Socialists was invited to Russia, wined and dined. In December 1935 the P.C.E. dissolved its trade union federation, the C.G.T.U. whose isolation stood in the way of the Comintern's new popular front policy. Caballero accepted the Communist unions into the U.G.T., giving them a nucleus from which to expand their influence. The Socialist and Communist youth organisations were unified in May 1936. With the outbreak of war, he was dismayed to find his supporters in both party and union transferring their allegiance to Moscow in droves.

"It is wonderful, for those of us who were outside the Communist Party until a few weeks ago, to contemplate how, in the very midst of the revolutionary struggle, one organisation that was for many years a powerful political force and had almost a monopoly of the political leadership of the Spanish proletariat was disintegrating, ruined by its mistakes, and how another organization, composed in the early days of little more than a handful of men, but guided to perfection by Marxism and Leninism, could become after 18 July the real force in the struggle against fascism and the real directing force of the Spanish masses."

—Francisco Moontiel to the central committee of the Communist party, March 1937, quoted in 'The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution' by Burnett Bolloten.

In his memoirs, Caballero describes the Russian ambassador Marcel Rosenberg as "wrapped around my legs like a serpent". Whilst they publicly flattered Caballero, the Stalinists found his leftist rhetoric annoying as they were busy seducing a terrified middle class. In such turbulent times many Spaniards who had no prior political affiliations, or whose sympathies lay with the right, felt the need to acquire a party membership for protection, and the Communists promised them continuity. They were going to use the right wing of his own party against him, but in September 1936 with the Second Republic and Popular Front utterly discredited they still needed Caballero's leftist rhetoric to persuade the masses that government was worth bothering with at all.

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—An Phoblacht: 'Frank Ryan re-examined' 9<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

<sup>20</sup> And a collaborator with the dictatorship, overseeing compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes.

“Largo Caballero proved incapable of gauging the future shape of politics, the ebb and flow of the intrigues of the political parties, his own party included. And this ‘Spanish Lenin’ served as a bridge into the most tragic phase of the Spanish revolution. At the head of a government broadly representative of the people, Largo Caballero injected some prestige into the devastated institutions of the republic, rejuvenated the state, and carried off the hitherto impossible missions of militarising the army, disarming the rearguard and reorganising the security forces, which were placed at the service of the government. Later, he vanished from sight like a comet only to be replaced by the counter-revolution and the dictatorship of one party.”

—José Peirats Valls, antifascist: ‘The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution’ Vol. 1. 1987.

“At that time, we called it a popular revolution. All of us knew that it was the establishment of socialism in Spain. That was clear. Where were the big capitalists, the large landowners, and the apparatus of the bourgeois State? They had all disappeared. Hence, the entire discussion appeared absurd and byzantine to me.”

—Santiago Carrillo Solares: *Spain Tomorrow*, Paris, 1974

Caballero gave up on the merger idea, but by the end of 1936 Spain’s gold was in Russia and for the sake of keeping his job, this pointless bureaucrat would dance to Stalin’s tune until he had outlived his usefulness. His naivety would lead to the defeat of the republic, his exile and imprisonment in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He barely survived the Second World War; the majority of his comrades were of course executed by Franco.

While Rosenberg was leg-humping Caballero, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko was blowing in Garcia Oliver’s ear. The Soviet consul in Barcelona was a hero of the Bolshevik revolution that Stalin was keen to be rid of. He led the ‘assault’<sup>21</sup> on the Winter Palace in 1917, but was tainted by his association with Trotsky and the left opposition. Stalin had posted him around the world to keep him out of the way, and Barcelona was to be his last assignment. Expressing his enthusiasm for revolutionary Catalonia he persuaded Oliver to indulge in what Bollothen called ‘the Grand Camouflage’, denying the fact of social revolution to fool the foreign bourgeoisie, but also guaranteeing the world’s proletariat would never miss what it hadn’t seen.

The relationship between CNT-FAI and the state reached its tipping point in September 1936. They felt the C.C.M.A.C. was not fit for purpose and the Catalan regional administration was re-constituted with their support as the ‘Defence Council of the Generalitat’. This was sold to the movement as another smokescreen to disguise the diffusion of power to the workers’ committees, but the parties’ representatives all spoke of ‘strong government’, capable of imposing its decrees on them. Oliver was leaning toward Escorza’s suggestion of the 20<sup>th</sup> July; since they could no longer do away with the Generalitat, they should take it over. The bottom-up structure of neighbourhood and ward committees would give way to a top-down structure with commissions and councils for everything. The revolutionary momentum was such that it would be months before this could be achieved, so a push-pull strategy was employed, starving collectives of government credit, imposing militarisation on the militia by withholding pay whilst choking off food and support to their dependants, offering rank and privilege to anyone who would accept it. The

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<sup>21</sup> He broke in through a window, taking with him a few Red Guards whose main interest was the Imperial wine cellar, and arrested the provisional government.



CNT-FAI councillors avoided using the 'G word' themselves but were now behaving like representatives, not of the anarchists, but of an abstract concept of anarchy, to be pursued at some indeterminate time that receded ever further into the future. Their role was to justify the decisions of government to the people rather than present the people's demands to government, and they would only be needed for so long as the workers exerted actual power over production and the conduct of the war. They had been persuaded that the social revolution could follow a swift victory over fascism, however the Popular Front government was in no hurry; its priority was to re-establish its governance while there was still fuck all to govern. Using the promise of arms and a united front against the fascists, the politicians would dupe the unions into propping up what remained of the state while the militias weakened for lack of supplies. The dinner had eaten the dog.

But for a handful of loyalist troops and paramilitaries, the vast majority of antifascist fighters at that time were union members, and the unions were running production. It seemed logical to federate all the workers' committees and militia under one umbrella, not a government as such, but a co-ordinating body, retaining dual power and minimising the divisive effects of the political parties. Therefore, a national plenum resolved to form a joint national defence council with the U.G.T. and the necessary overtures were made. However, control of the latter was being contested between Caballero's Leninists and the right-wing (or moderate if you like) social democrats and Stalinists. Note how the advocates of 'war before revolution' were most occupied with political manoeuvres. No response was received, which left only two options: 'go for everything' or bargain for representation in the cabinet, the entry of the Catalan regional committee into the Generalitat had ruled out the first one.

A parallel power struggle and consolidation was taking place in the nationalist zone, the bizarre death of Sanjurjo having decapitated the movement. The regular army's allegiance had always been more to its aristocratic officers than any concept of Spain, so each general set himself up as a feudal warlord within his occupied territory. Mola and Quiépo de Llano were right-wing republicans and the latter a freemason, distrusted by the traditionalists. The most effective military formation was Franco's Army of Africa, and apart from two rival right-wing militias, the Falange and the Requete (Carlists), most of their troops were foreign mercenaries, Moroccans, Germans and Italians, whose paymaster Adolf Hitler favoured Franco. Sanjurjo had been the Carlists' voice in the army and the Falange leader<sup>22</sup> was a prisoner of the Republic. By synthesising the trappings of Catholicism, monarchy and fascism Franco declared himself, Napoleon-like, head of the embryonic nationalist state in October, affecting the title Caudillo, a crude Spanish translation of Fuhrer. The factions of the right had little in common politically, beyond love of authority and hatred of the Working Class. A split in the Falange culminated in April 1937 in a gunfight at its headquarters in Salamanca, as soon as they selected a new leader Franco amalgamated all the parties into one with himself at the helm.

Here's fucking weird: the commander-in-chief of the mediaevalist Carlist Requetés who rejoiced in the name Francisco Javier de Borbón Parma y de Braganza, and sported one of the daftest hats I've ever seen, had a row with Franco and got kicked out of Spain halfway through. He only ended up in the Maquis during WW2 fighting alongside exiled Spanish anarchists! Completely irrelevant, I just thought you'd like to know that.

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<sup>22</sup> Primo de Rivera Jr was executed in Alicante during the siege of Madrid, on the day the German-Japanese Axis was established. It might have been more politically astute to send him home to stir up trouble.

Along with right-wing socialists and bourgeoisie, a great many republican army officers joined the communist party, it being the only way to assure continuity of supply once the flow of war materiel was controlled by the U.S.S.R. The Communists established the Fifth Regiment to absorb these officers and train new ones for their Popular Army. Recruitment was open to everyone but promotion depended on joining the party. Whereas the militia regarded soldiers purely as technical specialists, the Fifth Regiment offered them rank, parades, pomp and saluting. Their posturing was intended as a provocation to the anarchosyndicalists, who instead regarded it with amused detachment; a year later, Emma Goldman wrote:

“On my first visit to Spain in September 1936, nothing surprised me so much as the amount of political freedom I found everywhere. True it did not extend to fascists; but outside of these deliberate enemies of the revolution and the emancipation of the workers in Spain, everyone of the anti-fascist front enjoyed political freedom which hardly existed in any of the so called European democracies. The one party that made the utmost use of this was the PSUC, the Stalinist party in revolutionary Spain. [Catalonia] Their radio and loudspeakers filled the air. Their daily marches in military formation with their flags waving were flaunted in everybody’s face. They seemed to take a special pleasure in marching past the house of the Regional Committee as if they wanted to make the CNT-FAI aware of their determination to strike the blow when they will attain to complete power. This was obvious to anyone among the foreign delegates and comrades who had come to help in the anti-fascist struggle. Not so our Spanish comrades. They made light of the communist brazenness. They insisted that this circus claptrap could not decide the revolutionary struggle, and that they themselves had more important things to do than waste their time in idle display. It seemed to me that the Spanish comrades had little understanding of mass psychology which needs flag-wagging, speeches, music and demonstrations — that while the CNT-FAI however, were concentrated on their constructive tasks, and fighting on the various fronts, their communist allies made hay while their sun shone. They have since proved that they knew what they were about.”

—Emma Goldman: ‘Political persecution in Republican Spain’, from ‘Spain and the World’, London, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1937.

On 15<sup>th</sup> September the Secretary of the International Workers’ Association, Pierre Besnard visited Barcelona with a detailed plan to stir up a revolt in Morocco by freeing Abd-el-Krim, who was still a prisoner of France. He had obtained a mandate from French socialists opposed to the non-intervention policy to call on the (French) Popular Front government to help by declaring Morocco independent. After a fruitless meeting with Caballero<sup>23</sup> he warned his friends that collaboration with the government was endangering the revolution. Durruti asked him to procure arms as a matter of urgency.

Oliver had offered military aid to his contacts in the Moroccan Action Committee, however they didn’t consider that a unilateral declaration of independence would do much good as the Germans and Italians could just invade them directly. They wanted a form of regional autonomy recognised by the Spanish and French governments. Such a legalistic approach hardly amounted to spreading the social revolution, which the anarchists hoped would suck in both France and

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<sup>23</sup> His audience with the P.M. followed shortly after a visit from Rosenberg. Stalin was furious with Antonov-Ovseenko for encouraging the project; unrest in the colonies would most likely bring down the French government, and was bound to scare the British.

Portugal, and eventually show the Italian and German proletariat the way forward.<sup>24</sup> It would also make Stalin's position untenable, and might prompt the Soviet workers to finally finish what they had started in 1917. Nevertheless the C.C.A.M.C. ratified the agreement and the Moroccans were sent to Madrid; as anticipated, the French vetoed the arrangement. Caballero did not consider any document signed in Barcelona to be binding. There would be no formal autonomy but the Republic would provide arms and money to fight Franco in the protectorate; however the M.A.C. would not act without political guarantees and the project went nowhere.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> September Besnard reported back to Oliver and De Santillan that he had located Belgian arms manufacturers who were prepared to supply the republican government; at last they could properly equip the Aragon front.<sup>25</sup> Caballero promised to release 1.6 billion pesetas in gold to make the purchase, of which a third would go to Catalonia and Aragon, he was of course bluffing; if the Russians lost control over the supply chain they would immediately take their ball home.

By signing the non-intervention agreement and officially prohibiting the export of war materiel to Spain, Stalin had made his assistance entirely conditional on getting his own way. Rosenberg spelt it out to Caballero: Production was to be controlled by the state not the unions; private property to be respected and land expropriations stopped; the militia must be replaced by a traditional army with ranks and regulations; the workers' councils were to be dissolved, especially organisations such as the Federation of Collectives of Levant, which grew more than half of Spain's oranges and was exporting its produce on its own terms, and the surly Defence Council of Aragon; 'Trotskyists' must be excluded from governing bodies and their organisations suppressed. If all these things were done, the U.S.S.R. would convince the bourgeois democracies they had nothing to fear, and side with the Republic. Communist-inspired government propaganda of the time has it that the unions are fighting for the Second Republic and the autonomous efforts of the workers are merely implementing the policies of the democratically elected Popular Front! That the Confederation, feeling itself abandoned by the international proletariat, continued to hedge its bets, perhaps explains why these narratives persist to this day. On the 7<sup>th</sup> October the Soviet delegate to the Non-intervention Committee announced that his government would consider itself released from the agreement unless fascist violations ceased immediately.

The finance minister Juan Negrin had his own Russian shadow in the shape of the Comintern economist Stashevsky, who was secretly grooming the right-wing socialist to be Caballero's replacement. Negrin's political views could be summed up by the word centralisation, his disdain for anarchists, Catalanists, and Basque separatists, coupled with his ambition and circumstantial ethics made him a perfect tool. The Carabineros, a police force dedicated to his ministry, were only meant to deal with customs and excise matters and to guard the treasury; Negrin built them into his own private army, equipped with the newest weapons.

The Bank of Spain in Madrid held the second largest gold reserve in the world; about two hundred tons of which had already been exchanged for currency in Paris, drawing howls of protest and some legal challenges from the nationalist zone. Their allies overseas would attempt

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<sup>24</sup> For this reason the I.W.A. never made any concerted effort to recruit overseas volunteers, believing that militants would be best occupied in agitating against their own governments.

<sup>25</sup> Aragon had become the focus of libertarian activity since the re-establishment of government in Catalonia. In Aragon alone the political parties exerted no influence and the public assemblies were sovereign. The P.S.U.C. was desperate to sabotage collectivisation and resorted to pillage, so the Defence Council of Aragon was formed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October.

to block further trading. Since Caballero could not be trusted, a plan was hatched for the railway workers union and the Land and Freedom Column<sup>26</sup> to remove it to Barcelona, so they could deal directly. Durruti travelled incognito to Madrid to implement the plan. De Santillan lost his nerve at the last minute and consulted the National Committee of the C.N.T. which panicked, fearing a rift between Barcelona and Madrid, and the idea was shelved. The hostility was already there however; the Catalan weapons industry badly needed investment in new plant and tooling, but received no help from the centre.

Two weeks later, without asking anyone else, Spain's president, prime minister and finance minister sent more than five hundred tons of gold to Moscow for 'safe keeping', by arrangement with the Machiavellian secret police general Aleksandr Orlov. Spain's treasury contained many pieces of numismatic and antique value far above their gold price, including the spoils from their former colonies. However no inventory of these items exists as the entire cargo was weighed in as bullion, one can only speculate where it all ended up. On its arrival in Moscow, Stalin threw a banquet for the Politburo and boasted "the Spaniards will never see their gold again, as one never sees one's own ears". The money was supposed to be held on account for arms supplied, but Russia made a vast profit on the deal and it was later revealed, had been supplying both sides, flogging oil to the Nationalists via Italy. They charged the Republic twice the market exchange rate for rouble to dollar transactions, and of course the value of the peseta collapsed as soon as the transfer became known, by the end of the war the account would be in the red, according to the Russians. Henceforth, the Kremlin called the shots, just as Stalinism entered its most devious and paranoid phase.

"As early as September 1936 the Communists, under the direction of the Russian NKVD representative, Alexander Orlov, began filling prisons with hundreds of their — not necessarily the Republican government's — enemies, torturing and killing many of them."

—Herbert L. Matthews (New York Times correspondent):  
'Half of Spain Died'

Orlov's official mission was to direct espionage and subversion in the nationalist zone, but his main quarry was closer at hand. The Soviets saw 'Trotskyists' everywhere, considering them far more dangerous than the fascists. In fact the term 'Trotskyist', which was not in use prior to the Great Purge, could be used in a number of ways: a former associate of Trotsky — in other words any Bolshevik; a present associate of Trotsky or an affiliate to his Fourth International, these were very few and far between in revolutionary Spain, confined to a tiny group calling itself the 'Bolshevik-Leninists', anyone to the left of Stalin, especially the POUM; or a hypothetical conspirator prepared to betray the republic out of hatred of the U.S.S.R. It replaced 'social fascist' as the catch-all pejorative for anyone that refused to obey the Comintern.

"Stalin, Yezhov, and Beria distrusted Soviet participants in the Spanish war. Military advisors like Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, journalists like Koltsov were open to infection by the heresies, especially Trotsky's, prevalent among the Republic's supporters. NKVD agents sent to Spain were therefore keener on abducting and murdering anti-Stalinists among Republican leaders and International Brigade commanders than on fighting Franco. The defeat of the Republic, in

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<sup>26</sup> Catalan anarchists deployed in Madrid, mainly FAI members; 'Land and Freedom' being the title of the FAI's periodical.

Stalin's eyes, was caused not by the NKVD's diversionary efforts, but by the treachery of the heretics."

—Donald Rayfield: 'Stalin and his Hangmen: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed for Him'. 2004.

Still the POUM organ *La Batalla* declined to mince its words:

"In short, what really interests Stalin is not the fate of the Spanish or international proletariat, but the defence of the Soviet government in accordance with the policy of alliance established by some states against others."

—Editorial, *La Batalla*: 15 November 1936.

The Soviet consulate in Barcelona took the diplomatically unorthodox step of issuing a press release accusing the paper of being "in the pocket of international fascism", this appeared even in *Solidaridad Obrera*. The POUM sealed its fate when it proposed Catalonia grant political asylum to Trotsky. The latter had taken a keen interest in Spanish politics, and desperately wanted to test his theories, but was highly critical of his former secretary Andreu Nin especially over the decision to enter the Generalitat. In November 1936, at a meeting of N.K.V.D. officials in Valencia, Orlov and Rosenberg took the decision to exclude and liquidate the entire organisation. Orlov defected to Canada in July 1938 just as he was about to be purged, it is likely his detailed knowledge of Stalin's crimes protected him from assassination; he wrote to the dictator personally promising to keep it all to himself provided he and his family were left in peace. Rosenberg and Antonov-Ovseenko were both recalled to Moscow and shot.

By mid-October the non-intervention agreement lay in tatters and the Russians accused Portugal of breaking it, as they were desperate to avoid antagonising Hitler and Mussolini. The first Russian aid ships started to arrive, by stealth and in disguise; the first to dock in Barcelona contained mainly tinned food. In January 1937 a ship delivered five hundred and sixty-eight tons of butter, such an unfamiliar product to the Catalans that even low-level bureaucrats convinced themselves that 'butter' was code for some form of ordinance. Some of the small arms were obsolescent and worn out, with six different rifle calibres in use, making ammunition supply a lottery. The most modern, and welcome weapon was the T26 tank; all the best kit went to the Communist columns and the Fifth Army. Stalin would not risk having soviet personnel paraded in front of the non-intervention committee and had told the brigade commanders to "Stay out of artillery range". The Russian pilots would only fly over Republican territory.

"All villagers, male and female, will make themselves available to the delegate comrades who have taken up arms in service of the community, and will endeavour to bring all useable goods to the castle. All those who need anything will be attended to. Money is hereby abolished and libertarian communism is proclaimed in this village."

—The Committee. Mora de Rubielos, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1936.

The illustrious and much-maligned Iron Column was raised in the anarchist communes of the Levant, its ranks swelled by convicts it liberated from prison as it passed. Characterised as 'uncontrollables' by the republicans, its members were totally committed to social revolution; it received no help from the Republic and had to see to its own provisioning. The local unions and

peasant collectives supported it with donations of clothing, agricultural produce and even cash. It had its own newspaper, the 'Firing Line' and a radio station that broadcast in five languages.

"The Iron Column was made up of peasants and industrial workers. Its basic unit was the century, which was in turn divided into groups. The peasants formed their own units with people living in the same village. Within a month of its establishment, the Iron Column had twelve thousand enlisted members, but we only had enough equipment to arm around three thousand fighters. ...

... Most of the inmates were in San Miguel de los Reyes for criminal offences but there was also the odd comrade convicted for bank robbery or something like that. The opening up of the prison was prompted by principle and nothing more. It was an attempt to do away with something we regarded as a product of bourgeois rule: the inmates were victims of society and they had to be given a chance, at which point most of them joined the Iron Column, fighting and conducting themselves in an extraordinarily brave and intrepid fashion."

—Roque Santamaria.

After two months in the field they had received only a thousand rifles from the state; eighty percent of their weaponry having been captured in battle. They found themselves in a similar state to the columns in Aragon, within sight of their goal but unable to proceed. They were short of spares, and as always, ammunition, so a party returned to Valencia to sort out the rear-guard. The Civil Guards were persuaded to disarm and valuables expropriated to buy supplies. The militia built a huge bonfire in the main square of police files, land registers, and other legal documents. Such conduct was horrifying to the Stalinists, who portrayed them as common bandits, and embarrassing for the C.N.T. national committee, which was at the time negotiating representation in the government.

Tensions were inflamed by the shooting in Valencia of an Iron column delegate in mysterious circumstances by 'People's Antifascist Guards' (G.P.A.). On the 30<sup>th</sup> October, his funeral was attended by members of all three confederal columns fighting on the Teruel front. The militia came under machine-gun fire from the offices of the P.C.E. leaving over a hundred dead or wounded. They met to discuss retaliation, but on receiving news of a potential breach of the front, the survivors returned to their posts at 3 a.m.<sup>27</sup> Their response was a manifesto calling for the disbandment of the reactionary Civil Guard, and for all paramilitaries at the service of the state to be sent to the front immediately; with the battle raging all around, why were there people at the rear holding guns to point at fellow workers, and what need did anarchists have of courts and prisons?

The politicians' most pressing task was to recover their monopoly on violence, by turning the workers' militias into a conventional 'Popular Army' with a hierarchical command structure and pay differentials, proposed by the Communists and established by government decree on 30<sup>th</sup> October. Their talent for bureaucracy, and the anarchists' disdain for it, rapidly gave the Communists root and branch control of the armed forces. Political commissars would be attached to every brigade and battalion, almost all were P.C.E. members.

The editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera* commented:

"One of the quintessential aspects of war is the military code. The revolution has smashed to smithereens the lengthy code worked out by Alfonso's brasshats and entirely abolished the

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<sup>27</sup> Those writers who like to accuse the anarchist columns of indiscipline would do well to remember this incident.

phenomenon of barrack-drilled masses consonant with a servility which the capitalist regime instituted for economic reasons. We are not familiar with the contents of the new military code worked out by those individuals whom the antifascist organisations have appointed to positions of responsibility. In our estimation, the code which the revolution needs at the present juncture in the war must be of clearly revolutionary derivation.”

The following day it was clarified that the old code was indeed being restored; “until such time as a new code for the militias may be devised.”

“No. Militarisation of the militias, mobilisation of the proletariat and of all the antifascist population cannot and must not mean the resurrection of the old army. Let us devise new solutions, a new concept of duty and honour, far-removed from the rigid, aristocratic code which, were it something solid, might serve to manure the land.”

—Solidaridad Obrera: 31 October 1936.

Knowing full well that its members would not accept conscription into the army it instructed anyone finding themselves called up to “Immediately go to the C.N.T. barracks or to your unions or defence committees, where you will receive the militiaman’s card for your incorporation into the Confederal Columns.”

The town of Barbastro had been held for the Republic by troops under Colonel Villalba, who took charge of the initial assault on Huesca using anarchist and POUM columns. Villalba and Durruti clashed from the outset, as a professional soldier Villalba favoured militarisation; he set up his own War Committee there, and insisted on keeping it independent of the other columns. In this he received the enthusiastic support of the Communists. It cannot be claimed that that the militia were ineffective; in August, at Villalba’s request the Durruti Column sent José Mira with several centurias to attack Siétamo. In three days they had occupied the site and then left it under the Colonel’s control, it was swiftly re-taken; the rebels fortified the town with machine-guns and an artillery battery. In early September, Villalba decided to try again, and Mira’s centurias returned. The siege began on the 4<sup>th</sup> September, against fierce resistance from infantry, Falangists, and Civil Guards and hampered by the German air-raids launched from Zaragoza. The militia re-captured Siétamo in house-to-house fighting and also took the enemy fortifications in surrounding Loporzano, Estrecho Quinto, and Monte Aragón.

The existence of two war committees was the fault-line on the Aragon front, subsequent attempts to unify the command under a General Staff faltered because of course the militias’ War Committee represented its members, whereas the Communists could only act on orders from their party. A propaganda war was being fought on that front for external consumption that had to play down the successes of workers acting autonomously.<sup>28</sup> Rovira’s POUM column were forced to abandon their command post at Leciñena to the fascists because ammunition requested from Villalba was not forthcoming, the P.S.U.C. forces close by stood aloof considering it the POUM’s responsibility. This breakthrough compromised the entire front so the Durruti column immediately counter-attacked; their international section, led by the French artillery Captain Berthomieu overreached itself and took the town of Perdiguera, where they became trapped:

“Berthomieu and forty of his men had been too daring. They advanced impetuously and, as a result, separated from the rest of the Column. The fascists realized this and surrounded them with their Moorish cavalry.

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<sup>28</sup> Villalba was later put in charge of the confederal militia defending Malaga, with catastrophic results.

Cornered in several houses, the forty men faced a force twenty times larger and soon ran out of ammunition. Two militiamen, Ridel and Charpentier, took on the dangerous task of slipping through the Moroccans to warn Durruti. They were the only ones among the forty who entered Perdiguera to survive. The rest died fighting. Among the dead were Berthomieu, Giralt, Trontin, Bourdom, Emile Cottin, Georgette (a young militant from Paris's *Revista Anarquista*) Gertrudis (a German Trotskyist youth), and two nurses whose names are unknown.

We improved our lines by eight kilometres, but the territory gained didn't compensate for the Column's losses. Berthomieu alone was worth more than all that."

—Mathieu Corman: ¡Salud, camaradas! Paris: Ed. Tribord, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1937.

The militarisation decree met with fierce opposition within the columns; the workers had not taken up arms to defend the Republic, even against fascism, or for the right to choose who was going to order them about. They had endured one or other form of brutal economic and political regime all their lives and had consciously left that world behind. Even the POUM with its essentially Leninist ideology failed to impose an authoritarian structure on its column, as its members had also been imbued with libertarian ideas. Durruti received the news the same day he learned Caballero had gone back on his word:

"...This decision by the government has had a deplorable effect. It is absolutely devoid of any sense of reality. There is an irreconcilable contrast between that mentality and that of the militias... We know that one of these attitudes has to vanish in the face of the other one."

—Buenaventura Durruti to L'Espagne Antifasciste November 1936.

He was so pissed off he opted to take his chances on a nocturnal mission with the 'sons of the night' guerrilla group, penetrating Zaragoza to liberate some confederals who had been in hiding since the coup, and to avenge their comrades of the Internationals.

While the politicians manoeuvred and intrigued, the Confederation of the centre assembled three thousand workers into the *Espana Libre* column to defend Madrid, but the government refused to arm them. By the end of October, the fascists were 20 miles from the capital; they finally received their kit on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November, with shells falling on the outskirts of the city.

Back in the rear, exhausted from overwork and juggling contradictory agendas, Oliver was losing touch with reality and began to advocate militarisation. His revolutionary credentials were impeccable, having lived an insurrectionary life and spent seven years in jail under the dictatorship. To be fair, the fact that he had given up his place in the front line to perform this political role will have invested it with an exaggerated sense of importance; I don't doubt for a moment he would rather have been shooting fascists. Perhaps the rejection of his anti-collaboration strategy pushed him to the other pole. On 4<sup>th</sup> November he accepted a post in the central government as one of four 'anarchist ministers', two each from the C.N.T. and FAI, these were pure political appointees chosen by the national secretary with no mandate whatsoever, representing nobody but themselves. The lifelong outlaw became justice minister.

"From now on there will be no more talk of liberty, but rather submission to 'our government', the only agency capable of directing the war and economic life.

The confederal organisation has secured four ministries for itself, yet none of them correspond to the arguments raised in support of the creation of a National Defence Council.



Four second-rate ministries will now be filled by four individuals who have never shown any interest in the matters they must now concern themselves with. We will see a member of the Weaving and Textile Union, surely with much experience in matters of war, in the Ministry of Justice; a public speaker and writer on matters of the heart and social issues in the Ministry of Health; and a professional propagandist in the ministry of Trade.

In summary: instead of departments there are ministries, and instead of experts in their fields with their own initiatives, there are incompetent, inept politicians.”

—Linea de Fuego: 4<sup>th</sup> November 1936.

At 9:30 that evening Durrutti spoke from the CNT-FAI radio transmitter in Barcelona; his speech was heard throughout Spain, but he addressed it to the “Workers of Cataluña!” The Generalitat’s council of defence had asked him for one of his famous orations to raise the morale of those defending Madrid, a piece of inspiring propaganda for the Republic, it didn’t play quite as they intended. No complete transcript of the broadcast exists, as it was censored and redacted even by the anarchist press at the time. The Durruti Column had voted to reject militarisation; three days earlier he had signed a statement to that effect on behalf of its War Committee, on the day the despised military code was to take effect. He called upon the unions to hold their leaders to account for the organisation of the Catalan economy. He demanded the rearguard stop squabbling over politics and get behind the workers’ militias, re-affirming their commitment to social revolution and anti-militarism. Two weeks later he was dead.

“I do not feel like writing any more letters so that the comrades or the son of a militiaman can have one more crust of bread or pint of milk, while there are Ministers who do not have to pay to eat and have no limits on their expenditures. ... Fascism represents and is in effect social inequality, and if you do not want those of us who are fighting to confuse those of you in the rearguard with our enemies, then do your duty. We are waging war now to crush the enemy at the front, but is this the only enemy? No. Anyone among us who is opposed to the revolutionary conquests is also an enemy, and we must crush them as well.

... They’re mistaken if they think that the militarisation decree will scare us and impose an iron discipline on us. You are mistaken, Ministers, with your militarisation decree. Since you have so much to say about iron discipline, then I say to you, come to the front with me. At the front we do not accept any discipline, because we are conscious of doing our duty. And you will see our order and our organisation. Then we shall return to Barcelona and we shall ask you about your discipline, your order, and your control, which does not exist.”

—Quoted by Guillamon, Paz and others in various translations.

Companys response was to call an emergency session of the Generalitat the following morning. The topic was how to get the Working Class to submit to their remote control, the precise opposite of Durruti’s message, which had scoffed at their pretentions and reminded them of the precarity of their positions. The anarchist delegates could do little more than apologise for the delay.

Madrid came under siege and the new government promptly fled to Valencia, to the disbelief and disgust of the workers, who were set to fight to the death. The four were unanimous in their opposition to the move, then gave in to avoid a ‘crisis’, already thinking like politicians. They had only been invited in to endorse Caballero’s stampede from the enemy and as bait to draw in the

Durruti Column. The government expected Madrid to fall and wanted the anarchists implicated in both the retreat and the defeat. This is the point where the gulf between the leaders and the membership became unbridgeable; no one was going to take orders from those who were not prepared to share their fate, and CNT-FAI found itself astride this chasm.

As women and children built barricades under the fascist bombardment, a herd of fleeing ministers took to the road at nightfall on the 6<sup>th</sup>. In their haste the departing Ministry of War omitted to tell anyone where the ammunition reserves were stored. Once more the unions were left holding the baby and partisan rivalries shelved as their defence committees mobilised every worker capable of standing upright, taking to the barricades and rooftops with whatever they could find. Resistance was co-ordinated by the waiter Eduardo Val. Those militians who had fallen back to the city felt they had nowhere left to run and their grim determination proved too much even for the German tanks; the preferred method of stopping one was to leap in front at the last moment and throw dynamite. The technique is credited to the seaman Antonio Coll, who accounted for many monsters in this way before being crushed beneath one; nevertheless, his example was eagerly followed. It required only a steady hand, a cool head and utter disregard for one's personal safety. The Espana Libre's column delegate was cut down by machine-gun fire after putting a Panzer on its back.

Madrid was nominally left in the hands of a defence Junta, from which the POUM had to be excluded on Rosenberg's orders — or there would be no Russian tanks. Caballero wrote instructions for Generals Miaja and Pozas, and put them in sealed envelopes marked with: "Do not open before 06:00 on 7<sup>th</sup> November." Miaja couldn't wait and opened his at 23:00 on the 6<sup>th</sup>, only to find he had been given the wrong envelope; Pozas was nowhere to be found. The convoy of vehicles had to pass the checkpoint at Tarancón, about forty kilometres out, controlled by an anarchist militiaman named Villanueva,<sup>29</sup> already a veteran of several battles, who had instructions to prevent anyone taking weapons or other essentials out of the capital. The bureaucrats were rudely told to return to their posts. Cipriano Mera was going the other way, finding the government under arrest in Tarancón, he phoned Val, who had to come down and persuade the militia to let them go; eventually they were allowed to proceed but disarmed and treated with derision. Among the detainees was General Pozas, so Miaja got his orders. The Mayor Pedro Rico was turned back however, and since he could neither show his face in the city again, nor pass the militia, he hid in the Mexican embassy where all the other refugees were fascists. They watched with glee as his friends struggled to stuff the terrified man into the boot of the car that he hoped would take him to safety.

The desertion of the capital by the political class may have been its salvation, reviving the spirit of July. Vicente Rojo Lluch, who was to become the Republican Chief of Staff, wrote the following:

"Along with the government went the pessimism, the apprehension, the discord and the defeatist attitude of certain selfish elites ... as well as — why not also say it? — The panic that hundreds of people could not overcome, even though they held positions of great responsibility. In Madrid, along with the expected victims there emerged the beginnings of a genuine unity of belief rooted in the people; that feared and insulted people. And this belief yielded an absolute, epic and anonymous selflessness, as well as truth ... The long, anguished night of defeat seemed

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<sup>29</sup> José Villanueva returned to defend Madrid, he died at Teruel.

to vanish with those who fled, and the light of a new dawn began to shine for those who deserved to triumph.

—Vicente Rojo: ‘Asi Fue la Defensa de Madrid’

A career soldier of a military family (and a conservative Catholic who throughout the conflict retained the admiration of Franco) General Rojo had no political point to make, his future depended only on getting the job done. In fact both Rojo and Miaja had belonged to the right-wing Spanish Military Union, which had conspired against the Republic, and could have easily ended up on the other side, instead they joined the Communist Party. I’m not one to dwell on the military mindset, but as they grind humanity in their mill they see it at its best and its worst. For the soldier, as for the engineer, a thing will either work or it won’t. The “feared and insulted people” were on it:

“Madrid, free of ministers, commissars and tourists, feels more confident in its struggle ... The people — the Madrid Working Class — has no need of these tourists who have left for Levant and Catalonia. Madrid, free of ministers, will be fascism’s tomb. Forward, militians! Long live Madrid without government! Long live the social revolution!”

—C.N.T. Madrid radio broadcast, quoted by Paz and others in various translations.

If Madrid was glad to see the back of the politicians, they were no more welcome in Valencia with their senseless drain on resources, and their meddling threatened operations on the Teruel front.

“For the women, for the children, for the aged and the wounded of Madrid: our homes and our bread are there for the asking. But for the cowards and deserters who drive around and show off their weapons: our disdain. Comrades, we must shun them and make their lives impossible!”

—C.N.T. Levante federation November 1936.

The nationalists had left the road to Valencia open in the expectation that the abandoned city would simply evacuate rather than fight; they were already planning their victory parades and their mass executions. Franco announced: “We have Madrid in our clutches. We dominate all the high ground. No defence is possible. If they had any inkling of military science they would not even attempt a pointless resistance.” The population knew what was in store for them if they lost, and nobody expected to survive, only to die fighting. The C.N.T. propagandist Eduardo de Guzman gives a breathtaking account of the first forty-eight hours of Madrid’s defence.

“Madrid’s defence is today in the workers’ hands alone. The government is on the road to Valencia. No one remains at the Ministry of War. Miaja has been issued with orders and invested with powers but, as yet, there is no telling whom he can rely on, nor what he can do. He stands ready to die at his post: but until tomorrow he will be able to do absolutely nothing. And tomorrow may well be too late. ...

... Throughout the night, the fighting is very hard. For the first time the advance of the fascist tanks is hesitant. For the first time, the Moorish cavalry is swept aside en bloc. For the first time, loot-hungry legionnaires know terror and panic. There are no battle-hardened enemies in the districts of Madrid. But steadfast at their posts, dying and killing, there are the men from the unions.

No general directs this battle. If any of the handful of military left behind at the Ministry of War had been asked who was in charge of the fighting, he would not have been able to answer. Defending Madrid are a few columns mauled and demoralised by the fallbacks, short of manpower and low on determination. It cannot be they are denying the Moorish hordes' control of the city today. Only the unions will have an answer to the question. Only the unions, the ateños and the slum districts know the provenance of these thousands of heroes. Only one man, Eduardo Val, held the reins of Madrid's defence in his hands through the night."

—Eduardo de Guzman: 'Madrid Rojo y Negro.'

Franco trumpeted the legend of his fifth column to undermine morale, while the Communists used it to undermine their political opponents.

"On November 6 and the night of November 7–8, 1936, when the fate of Madrid hung in the balance, about a thousand prisoners were taken from the Model Prison and massacred in Madrid and surrounding villages .... I believe, myself, that the orders came from the Comintern agents in Madrid because I know that the sinister Vittorio Vidali [alias Carlos Contreras in Spain, alias Enea Sormenti in the United States] spent the night in a prison briefly interrogating prisoners brought before him and, when he decided, as he almost always did, that they were fifth columnists, he would shoot them in the back of their heads with his revolver."

—Herbert L. Matthews (New York Times correspondent):  
'Half of Spain Died'

Most socialist historians, and even liberal-bourgeois ones such as Anthony Beevor, accept Koltsov's account that the XI International Brigade was deployed on the 8<sup>th</sup> November, Rojo has it otherwise:

"One can be sure that they'll say what they want, all those books that relate the event in those or similar terms, as well as the brilliant journalists who announced the city's imminent fall that day from their parapets in Madrid's hotels. Kleber and his men (who fought valiantly and efficiently some days later, along with the twenty or twenty-five thousand others who heroically defended the capital) were simply sunbathing somewhere in the Tajo or Tajuña valley, where they couldn't even hear an echo of the fighting."

—Vicente Rojo (*op. cit.*)

"At the beginning of the battle there was not on our front of Madrid a single International Brigade, nor even scattered Battalions. ... *The first of these units which was put at the disposition of the Defence Command, entered in the line on the 10<sup>th</sup>*, and precisely in the sector in which it was engaged, in spite of its energetic action, on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the enemy's Column 1 would reach the Manzanares and two days later would break through the front to penetrate the University City."

—(*ibid.*)

My italics.

"The enemy Column managed to sink its first echelon into the Manzanares on November 13, between the Los Franceses Bridge and the Hippodrome. It established a front of approximately

one thousand meters in length, although it did not cross the river. For its part, Column 4 moved in an eastward and northern direction, but without reaching the wall. The XI International Brigade fought brilliantly.”

—(*ibid.*)

The Fifth regiment took their positions on the 12<sup>th</sup>, alongside Mera’s militia, who were struggling to hold back the nationalists from the Manzanares River.

The situation becoming critical, Durruti was persuaded to reluctantly bring part of the column to the capital, the Soviet consul having promised them arms, so on the 12<sup>th</sup> November between one and two thousand<sup>30</sup> anarchosyndicalists were recalled from the Aragon front. Not to be outdone, the P.S.U.C. hastily assembled its Libertad López Tienda Column, with a view to diluting the anarchist influence. These were the first Catalan militia to reach Madrid on the 13<sup>th</sup> November, untrained and poorly armed but already parading in uniform with professional officers.

The Durruti Column met the arms shipment in Barcelona, transferring the crates from the vessel to railway cars over the night of the 13<sup>th</sup>; they took the train as far as Valencia but had to complete the journey by road as the tracks had been bombed. The recent infestation of bureaucrats filling the hotels and eating-places left the militia sitting in the street waiting for their transport. Durruti went ahead by air with Manzana, Yoldi and Oliver arriving on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The timing is important as it settles the buck-passing between anarchist and Marxist historians over responsibility for the breach of the front.

Again politics got in the way, the Catalans were supposed to be under a single command but the Communists refused to take orders from an anarchist, and the professionals from a militia. López Tienda’s raw recruits were dispersed by a fascist attack on the afternoon of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Anecdotally,<sup>31</sup> a group of Civil Guard attached to the P.S.U.C. crossed the Los Franceses bridge and switched sides, shortly afterwards the bridge was dynamited and at about 16:00 the fascists waded across the River. By the time the Durruti Column was in place at 02:00 on the 16<sup>th</sup>, the rebels had penetrated the University City area.

No one had eaten or slept for days but the counter-attack began at dawn. Another nasty surprise was in store; the rifles they had unloaded in Barcelona turned out to be obsolete and barely serviceable. Durruti telephoned De Santillan and told him to “shove them up [his] arse and send thirty-five thousand FAI grenades”.<sup>32</sup>

Hundreds of German bombers pounded the city, targeting all residential areas except for the wealthy Salamanca district. Little Russian planes called ‘Chatos’ engaged them and their Italian fighter escorts and shot some down. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, Germany and Italy formally recognized the

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<sup>30</sup> The figures vary wildly in different accounts; Abel Paz quotes 1400 and 1700 in the same book. Some have it much higher, it’s widely accepted, however, that only about 700 were still alive a week later. In a secret report to the N.K.V.D. Antonov-Ovseenko fumes that Durruti considered Madrid to be of purely political significance and was more interested in defending the anarchist enclave in Aragon. He called up unarmed reserves from Barcelona to replace his militia, who left their rifles behind, forcing the Russians to arm them, so the front would not be weakened.

<sup>31</sup> “Historia y Vida, No. 35. Francisco Hidalgo Madero, a professional officer who had been a member of the Column, responds to an article by Martínez Bande discussing the Libertad-López Tienda Column.”

—Abel Paz: ‘Durruti in the Spanish Revolution’, footnote.

<sup>32</sup> Manufactured in underground workshops in Catalonia, the ‘FAI grenade’ had no pin and the lever was held in place by a piece of tape. Foreign volunteers called them ‘impartial’ or ‘neutral’ grenades, Orwell hated the bloody things but the anarchists were used to them.

fascist government, everyone believed their entry into the capital was a foregone conclusion; the following day Germany signed its agreement with Japan, lest the liberal democracies get any ideas.

“Madrid is the first city in the civilized world to suffer an attack from the fascist barbarians. London, Paris, and Brussels should see, in Madrid’s destroyed houses, in its devastated women and children, in its museums and bookstores now reduced to piles of rubble, in its defenceless and abandoned population ... what their fate will be when the fascists go after them.”

—César Falcón, quoted by Vicente Rojo: (*op. cit.*)

The columns fought on independently, since no-one could leave their post, the junta had no chance of directing operations but was purely a conduit of information between the disparate fighting units. On the 19<sup>th</sup> November the highly experienced delegate José Mira, already wounded, wrote to Durruti in desperation that his unit had been without food or rest for seven days, Durruti replied that he hadn’t stopped either. He believed the fascists had virtually spent themselves in the attack and another night could make all the difference. Manzana and Yoldi were also injured, he was trying to get them all relieved, but the situation on the ground was fluid and required his constant attention. He had arranged to meet with Mera and Val in the evening to discuss militarisation, the creeping influence of the Russians, and unifying anarchist forces in the capital.

At 14:30 that afternoon Durruti was mortally wounded by a gunshot of unknown origin; I’ll leave the speculation to others.<sup>33</sup> It’s hard for anarchists to accept that the loss of one individual could derail a popular movement, but it certainly had a demoralising effect, even the republicans shat themselves. The Working Class doesn’t need leaders, but sometimes it needs guides, those who inspire others through exemplary behaviour. There are lessons to be learned however; the cult of personality arising from his life had already become a burden to him. When his wound was pronounced inoperable by the most senior surgeon available, the medical staff breathed a collective sigh of relief; no one wanted to take responsibility for Durruti’s survival.<sup>34</sup> In that terrible atmosphere of intrigue and paranoia the whole incident became shrouded in mystery and obfuscation. The eye witnesses’ accounts of the shooting do not agree even on who was actually present!

- the Astra model F, a knock-off broomhandle Mauser adopted by the civil guard in 1934. The bulky wooden holster doubled as a shoulder stock, converting it into a short carbine. It could be made to fire full automatic with a delaying mechanism in the grip that cut the cyclic rate from the natural 900 R.P.M. to a more comfortable 350. Contemporary references to “Mauser” pistols invariably denote Astras. Durruti had one, though on the day he carried the .45 Colt presented him by the French magazine *le Merle Blanc*.

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<sup>33</sup> However, the official Republican ‘sniper’s bullet’ explanation is untenable. The autopsy report described the bullet lodged in Durruti’s chest as “9mm Largo” (long); this is the common Spanish description of the pistol and submachine gun round usually called 9x23mm Bergmann-Bayard. Ballistically its performance was very slightly lower than the better known 9x18mm Parabellum (Luger) with an absolute maximum effective range of about 200 yards. The nationalist lines were about half a mile away. There were a number of weapons in the Spanish theatre chambered for this cartridge:

<sup>34</sup> Above all, anarchy requires honesty with oneself and others, and a readiness to assume responsibility as may be required.

- The Astra 400, standard sidearm of the Regular army, and manufactured by both sides during the civil war. Pictures of Manzanera clearly show this distinctive pistol on his belt.
- According to Antonio Bonillo, who was in the car ahead of Durruti's Packard, Manzanera carried a 'naranjero' submachine gun, a Spanish copy of the Bergmann MP28. Some accounts place this in Durruti's hands.

Paz put it thus: "Durruti, the anti-hero, had become a hero. Ultimately, Durruti the hero killed Durruti the man." (*Op. cit.*) In Goldman's glowing tribute, "the notorious terrorist", "this scourge of God" takes on a Christ-like aspect.<sup>35</sup> The figure of 'Our Durruti' was invoked by both sides in the war-versus-revolution split, quoting and misquoting at will to justify their respective agendas. A slogan, falsely attributed to him: "We renounce everything, except victory" was in fact coined by Izvestia's Ilya Ehrenburg.<sup>36</sup> Some of his closest associates had become apologists for the state, and his most militant comrades maligned as criminals (what else could they be?) So whose Durruti was he?

Even the professional liars of the Comintern dared not attack his reputation directly, so they came from behind. The people loved Durruti and must be made to love Stalin, so the two would be brought closer somehow, it was suggested that he was secretly sympathetic to the Party and was about to join when the fateful shot was fired. The ultimate insult came in April 1938 when Negrin's government posthumously conferred on him the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. At the time, the Communists were making Lieutenant Colonels of everyone and their uncle, they tried it on Durruti's partner Emilienne, and she told them to fuck off in no uncertain terms:

"When Durruti spoke of victory, he meant, without any possible doubt, the victory of the Popular Militias over the fascist hordes, since he rejected the idea of a military victory of a bourgeois republic that didn't lead to social transformation. I heard him say so many times: *"It wouldn't be worth dressing up like soldiers to be governed by the Republicans of 1931 again. We accept concessions, but we won't forget that we have to carry out the war and the revolution simultaneously."* Durruti never forgot his years as a hunted militant. The dramatic persecutions suffered by the CNT and FAI were etched in letters of blood in his memory. He didn't trust the Republican politicians in the slightest and refused to describe men like Azaña as anti-fascists. In a word, he believed that the Spanish bourgeoisie that supported the Republican cause would not miss the opportunity to unscrupulously undermine, even in the middle of war, the proletariat's revolutionary conquests. Regrettably, events show that he was right ..."

—Emilienne Morin: 'Nuestra Victoria',  
in 'Le Libertaire' 17<sup>th</sup> November 1938.

Durruti seems to have had the clearest vision of the way forward, advocating a guerrilla rather than a military campaign, something of which he had 20 years experience and which would have made better use of the limited resources available. He also steadfastly refused to compromise with bourgeois values, and held out strongly against joining the government and militarising the columns, whilst some of his comrades were so bewildered by the magnitude of the task at

<sup>35</sup> 'Durruti Is Dead, Yet Living' by Emma Goldman, 1936. The other epithets appeared in the Spanish press after the assassination of Cardinal Soldevilla.

<sup>36</sup> — Ilya Ehrenburg: 'Corresponsal en la Guerra Civil Española'. Júcar, Madrid, 1970, p. 24.

hand they shrank from their own principles. Above all he had absolute faith in the Working Class; it was not the rank and file but the self-appointed leadership of the CNT-FAI that tried to play its enemies at their own game; political representation is bullshit when attempted by people who actually believe in it, and anarchists make crap politicians. This is a lesson that must be repeated again and again.

Durruti many times articulated the view that if the war was not won swiftly, hierarchy would come in by the back door, through operational necessity and the bestiality of combat. There is nothing egalitarian about taking another's life, or in sending a comrade to a certain death, even as a willing volunteer, so the means would pervert the ends. Cipriano Mera, the bricklayer who in 1934 had ridiculed Garcia Oliver's proposal of a revolutionary army, was a meticulous planner whose anarchism, like Durruti's rested on personal responsibility and morality. He was highly critical of the government's abandonment of their capital, and of the political manoeuvres of the Communist Party. He had however, become preoccupied with the issue of discipline and found the pre-figurative ethos of the militias frustrating, he had been especially moved by the deaths of close comrades he considered avoidable.

"It was at that moment, after the loss of Aravaca and Pozuelo, on the outskirts of Madrid — that all my ideas about discipline and militarisation turned upside down. ... The spilling of my brothers' blood in battle made me change my opinion. I understood that in order to avoid a comprehensive defeat we had to build an army of our own; an army every bit as potent as the enemy's; a disciplined, capable army organised to defend the workers. From then on I never ceased to advise every combatant about the necessity of submitting to the new military regulations"

—Cipriano Mera, antifascist:  
quoted in 'C.N.T.' 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1937.

This is the conversation he proposed to have that evening; after Durruti's death he embraced militarisation and the remains of his column became the 14<sup>th</sup> division. He accepted the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, but always considered himself, first and foremost, a bricklayer.

Paz answers him:

"Cipriano Mera's arguments were untenable from all angles. An army like the enemy's could not possibly be conjured up. The enemy would only be destroyed by a distinct strategy: guerrilla operations, serious infiltration in the rearguard, the sowing of revolt in that same rearguard, and the destruction of bridges. In other words a 'scorched earth' policy. For this type of war, and for this type of warfare we had fighters who were superior to the enemy.

But the same could not be said about conventional warfare. The 'spilled blood of comrades' that Mera regretted seeing ran in rivers later on, because that was the inevitable result of the military tactics used by the Russian experts, the clearest examples of which were the battles of Teruel and the Ebro."

—Abel Paz: 'The story of the Iron Column'.

And what was it Bakunin had said about indulging men of genius? The same could be said for men of action, for had not an incorrigible old Nosotros gunman led them into government?

"I do not think that society ought to maltreat men of genius as it has done hitherto: but neither do I think it should indulge them too far, still less accord them any privileges or exclusive rights



whatsoever; and that for three reasons: first, because it would often mistake a charlatan for a man of genius; second, because, through such a system of privileges, it might transform into a charlatan even a real man of genius, demoralise him, and degrade him; and, finally, because it would establish a master over itself.”

—Mikhail Bakunin: ‘God and the State’.

The attack on Madrid abated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November, as Durruti’s funeral brought Barcelona to a standstill. Mera’s Construction Union alone had lost two thousand four hundred members. The use of air power against civilians on this scale would become a pillar of fascist<sup>37</sup> military practice. It had a negative propaganda effect and stiffened the resolve of the defenders; it certainly increased sympathy for the Republic overseas. But the Army of Africa were unused to street fighting and so were the Republican generals, the day belonged to the militia and the ordinary citizens of Madrid.

The visible presence of Russian armour in the battle for Madrid gave the Third Reich an excuse to increase its involvement and it established the Condor Legion for the purpose of testing its new hardware and rehearsing tactics for the European war. On the 28<sup>th</sup> November Franco added his signature to the agreement between Germany and Italy giving the latter control of the Mediterranean, Mussolini began drafting his blackshirts into the ‘Corps of Volunteer Troops’ with silly names — the ‘Black Arrows’, the ‘Black Flames’, ‘Black Feathers’ etc. From the 29<sup>th</sup> November to the 15<sup>th</sup> January two battles were fought over the Corunna road to the Northwest of the capital, pitting heavy German artillery and Junkers JU-52 bombers against T26s under Red Army General Pavlov (one of the few who wasn’t subsequently purged) the XII and XIV International Brigades, and Mera’s column. The fascists succeeded in cutting the road but failed to encircle the city; casualties were even at around fifteen thousand each, the Thälmann Battalion was hit especially hard, with only thirty-five survivors.

High on the politicians’ agenda was the restoration of property and commerce. As early as the 27<sup>th</sup> July, to hold off the British gunboats, Marianet had met with their consul and agreed that eighty-seven firms in which Britain expressed an interest would not be socialised. Workers in these industries had to be content with control committees integrated with the management, which smacked of corporatism. A collectivisation decree issued by the Generalitat in October appeared to endorse the expropriations but made all enterprises of fewer than 100 employees exempt unless owned by proven fascists. Money was still required for some purposes, sustaining the concepts of transaction and markets. The bureaucrats withheld credit from the industrial collectives, partially strangling the Catalan arms industry.

“There was not, therefore, true socialisation, but a workers’ neo-capitalism, a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our Syndicates.”

—Gaston Leval: ‘Collectives in the Spanish Revolution’.

Crucially, Caballero had given the Communist Party the ministry of agriculture. On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1936, by which time some three million Spaniards were working in agricultural collectives, the Ministry had issued a decree retrospectively formalising the confiscation of land from

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<sup>37</sup> Like all fascist innovations it would soon be adopted by the democracies. Klaus Barbie was the first to use

“natural persons or their spouses or to legal persons<sup>38</sup> that have intervened directly or indirectly in the insurrectional movement against the Republic.” The Communist paper Frente Rojo boasted that it had abolished “more than forty percent of private property in the countryside”. Nevertheless the decree prescribed complex conditions for collectivisation, and provided for former proprietors to apply for restitution of land held by ‘non-conforming’ collectives. It amounted to nationalisation of land that had already been expropriated by rural workers, over which the State would conditionally grant them usufruct. Such rights, and government credit of course, would then be in the gift of the minister, Vicente Uribe, who sat on the Politburo of the P.C.E.

As Marxist-Leninist advocates of social revolution, the POUM found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time; their defiance of Stalin made them ‘Trotskyist’ by default. But since they were not anarcho-sindicalists they had to share the U.G.T. with the Catalan Socialist and Communist parties, now unified into the P.S.U.C. plus an ever-increasing influx of dispossessed bourgeoisie. Clearly there could be no room for two authoritarian Marxist groupings; this made their elimination from the union and Catalan government inevitable. To this end, in December the Stalinists provoked a crisis in the Generalitat. The Confederals interpreted this as a domestic squabble between Marxists rather than part of a carefully-planned takeover. They ought to have read Pravda:

“As for Catalonia, the purging of the Trotskyists and the anarcho-sindicalists has begun; it will be conducted with the same energy with which it was conducted in the U.S.S.R.”

—Pravda: December 16, 1936.

Camillo Berneri quoted the above in his ‘Open letter to comrade Federica Montseny’ which appeared in ‘Guerra di Classe’ No. 12, on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1937.

As a practical solution they proposed that power be shared between the unions, so from the 15<sup>th</sup> December Catalonia was run by the U.G.T., C.N.T. and Rabassaires. Of the political parties only the Esquerra remained in the Generalitat in recognition of its majority in the body elected before the war. This left the POUM without representation being only a minority within the socialist union, so their leader Andreu Nin lost his place as Justice Minister. Communists Rafael Vidiella and Joan Comorera remained, only now representing their union rather than their party.

The Catalan U.G.T. was another blind spot; it would have been hard for anarcho-sindicalists to conceive of a trade union being anything but the sum of its members, but the Communists saw it as an arena for party politics, as they had in Russia. By the end of 1936 it had grown considerably, thanks to the affiliation of landlords, proprietors and owners’ unions; all those desperate to legitimise their activities by holding a union card were eagerly recruited. On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1937, the Socialist paper ‘Adelante’ would observe:

‘Let us cite one instance as an example. Under the auspices of the aforementioned party [P.S.U.C.] a trade union section entitled “Gremi d’Entitats de Petits Comerciants i Industrials” (GEPCI — Guild of Small Businessmen’s and Industrialists’ Associations) affiliated to the UGT. Workers unionised in the UGT since before last 19 July now found themselves within the ranks of the same union organisation as the people who were their bosses and who denied them very fair demands in strikes which we all of us can recall.’

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electricity to torture the French resistance, the French subsequently used it on the Algerians, but I’m getting ahead of myself...

<sup>38</sup> I take this to mean corporate entities, trusts and estates.

In stark contrast to their behaviour at home, the Stalinists backed individualist peasants who opposed collectivisation. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January the Catalan U.G.T. hosted a landworkers' conference at which the speakers were not peasants, but P.S.U.C. activists. The same day, armed U.G.T. smallholders forcibly expelled Confederal personnel from the village of La Fatarella, the latter's call for assistance to Barcelona sparked a fifth column scare, and the smallholders were massacred by control patrols and assault guards.

Elsewhere, in Aragon and Levant, accommodation had been reached whereby individualists had been allowed to keep as much land as they could cultivate by their own efforts. An agreed share of their produce would secure the services of the collective and a voice at the assemblies. Such arrangements were formalised and codified in great detail at the constitutive conference of the Federation of Collectives of Aragon at Caspe in February. An agreement drawn up by the Catalan peasant federations (C.N.T. and Rabassaires) contained such clauses as:

5. Should a holding be located in the midst of collectivised lands, it will have to be exchanged with another plot, but this exchange must work to the advantage of the individual obliged to change his holding. This swap can only be effected if the said plot represents an impediment to the collective. Should there be more than one instance in the same amalgam of collectivised lands then, should no agreement be forthcoming, the dispute shall be referred to the liaison committee of the three organisations.

6. In other instances, even though amalgamation of holdings may be advisable, exchanges are to be made freely without recourse to coercion."

When the U.G.T. was invited into the alliance, it announced it would not accept collectivisation.

The shuffle of roles put the Stalinists in charge of both internal security and food supply. Hitherto the latter had been managed by the supply committees through the Food and Transport Workers' unions, on the basis of need. Lots of stuff was simply given away, on production of a ration book; or, in the workplace, a union card. Joan Fabregas, the C.N.T.'s food councillor who had drafted the collectivisation decree also lost his place, so its implementation fell to Comorera, who would use it as a stick to beat the district committees. Fabregas had fought for a monopoly on foreign trade, a sensible enough precaution in wartime, but the Communists advocated free markets with access based on ability to pay. A dozen Catalan wholesalers bid against each other on the Paris grain market, driving up prices. Shortages lead to bread rationing, hoarding and profiteering. The P.S.U.C. had manoeuvred itself alongside the Catalan bourgeoisie, to confront the Working Class, setting the scene for the May events and the invasion of Aragon.

Since August 1936, Control Patrols had been charged with the maintenance of 'revolutionary order' in Catalonia; confederals accounted for half the personnel, but only four of the eleven section delegates,<sup>39</sup> the remainder being Communist and Esquerra. These had been created by the C.C.A.M.C. in the early days to regularise reprisals and curb the zeal of the Catalan proletariat, each of whom had a thousand historic injustices to avenge. They were based on the requisition patrols plus members from anarchist groups and political parties. These bodies were fairly autonomous and the extent to which they pursued personal political agendas remains a matter of controversy. The CNT-FAI investigations department established courts and prisons to settle its

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<sup>39</sup> By tradition anarchists avoided supervisory posts; rank and influence were only to be scorned and their disdain

scores with right-wingers and old Libres gunmen; it was responsible only to the Regional Committee. This not only set a dangerous precedent, for the other parties followed suit, but drove such elements into the arms of the Stalinists.

The defence committees remained in operation and were ill-disposed to the interests of the political parties, which hindered the higher committees in their futile struggle to keep everyone on the same side. It was considered that they had outlived their usefulness, so attempts were made to disarm them and bring them under control of the unions. The P.S.U.C., U.G.T. and Esquerra went to work on the old law enforcement professionals, the Civil and Assault Guards, with a view to creating a police force that would serve the politicians rather than the Working Class, as it does everywhere else. A Communist chief of police, Rodriguez Salas was appointed and began stirring it up with a broad stick. The bodies of fascist rebels killed in the July uprising were exhumed and re-interred with great ceremony, to the glee of the nationalist media.

Now Stalin addressed Comrade Caballero in person, in a letter signed also by his Prime Minister Molotov and Defence Minister Voroshnikov. The preamble is a lot of guff about how historical conditions in Spain are propitious for a parliamentary route to socialism. He accedes to Caballero's requests for military specialists and promises that these will know their place and play a consultative role only. Then he lays down his terms:

"First, the peasants have to be taken into consideration, as they make up a majority of the population in an agricultural country like Spain. Agrarian and fiscal reforms need to be devised that correspond to their interests. It is important to recruit the peasants to the army and create guerrilla detachments that will fight the fascists in their rearguard. Decrees favourable to the peasantry will facilitate recruitment.

Second, the small and medium bourgeoisie have to be attracted to the government. If that isn't possible, they must be neutralized. Toward that end, the bourgeoisie must be protected against any property confiscations and assured freedom of commerce, to whatever degree possible.

Third, leaders of the Republican parties must not be rejected but rather encouraged to work with the government. It is necessary to guarantee the support of Manuel Azaña and his group and to do everything possible to help them overcome their hesitations. These measures are necessary to prevent Spain's allies from considering it a communist Republic.

Fourth, the Spanish government should inform the press that it will not permit damage to property and the legitimate interests of foreigners living in Spain who are citizens of countries that do not aid the rebels."

—Josef Stalin, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1936.

Caballero was in a cleft stick; making a fuss about a Communist takeover would play into the hands of nationalist supporters overseas, especially Britain, and guarantee that Spain would get no help from either side, so he had no choice but to play along with the grand camouflage of the Popular Front. The Communists, on Stalin's instructions, never held more than two ministries in the government, but they penetrated every level of society, especially the military, and took over the bureaucracy as fast as it was being re-built. They operated discreetly alongside their rivals, playing one against another, until they were in a position to shove them aside. The P.C.E. acquired its own parallel police, prisons and dungeons, and acted without consulting either the Valencia government or the Generalitat, the Russian habit of casually torturing and assassinating enemies

in the 'Cheka' had been imported. The socialist and anarchist press reported that in Murcia their own people were being tortured as well as suspected fascists.

An interesting conversation took place in the Kremlin on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1937 between Marcelino Pascua, Spain's ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Stalin, Voroshilov, and Molotov. Stalin announced his decision to recall his top diplomats Rosenberg and Antonov-Ovseenko to Moscow. (He intended to shoot them but probably left that bit out). Pascua proposed a treaty of friendship with the U.S.S.R. but Stalin was not keen:

"On the contrary. Perhaps it would be useful to declare that there are no special ties between the USSR and Spain. Yes, sympathy between the masses, but no secret treaty.... There are those in the English government who will come out in favour of aid if the USSR backs off.... Let me stress that [Spain] must distance herself somewhat from the USSR in order to obtain aid from England..."

—J. Stalin quoted by M. Pascua.

Rosenberg's successor only lasted until May,<sup>40</sup> by which time the anarchists were out of the cabinet and Caballero had been replaced by Juan Negrin, the finance minister who had handed Spain's treasury to Russia. To the outside world this represented a shift to the right, away from Marxism-Leninism and therefore the U.S.S.R. but in all aspects Dr. Negrin was Stalin's poodle, there would be no further need of diplomatic relations once Soviet agents were embedded throughout the Spanish state.

At the beginning of 1937, according to the Communist education minister Jesus Hernandez, the British and French had entered into secret talks with Germany and Italy.

"Hernandez insisted that it [the Anglo-French proposition] consisted of possible overtures to Hitler and Mussolini that they withdraw their support from Franco and suggest to him that he make his peace with the Republic, in exchange for Spain possibly agreeing to at least joint control with the Italians over Spanish Morocco and return of the former German colony of Cameroons to the Reich. The British and French made this proposal to Luis Araquistain, Spanish ambassador to France and a close personal and political associate of Largo Caballero, who passed it on to the prime minister. According to Hernandez, Largo Caballero tentatively accepted the idea, if it could be brought to fruition"

—Robert J. Alexander:

'The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War, Volume 2'

That would have been a catastrophe for Stalin; an end to the war with the social revolution still underway, several dissident Marxist groups openly defying his authority, and a basis for peace in the Mediterranean that might leave the Axis free to attack Russia without threatening the interests of the bourgeois democracies.

At the same time an assembly of the confederal columns discussed militarisation; they faced a stark choice: they could not remain in the field otherwise, as their support mechanism the C.N.T., was for the first time incorporated into the state, with its bourgeois and Soviet interests. They were split between those who, like their leadership believed in compromise for the sake of anti-fascist unity, and those who maintained, as Durruti had, that only social revolution could truly

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for the policing function left another gap to be filled by the nefarious.

<sup>40</sup> Yeah, he was shot as well.

defeat fascism. Nevertheless the dissolution of the militia would leave the revolution defenceless and returning militians were apt to be conscripted anyway. Some anarchists had already joined Marxist columns because these were better supplied, and passed the war at the front unaware of the bitter power struggle going on behind their backs. Libertarian bodies and socialised production were as much at threat from bourgeois-Stalinist elements in the rear as from the nationalists, so perhaps a Revolutionary Army was not such a bad idea after all. The Durruti Column was so deeply divided on the issue it sent Manzana with a commission to the Regional Committee, the upshot of which was that each militian would have a fortnight to make up their mind. Once militarisation had been accepted as a *fait accompli*, it was advisable to proceed as fast as possible to keep the columns together. The Communists' instructions were to disperse the anarchists and leftists in mixed brigades with new officers, but Caballero had stopped listening, and was beginning to play his old enemies against his fair-weather friends.

The fall of Malaga to Italy on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1937 gave the dictator his excuse to unseat Caballero. Malaga suffered from the same government prejudice as Catalonia, agriculture on the coastal strip was mostly collectivised and the city had been held by Confederal militia, only three-quarters of whom were armed; they had sixteen artillery pieces in total. The government's military representative was Communist fellow-traveller Colonel Villalba, whose incompetence on the Huesca front had inflicted significant losses on the Durruti Column. Weeks of fascist build-up in the surrounding countryside had been ignored. Mussolini's Blackshirts, nine mechanised battalions worth, descended from the hills to the North and West in little turretless tanks and armoured cars. They were accompanied by thousands of African legionnaires and Carlist Requetés, supported by a hundred aircraft, three Spanish cruisers and the German battleship Admiral Graf Spee. The city had to be evacuated; some ten thousand prisoners were executed while four thousand refugees died on the hundred and fifty mile march to Almeria, simultaneously bombarded from land, sea and air. A nationalist officer wrote:

"During the first week, when no-one could enter Malaga, four thousand were shot. They were shot down in groups by machine-guns on the Playa del Palo. Later on, courts martial were set up. At dizzying speed, people were tried — if that is the right word — in groups of fifty to seventy. In this fashion, by the third month of Malaga's liberation ten thousand people had perished."

—Antonio Bahamonde y Sanchez de Castro:  
'Un Ano de Queipo: Memorias de un Nacionalista'

The reprisals continued for years, in August 1944 the death toll stood at twenty thousand as reported by the nationalist administration to the British consul. I could speculate that the liberal democracies' indifference to the systematic extermination of non-combatants may have encouraged the Nazis to press ahead with their own genocide; it certainly did nothing to put them off.

The Communists claimed the defeat was due to treachery, and they may well have been right.<sup>41</sup> Villalba was arrested but swiftly released; the under-secretary of war, General Asensio, one of the

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<sup>41</sup> Was Villalba a 'fifth columnist' who regretted getting stuck on the republican side? He was allowed to return to Spain after the war, and claim a Colonel's pension; had he ever been of any use to the Republic he would undoubtedly have been shot. He seriously undermined the Aragon front from the start, when he prevailed on the anarchists to delay the assault on Zaragoza until it was too late. Did he sacrifice Malaga on Franco's or Stalin's orders? Or was he just an arsehole?

few who had failed to join the party, was variously accused of incompetence and duplicity, and Caballero had defended him. He succumbed to the pressure, but his replacement was a left-wing socialist.

The Nationalists then sought to cut the road from Madrid to Valencia, which required skirting the south of the city and crossing the valley of the Jarama River. The action was intended to coincide with an attack on Guadalajara by the Italians but they weren't ready so Franco went ahead anyway. Beginning on the 5<sup>th</sup> February the Army of Africa with a German armoured company surprised and overran Republican forces on the West bank; these defended their positions to the death, but by the 8<sup>th</sup>, the Western heights were in fascist hands. The river crossing on the 11<sup>th</sup> was led by Moroccan commandos who killed the sentries, immediately followed by cavalry that engaged the XIV International Brigade. Another column crossed the Arganda Bridge, which failed to collapse when its charges were detonated, but was halted by the Garibaldi Battalion of the XII I.B. German and Russian aircraft clashed overhead, the Russians retaining control.

The Eastern side was reinforced by the recently formed XV I.B. of British, Irish, Francophone and Balkan volunteers. The British Battalion went into action here for the first time. Things didn't get off to an auspicious start; their commander Wilf McCartney was accidentally shot by the Brigade Commissar Peter Kerrigan (the Comintern's British delegate) before they left their base at Madrigueras. McCartney was invalided out so Tom Wintringham took over. The first deployment of the XV was a cock-up; they were poorly equipped, had no maps and had not been told the enemy had already crossed the river, so they came under fire as soon as they began to descend the valley. The machine-gun company found it had been given the wrong ammunition. The truck carrying the replacement batch broke down, and when it arrived, the cartridges had to be belted by hand. The ridge of land that became known as 'suicide hill' was continuously swept with fascist machine gun fire, it was held for hours against terrific odds by one of the three infantry companies, led by I.R.A. veteran Kit Conway, who died there.

"Reaching the crest of the hills overlooking the valley and the river, the three companies of the Battalion met the full force of the Fascist advance. Up the slopes long lines of Moors and Foreign Legionnaires surged forward under cover of artillery and machine gun fire, threatening to sweep all before them. No one in his senses could have conceived that this line of riflemen could hold up that onslaught for more than a few minutes. And behind them? Nothing. A clear field down to Arganda, Morata and the Madrid road.

But men who had come hundreds of miles to fight, sustained by an understanding of the cause for which they are fighting, do not act in the way prescribed by the military textbooks. Rapidly deploying in open formation, the Battalion went into the attack against the advancing Moors. The Fascist troops faltered, then hastily dropped down to cover. Only the sheer audacity of this handful of men could have achieved this. Had the Fascist officers been aware of the true position on our side, they would have overwhelmed the Battalion by sheer superiority of arms and numbers."

—George Leeson, antifascist: 'Spain Today, February 1947.

The ridge was eventually abandoned, but as luck would have it, just as the fascists came over the top the machine-gunners managed to get re-supplied and mowed them all down. The following day's chaotic infantry retreat left the machine-gun company exposed and most were captured. Forty infantrymen then charged the position, of whom six survived. On the third day fascist

tanks pushed the line back to the road, it was 'shit or bust'. Frank Ryan and Jock Cunningham gathered the survivors to counter attack, leading them in a chorus of the 'Internationale':

"Some were still straggling down the slopes from what had been up to an hour ago, the front line. And now, there was no line, nothing between the Madrid road and the Fascists but disorganised groups, of weary, war-wrecked men. After three days of terrific struggle, the superior numbers, the superior armament of the Fascists had routed them. All, as they came back, had similar stories to tell: of comrades dead, of conditions that were more than flesh and blood could stand, of weariness they found hard to resist.

I recognised the young Commissar of the Spanish Company. His hand bloody where a bullet had grazed the palm, he was fumbling nevertheless with his automatic, in turn threatening and pleading with his men. I got Manuel to calm him, and to tell him we would rally everyone in a moment. As I walked along the road to see how many men we had, I found myself deciding that we should go back up the line of the road to San Martín de la Vega, and take the Moors on their left flank. Groups were lying about on the roadside, hungrily eating oranges that had been thrown to them by a passing lorry. This was no time to sort them into units. I noted with satisfaction that some had brought down spare rifles. I found my eyes straying always to the hills we had vacated. I hitched a rifle to my shoulder.

They stumbled to their feet. No time for barrack-square drill. One line of four. 'Fall in behind us.' A few were still on the grass bank beside the road, adjusting helmets and rifles. 'Hurry up!' came the cry from the ranks. Up the road towards the Cook-House I saw Jock Cunningham assembling another crowd. We hurried up, joined forces. Together we two marched at the head. Whatever popular writers may say, neither your Briton nor your Irishman is an exuberant type. Demonstrativeness is not his dominating trait. The crowd behind us was marching silently. The thoughts in their minds could not be inspiring ones. I remembered a trick of the old days when we were holding banned demonstrations. I jerked my head back: 'Sing up, ye sons o' guns!'

—Frank Ryan: 'The Book of the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade' 1938.

The one hundred and forty volunteers who marched back up the road to suicide hill did not all speak the same language, but everyone knew the tune; to compensate for their lack of numbers they engaged the enemy with a high rate of fire. Evidently the Fascists had not expected to see the routed Brigaders again, and presuming them to be reinforcements, fell back. The breach in the front was filled overnight and did not move for two years. To their right the Dimitrov and Thälmann Battalions held off the frontal assault on their own positions.

There were several costly counter attacks that failed to shift the Nationalist lines significantly, Lister's fifth regiment advancing across open ground in broad daylight took fifty percent casualties, the North American and Irish Abraham Lincoln Battalion fared no better under similar conditions, their first engagement immortalised in the last words of poet Charlie Donnelly: "Even the olives are bleeding". Jarama seriously undermined the morale of the International Brigades; they were used as expendable shock troops by inexperienced Communist generals who wanted propaganda victories. A month of bloodshed left both sides entrenched in a stalemate reminiscent of the Western front.

It's fair to say the republic suffered from a lack of military experience, the Spanish metropolitan army had been little more than a dining club, only those officers who had been to Africa had ever

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<sup>42</sup> To the extent that Franco believed they were receiving training from the French armed forces.



seen combat, or even been on manoeuvres. Their tactics were from old French textbooks<sup>42</sup> or gleaned from the First World War, to which they had been spectators. The Russian officers were mostly young and equally untested, as the Red Army was being purged. Their authoritarian culture stifled initiative and they were under strict instructions not to risk capture. The best of the I.B.s were those like the Irish, with recent battle experience, or veterans of the Great War.

Flushed with the carnage at Malaga, Mussolini planned a showcase for fascist Italy's martial prowess; sending his Blackshirts to cut off Madrid to the North East at Guadalajara. Instead they took such a shafting as to acquire a reputation for military incompetence and retreat that outlived his regime. Instrumental in their downfall was the Garibaldi battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> I.B., exiled Italian antifascists with a score to settle. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March the motorised infantry swarmed into the pass in their fleet of little tankettes. With about five to one numerical superiority they initially made rapid progress but were slowed by bad weather and boggy ground. The vehicles began to get stuck and their air support was grounded whilst the Republican air force benefitted from the concrete runway at Albacete. The 14<sup>th</sup> division led by the Madrid bricklayer Cipriano Mera counterattacked. The rout at Guadalajara guaranteed Mussolini's continued support for Franco, to save face, it also led to the latter rescinding Blackshirt military autonomy and caused observers to re-think their strategy regarding mechanised infantry. At the same time, in their capacity as members of the non-intervention committee, Italian and German navies blockaded the Mediterranean coast; the only supply route left to the Republic was across the Pyrenees, and the French were all over that.

The Iron Column was the last to accept militarisation, eventually voting to stay and fight together. The following is an excerpt from an essay written in March 1937 by a volunteer whose name I have been unable to discover. A former soldier who spent eleven years in jail for killing a village tyrant before the anarchists set him free, he speaks of the hatred bred in the barracks, of cruelty, learning to read and finding love in prison, the beauty of the sierra, the limits of pain, and his new-found libertarian dream for which he is ready to suffer and die. Only one who has experienced the depths of degradation, he believes, can truly appreciate the value of freedom.

"Many prisoners who had suffered as I had from bad treatment received since birth, were released with me. Some of them, once on the street, went their own way. Others like myself, joined our liberators, who treated us like friends and loved us like brothers. With them we gradually formed the Iron Column, with them, at a mounting tempo, we stormed barracks and disarmed ferocious Civil Guards; and with them we rudely drove the fascists to the peaks of the Sierra, where they are now held. Accustomed to taking whatever we needed, we seized provisions and guns from the fascists as we drove them back. For a time we fed ourselves on offerings from the peasants, and we armed ourselves, not with weapons extended to us in gift, but with what we wrested from the insurgents with our bare hands. The rifle that I hold and caress, which accompanies me since the day that I forsook the prison, is mine; it belongs to me. I stripped it like a man from the hands of its former owner, and in the same manner was obtained almost every other rifle held and owned by my comrades. ...

... Nobody, I guarantee it, nobody could have behaved more properly towards the helpless and needy, towards those who had been robbed and persecuted all their lives, than us, the uncontrollables, outlaws and escaped convicts. Nobody, nobody — I challenge anyone to prove otherwise — has been more affectionate and obliging with children, women and old people; nobody absolutely nobody can reproach this column — which alone, unaided and even obstructed has been in the front lines from the very beginning — with a lack of solidarity, for being arbitrary, for

cowardliness or laxness in battle, or for hostility towards the peasants, or for not being revolutionary enough, because boldness and bravery have been our standard, magnanimity toward the vanquished our law, cordiality towards brothers and sisters our motto and goodness and respect the underlying framework of our lives. ...

... The Column, our Column, must not be dissolved. The homogeneity that it has demonstrated on every occasion has been admirable — I am speaking for ourselves only, comrades — the sentiment of comradeship among our members will be considered a shining example in the history of the Spanish Revolution; the bravery displayed over the course of a hundred engagements may perhaps be equalled in this struggle of heroes, but it will never be surpassed. From the very first day we were friends; more than that, we were comrades and brothers. To disband, to go off in all directions, to no longer see one another, and not to have, as up until now, the impulse to fight and win, all this is impossible. The Column, that Iron Column which caused the bourgeoisie and the fascists to tremble from Valencia to Teruel must not be dissolved, it must continue to the end.”

—‘A Day Mournful and Overcast’.

By an ‘uncontrollable’ from the Iron Column.

I find the testimony of this anonymous warrior especially inspiring; his short life has spanned heaven and hell beyond the imaginings of mythology. He goes into battle, sober and conscious, subordinating his right to exist to that of his freely chosen group; his ferocious individuality is expressed through solidarity, love and comradeship. This is humanity at its highest level. Men and women such as these could have dispensed with fascism as easily as taking a loose crap, had they not been thwarted at every turn by those with their own petty agendas.

“The journalists who sneered at the militia system scarcely remember that the militias had to hold the line while the Popular Army was trained in the rear. And it is a tribute to the strength of the revolutionary discipline that the militias stayed in the field at all. For until about June 1937 there was nothing to keep them, except class loyalty.”

—George Orwell: ‘Homage to Catalonia’.

“The café military strategists who joked at the beginning of the war about the indiscipline and ineptitude of the popular militia have at their disposal striking evidence of the tactical and strategic blunders committed by the general staff once the army was militarised. Operations leading to the division of the Mediterranean sector and later the defeat of Catalonia were the work of the loyalist high command. It planned the offensives, the battles of attrition that only wasted its own soldiers and played into the hands of the enemy.”

—Jose Peirats Valls: ‘Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution’.

The Iron Column had hoped that they could preserve their identity by simply changing their name and calling their delegates ‘officers’; reportedly a consignment of stripes arrived and each delegate put as many on his sleeve as he wished. One of the consequences of militarisation was that women were no longer permitted to be combatants. That question had been settled early on, when an assembly voted that any woman “who brought her rifle with her” — in other words, came to fight — would be welcome. Another vital revolutionary gain had been surrendered, but

a new anarchist grouping was emerging to defend the social revolution. The following statement had appeared in the paper 'Acracia' of Lerida on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January:

"On behalf of the Durruti Column, the following units... the no. 4 Gelsa detachment, the 'Accion y Alegria' Group, the International Group, the artillery batteries, the machine-gunner sections and other centuries..."

"To the comrades, to the confederal columns' protesting at militarisation and offering a specific structure acceptable to the fighting men. They claim to speak 'On behalf of every one of the centuries of the Durruti Column'... 'Apparently the government is making the provision of equipment conditional upon our militarisation... According to what the committees themselves say, they cannot give us any assurances that the Madrid government will supply us with the equipment even if we do militarise. That being the case, the trespass against our principles would be rewarded with nothing more than an empty promise.'

Reprinted in 'El Amigo del Pueblo',<sup>43</sup> no. 5, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1937.

The Gelsa section of the Durruti column, stationed on the outskirts of Zaragoza, voted to return to Barcelona bringing their weapons with them; they began to call themselves the Friends of Durruti in recognition of their common origin. The group was announced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March and formally launched on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Founder members included the journalist Jaime Balius,<sup>44</sup> Francisco Carreno of the Durruti Column War Committee, Francisco Pellicer of the Iron Column and former Nosotros member Pablo Ruiz. Membership of the group was open to Confederals only, and swelled to about five thousand before the May events. According to Guillamon, a number of U.G.T. activists switched unions in order to join the Friends. On the 4<sup>th</sup> march, the Catalan ministry of internal security announced its intention to abolish the Control Patrols. The following day, some P.S.U.C. members requisitioned ten armoured cars from the factory using a forged document; they were traced to the Voroshlikov barracks. In the second half of March the Barcelona defence committees embarked once again on a programme of revolutionary preparedness, drawing up meticulous street-by-street plans for resisting a military coup, this time by the republican government and possibly their own National Committee.

The P.S.U.C. decided it would like to move its Carlos Marx column from Aragon to the centre, further isolating its enemies. The Catalan defence minister Francisco Isgleas opposed the move and a vigorous campaign commenced against him, leading to his resignation on principle. The Communist press attributed the lack of progress on the Aragon front to the idleness and indiscipline of anarchists and accused the POUM of treason; but they still had no ammunition, and Stalin had decreed that none was to be landed in Barcelona.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> April Federica Montseny addressed a rally in the Monumental bullring in Barcelona, to be greeted with placards demanding the release of antifascist prisoners, including the column delegate Maroto;<sup>45</sup> she was heckled with chants of "to hell with politics, to hell with government". The following day, the Barcelona FAI held a plenum, with delegates from

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<sup>43</sup> Organ of the 'Friends of Durruti' group.

<sup>44</sup> For someone who expressed his views in such a forthright manner, Balius has been much misunderstood and misrepresented. A former insurrectionary Catalanist, he had gravitated through Marxism to anarchism and joined the FAI in 1932, he belonged to the same affinity group as Ruiz and Pellicer. From July 1936 he wrote many articles criticising political collaboration.

<sup>45</sup> Francisco Maroto had been accused of treason by the Governor of Almeria, Gabriel Moron. Maroto's column had conducted reconnaissance missions into the enemy city of Granada, although Maroto denied entering the city himself. The National Committee stated: "If Maroto entered Granada, it is because he was more skilled than Moron, 'the hero of Almeria'." Maroto's death sentence was commuted. In 1939 he was shot by the fascists.

the defence committees and Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Durruti being represented by Pablo Ruiz. Speakers lamented the failure of their representatives in the Generalitat to stem one counter-revolutionary edict after another, to prevent molestation of confederals and censorship of the anarchist press. In under a year they had been put back to square one, trying to fight a professional army whilst being disarmed and persecuted by a bitterly divided government that feared revolution more than fascism. The meeting voted to withdraw from the Generalitat and push on with socialisation of production.

On the fifth anniversary of the Republic the Friends published a pamphlet dissociating itself from the celebrations of the 14<sup>th</sup> April, which it saw as an attempt to play down the significance of July 1936. It called for “free unions and municipalities to take charge of the economic and social life of the Peninsula” and denounced politicians with no constituency in the workplace, especially Companys.

Meanwhile the Germans had prevailed on Franco to turn his attention away from Madrid to the semi-autonomous Basque region in the North, like the Soviets, they wanted to prolong the war, they also wanted coal and iron ore in return for their investment. The anti-civilian Mola plan was put into practice again on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1937, market day. The Luftwaffe’s Condor Legion bombed the 14<sup>th</sup> Century wooden town of Guernica flat in an afternoon. In addition to thousand-pound high explosive bombs the Nazis dropped a great many anti-personnel and incendiary devices, and their fighter escorts machine-gunned the escaping populace. The whole thing was denied by the nationalists, and might have gone unreported but for the Times correspondent George Steer. The fascists and their friends in London such as Bolin and Jerrold claimed the town had been burned by the retreating Basque army, highly improbable given that Guernica was the historic capital of Basque nationalism and culture. Steer was able to produce three bomb cases stamped with the German eagle. The massacre inspired Picasso’s eponymous mural and the woodcut of Heinz Kiwitz, a German antifascist who joined the International Brigades in 1938 and went missing in action at the Battle of the Ebro.

The tension in Catalonia erupted in May, exploding the myth of the anti-fascist front, and exposing the divisions in CNT-FAI. On April 24<sup>th</sup>, an attempt was made on the life of Rodriguez Salas, the Communist police chief. The following day Roldan Cortada, a treintista who had left the Confederation for the P.S.U.C.<sup>46</sup> was shot dead in a Working Class district. Although his killer was never identified the finger of suspicion pointed at his former comrades, leading to a spate of raids and arrests by the already unpopular Salas.

Clashes between anarchists and Communists over control of the French border spread along the whole frontier when the mayor of Puigcerda, Antonio Martin, and three of his comrades were killed by Negrin’s Carabineri. Confederal reinforcements arrived from Lerida, Aragon and Seo de Urgel. The crisis was only ended by the Catalan Regional Committee ceding the town to the central government. Posters appeared around Barcelona declaring:

**Friends of Durruti Group. To the Working Class:**

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<sup>46</sup> In fact many of the Communist leaders who had come from the Spanish workers’ movement were former anarchists, they had always been left alone.

1. Immediate establishment of a Revolutionary Junta made up of workers of city and countryside and of combatants.
1. Family wage. Ration cards. Trade union direction of the economy and supervision of distribution.
1. Liquidation of the counterrevolution.
1. Creation of a revolutionary army.
1. Absolute Working Class control of public order.
1. Steadfast opposition to any armistice.
1. Proletarian justice.
1. Abolition of personnel changes.

Attention, workers: our group is opposed to the continued advance of the counterrevolution. The public order decrees sponsored by Aiguade are not to be heeded. We insist upon the release of Maroto and other comrades detained.

**All power to the Working Class. All economic power to the unions. Rather than the Generalidad, a Revolutionary Junta!**

The word 'Junta' has been problematic, and figured in subsequent allegations of Bolshevism, but the proposal was for an elected body of union members, not far from the National Defence Council for which the National Committee had pressed. Nevertheless the POUM were in agreement; on 1<sup>st</sup> May Juan Andrade wrote in *La Batalla*:

"For instance, the 'Friends of Durruti' have framed their program points in posters in every street in Barcelona. We are absolutely in agreement with the watchwords that the 'Friends of Durruti' have issued with regard to the current situation. This is a program we accept, and on the basis of which we are ready to come to whatever agreements they may put to us. There are two items in those watchwords which are also fundamental for us. All Power to the Working Class and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of proletarian Power."

—Juan Andrade: 'La revolucion Espanola dia a dia.'  
Barcelona, 1979.

The Generalitat prohibited the customary celebrations of International Workers' Day, fearing a bloodbath. In Valencia, where the Caballero faction still dominated the U.G.T. the unions held a joint Mayday rally. The following day the Friends hosted a public meeting at the Goya theatre in Barcelona, warning in the light of recent occurrences, that an attack on the workers was imminent. The May events are usually treated by historians as a footnote to the Spanish Civil war, and by liberals as a bizarre fratricidal spat between left-wing extremists. In fact they go to the heart of what the Spanish conflict was all about, for this was the showdown between the revolutionary aspirations of the Spanish proletariat, which were at least as old as the century,

and the capitalist system itself. Private property and wage labour were represented here by an alliance of bourgeois Catalanists, the Comintern, and the right wing of the Socialist Workers' Party. They were aided and abetted by those delegates of CNT-FAI mandated to negotiate with the popular front. Its denouement revealed the extent to which they too were terrified of their rank and file.

On the afternoon of 3<sup>rd</sup> of May Salas led his Assault Guards against the telephone exchange, which had been a workers' collective<sup>47</sup> since its recapture from the army, a decisive moment in the July revolution. Control of the Telefonica by the Working Class was of vital importance as a symbolic and concrete expression of dual power since it permitted monitoring of government communications with the sanction of cutting them off. This was an intolerable situation for the bourgeois-Stalinist bloc. Like the fascists before him he only took the ground floor and was engaged by the workers upstairs with machine-gun fire.

The workers stood firm, disarming police throughout the city, and the defence committees erected barricades once more; outside the administrative centre they retained full control. In those districts police sided with the workers and voluntarily handed over their weapons. Ethel MacDonald, Jenny Patrick, Augustin Souchy and George Orwell all give detailed first-hand accounts of the May events.

"... three lorry loads of police had made use of the peaceful siesta hour when shops and offices are closed, to launch their attack. They had no difficulty in seizing the ground floor but our comrades in the building barricaded the stairways and swept them with machine gun fire thus preventing further assault.

Immediately, crowds gathered outside the building and the streets were filled with anxious men and women. Suddenly the cry was raised — "To the barricades. To the barricades!" It echoed through the streets and in a very short time firing had broken out all over the city.

It seems the police had used sandbags and bricks, originally intended to repel Franco's attack, to build complete fortifications round all areas controlled by the government.

Opposite each barricade our anarchist comrades tore up the loose paving stones from the streets to build their own barricades,"

—Ethel MacDonald, antifascist:  
in the Sunday Mail 5<sup>th</sup> December 1937.

Orwell, who was on leave, spent three days keeping watch on a cinema roof, MacDonald and Patrick busied themselves loading rifle clips and taking food to their comrades. The POUM being the communists' primary target, its executive met with the regional committees of CNT-FAI and Libertarian Youth, seeking their public support for the workers' resistance, but those bodies confined themselves to demanding the removal of Salas and Aiguadér. After this the POUM leadership also started to back away from its rank and file.

The Regional Committee broadcast radio appeals for restraint in the face of provocation; they would negotiate with the government and the police. Their fatal mistake was to assume the violence was the work of rogue elements within the Communist and bourgeois parties rather than a premeditated strategy hatched in Moscow. Delegates from their control patrols approached the

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<sup>47</sup> Its collectivisation had been 'legalised' by the decree in October, and it was jointly administered by the unions with a government delegate, not as is often claimed, controlled by anarchists.

Telefonica to reason with the intruders, but Salas' orders were signed by the minister of internal security Artemi Aiguadér, who told the Regional Committee he knew nothing about it.

Juan Manuel Molina (Juanel) found himself acting Councillor of Defence owing to the resignation of Francisco Isgleas. He met the chiefs of the General Staff, who assured him he had their confidence. They put him in contact with the commanders in the barracks and at the front, who in turn pledged their allegiance. He then reported to the committees of the Libertarian movement, that all the barracks of Barcelona, except the Carlos Marx, awaited his instructions. The C.N.T. coastal batteries on Montjuich were especially twitchy, keen to bombard the Stalinists. He wrote:

'With the military situation of Catalonia well in hand, the battle which the Communists had initiated was won by us.'

Molina told Pedro Herrera and Diego Abad de Santillan:

"Paradoxically we have won the battle by sounding retreat. Among many other things, we have all the military forces of the region which await my instructions. You are in an advantageous situation to impose solutions which will be a guarantee for our organizations and for the people. Don't make a deal!"

—Juan Manuel Molina: 'El Comunismo Totalitario',  
Editores Mexicanos Unidos, Mexico, 1982

On the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>, police occupied the Palace of Justice and a few C.N.T. offices. With the provocateurs still in post, a general strike began; the centre of the city was deserted. Battle lines were clearly drawn, with the Catalan police, Assault and Civil Guards plus civilian activists of the political parties manning one set of barricades, and the defence committees, Libertarian youth, POUM and Friends of Durruti on the other. In addition, agents provocateurs, of whatever persuasion, fired stray shots in quiet districts. Police visited a house occupied by Italian militia on leave from the Aragon front, and confiscated their weapons. Among them was Camillo Berneri, whose article 'Between the War and the Revolution' had compared the Soviets to the fascists.<sup>48</sup> Twelve members of the Libertarian Youth were seized on their way to the headquarters of the Regional Committee, the Casa CNT-FAI, and their mutilated corpses dumped out of an ambulance four days later. The Regional Committee made three broadcasts over the afternoon appealing to all parties for antifascist unity. The Friends issued leaflets repeating the demands from their poster for a revolutionary junta, the dissolution of political parties and the Generalitat; commending those POUMistas who had stood by the workers. Delegates of the two groups met in the evening, and concluded that despite having control of the city, without the support of the Regional and National committees the uprising would fail.

Aiguadér requested fifteen hundred assault guards from Valencia to overcome the workers' resistance. Caballero being engaged in a power struggle with the Stalinists and right wing of his own party, hesitated to place troops at the disposal of the person he suspected of instigating the conflict. He would accede only on condition the central government assumed responsibility for them, effectively revoking Catalan autonomy. First he sent a delegation of C.N.T. and U.G.T.

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<sup>48</sup> "The article in Number 6 [of 'Guerra di Classe'] has irritated the Consul General of the USSR in Barcelona who has asked the regional committee [of the CNT] if they approved it. I don't know what they replied."

—Camillo Berneri, January 1937. Quoted in:  
'Pensieri e battaglie' (Paris 1938)

to Barcelona to negotiate a truce between the unions. Montseny (whose car was shot at), Marianet and Oliver arrived from Valencia in late afternoon. Oliver recalls in his memoirs that the ministers' intervention was not welcomed; they were reluctantly accommodated on chairs and sofas, on going in search of food, he came across Companys and his wife dining lavishly with the P.S.U.C. and the Russians.

Two cars travelling from the docks to Casa CNT-FAI were stopped at a roadblock just three hundred yards away and their occupants executed in cold blood; the Regional Committee then ordered armoured cars for its defence. A joint statement from both regional federations called on the combatants to lay down their arms and return to work. The C.N.T. Hide and Leather workers Union was attacked while negotiations continued overnight. Eventually all the ministers resigned, Salas and Aiguadér went with the rest; The C.N.T. delegates suggested a provisional government be set up having one councillor from each party, but no-one who had been involved hitherto.

Fifteen hundred members of the Red and Black Column, and the Lenin Division of the POUM, having secured the front, prepared to return to Barcelona. They had shadowed a P.S.U.C. column as far as Barbastro, and were being menaced by the air force.

"Maximo Franco, chief of the 127 brigade, most nervous, had already passed Monzón, at the front of a battalion, with its corresponding material, some cannons and machine-guns. I gave instructions to the Organization in Binefar to meet the column, and get Maximo Franco to call me on the telephone. He did, and on my assuring him that I continued at the head of the Councillorship of Defence and in Barcelona we had enough and more than enough to dominate the Communists, he returned to the front his unit. In spite of the fact that the chief of the Red and Black had distributed his forces on the front, leaving its defence assured, we could not give pretext to the enemies and to public opinion that a military unit had abandoned the front."

– Molina (*op. cit*)

In October 1934 Companys had aborted his insurrection on the first cannon shot, his refusal to work with anarchosyndicalists having doomed it to failure. In July 1936 he had abandoned Catalonia to its fate for the same reason; nevertheless they had taken his subsequent contrition and conciliation at face value and considered him an ally. Now he called for the republican air force to bomb them out of existence.<sup>49</sup> When it refused, he again surrendered Catalan independence, invoking an emergency provision of the Statute of Autonomy; responsibility for order in the region passed to the central government, just six months after they had deserted their own capital. Crucially it also placed the Aragon militia under the command of the Communist General Pozas. Companys' may have gambled that provoking a showdown between the Communists and the anarchists would lead Caballero's government to put his party back into power, in fact it was only the CNT-FAI policy of democratic collaboration that was keeping him employed. In 1940 he was arrested in occupied France and returned to Barcelona to be shot at Montjuich Castle.

"The President of the Generalitat, communicates to the under-secretary of the Council, that the rebels have brought artillery into the streets. It is requested that orders be conveyed to Sandino to place himself at the disposal of the Government of the Generalitat."

—Fragment of teletype from Companys to Valencia: Documentation on deposit at the Hoover Institute.

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<sup>49</sup> "During the May Days the government of the Generalitat requested that the government of Spain send air-



The 5<sup>th</sup> of May dawned with attacks by assault guards on the Medical Union and the Local Federation of the Libertarian Youth, both telephoned the Regional Committee for help, but six young anarchists died defending their headquarters. Further down the coast at Tarragona, police occupied the telephone exchange and cut off communications between the libertarians' offices. The political parties and Socialist Youth were seen to be arming their civilian activists. Whilst entering into negotiations with the bureaucracy, the libertarians prepared for attacks on their premises. Likewise at Tortosa, where fighting broke out immediately and the anarchists gained the upper hand. The Generalitat's radio station spoke of uncontrollable elements within the C.N.T., in response the Regional Committee telephoned it to ask who was controlling the police.

The Italian anarchists' house was raided again; Professor Berneri and his friend Francisco Barbieri were abducted and shot. In his book, 'Ready for Revolution' Augustin Guillamon shows, with the aid of contemporary photographs, how the two Italians were completely hemmed in by P.S.U.C. barricades and overlooked by the balconies of the U.G.T. office. There was only one door, and it is inconceivable that anyone could have entered or left the building without the Communists' permission. Assassinations on foreign soil had to be personally sanctioned by Stalin and carried out by special mobile squads; they were considered too risky to be left to the locals. Also found dead was Domingo Ascaso, delegate of the column named for his brother, and Francisco Ferrer, who bore the same name as his famous uncle.

Discussions over the provisional government proposal commenced immediately, the Communists stalled, and at noon Valencia gave them what they had been waiting for. General Pozas would take charge of the army in the East, including the POUM and Confederal divisions in Aragon; Colonel Escobar would be delegate of public order. Agreement was finally reached in the afternoon, Aiguadér's job was abolished but Salas would continue pending the arrival of Escobar, who was shot and wounded on arrival in Barcelona. At five the following terms were proposed by Regional Committee and accepted by the new administration:

- Hostilities to cease.
- Each party shall keep its positions.
- The police and their civilian allies are specifically asked to stop fighting.
- The responsible committees to be informed at once of any breach of the pact.
- Solitary shots should not be answered.
- Defenders of Union premises to remain passive and await further instructions.

The firing continued, new barricades appeared closer to Casa CNT-FAL. Gregorio Jover returned from Huesca to see what was going on but balked at recalling the militia.

The 6<sup>th</sup> May; the police continued to fortify their positions; the Libertarian youth headquarters in Tarragona came under attack. The death toll stood at five hundred, with fifteen hundred

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planes to bomb the CNT strongholds and this request was denied. Companys then asked what he was supposed to do to get the situation under control and he was told that there was no other solution besides surrendering jurisdiction over Public Order in Cataluña to the central government, and Companys surrendered it."

—Jaime Antón Aguadé i Cortès, nephew of Artemi Aiguadér: Signed and dated before witnesses in Mexico City 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1946

wounded. The Friends of Durruti issued a manifesto naming the provocateurs as the political parties and the Generalitat's security forces, disowning the C.N.T. committees for calling a ceasefire, and urging the workers not to give up the ground they had "taken in an open and resolute battle." This was rejected as a provocation by both CNT-FAI and Libertarian youth. Although the POUM leadership never actually endorsed it, the Friends' manifesto was reprinted in *La Batalla*, a propaganda gift to Moscow. Another joint statement from the unions called for a return to work, broadcast over the radio and appearing in the press alongside the Friends' manifesto. The fighting abated somewhat, but no one could return to work with the police still building barricades and arresting workers; anyone with a C.N.T. card was subject to harassment. Antonio Sese, the Catalan U.G.T. secretary, and its representative in the new provisional government, was fatally shot in front of the Theatre Union, apparently by friendly fire from his own barricade. His companions bore witness to this, believing his death to be accidental, but it did nothing to calm the situation, and held up proceedings for half a day.

A truce had settled on the telephone exchange, and food was sent up to the workers. Both sides agreed to withdraw, however the police failed to comply and replaced C.N.T. workers with U.G.T. members; thus the exchange fell into Communist hands. An hour later they attacked the railway station. Later in the day, the Confederation issued a press release stating its position in the hope of setting the record straight. The executive committee of the Catalan U.G.T. held an extraordinary meeting to expel members of the POUM.

Back in Valencia, it fell to Oliver as justice minister to negotiate the entry of the assault guards, who had been withdrawn from the Jarama front supposedly to relieve the police and restore order. Montseny and Marianet reported that as Escobar's replacement had retained Salas as police commissioner, the police were preparing to attack union premises and trying to encircle the Regional Committee. Fighting was still going on in Tarragona. It would be too inflammatory to allow them into Barcelona unless there was an armistice; it was doubtful they would even make it through anarchist-controlled territory. The minister of the interior ordered Salas' dismissal and the two worked through the night, imploring the defence committees to grant the troops safe passage. They were allowed to enter Tortosa unmolested, where they immediately raided Confederal premises, arresting those who had put down the Communist coup, whilst the P.S.U.C. and Catalan nationalists came out of hiding and looted collective property. They arrived in Barcelona on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> May. The demoralised workers abandoned the barricades, they would not turn against the leaders of 19<sup>th</sup> July even though the battle was all but won when the latter made their first desperate appeals for ceasefire. They had declined to take power, now they found themselves wielding it anyway, on behalf of the Soviet Union. The Communists, claiming victory, left their barricades up and held onto their prisoners.

Also resident in the city at the time was the Republican president Manuel Azana, who had every reason to fear the Working Class having famously ordered the massacre at Casas Viejas, with the words: "take no prisoners" "shoot them in the guts". His legendary cowardice had been, by turns, a source of amusement and embarrassment to his colleagues, who tolerated him because his ambivalent politics were thought to appeal to foreign capitalists. He had left Valencia to be close to the French border and with the outbreak of hostilities telegraphed the defence ministry demanding that his physical safety take precedence over everything else. To his dismay they all had more pressing concerns; in desperation, he threatened to resign. A vessel was duly sent to evacuate him but it took four days to get him out of the house as he was afraid to step into the street. During a quiet spell, his marine bodyguards nearly shamed him into taking the four-

minute ride to the docks but more shots rang out and he froze. He recorded his feelings of terror and abandonment in his diaries, and later in his memoirs, which have sadly coloured the liberal historians' narratives of the May events.

A glance at the contemporary Communist press such as Britain's 'Daily Worker' portrays the people's reaction to their provocation as a conspiracy involving Trotsky, Franco, Hitler, Mussolini, the POUM and the 'uncontrollables' (the rank and file committees) — supported by the evidence of the Moscow show trials of the previous year. Stalin's purge of the leaders of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution had been achieved with elaborate and detailed forced confessions,<sup>50</sup> which all relied on the thesis that Trotsky and Hitler were allies. Trotsky would stop at nothing to overthrow Stalin, and to this end his followers were plotting with the fascists to invade his former homeland. In its manifesto on the twentieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution,<sup>51</sup> the executive committee of the Comintern reported that Trotsky had promised the Ukraine to Germany, and Primorsky Krai — Russia's Eastern maritime province — to Japan in return for their assistance. I suppose it would have been harder to sell this bullshit had Trotsky not been remembered in Russia as a ruthless sociopath. The ogre and the exile were well matched, Stalin was terrified of him, for Trotsky was writing his biography, so even his childhood memories were being surgically dissected and used against him.

It was all for domestic consumption of course, but the fiction had to be maintained, and the existence of an independent Marxist party fighting alongside the Communists in an antifascist war was an anomaly they could not sustain. As the conspiracy theory was elaborated and embellished, the POUM, thousands of whom were still fighting in the front line, morphed from ideological heretics to 'Trotsky-fascists' a network of spies, saboteurs and agent-provocateurs funded by Germany and Italy. Several versions of the conspiracy were published, the standard one being an attempted coup by the POUM to coincide with an Italian invasion; in the *Daily Worker*, the anarchists were to blame. Orwell deconstructs the theory in some detail, starting with the allegation of Trotskyism — by then a meaningless insult, and examines the impossibility of the POUM organising such a thing in Barcelona where everything was controlled by the unions, in which they had only marginal representation. He speculates that in Britain the anarchists made more plausible culprits, as few readers would know what a Trotskyist was. Further, the POUM was affiliated to the London Bureau — as was the I.L.P. which could easily seek redress through the courts for libel.

However the resistance was not entirely spontaneous; the barrio defence committees had anticipated and planned for just such an eventuality, and only the capitulation of the CNT-FAI's higher committees could stop it. Even with their hastily deployed reinforcements, the Communists and Catalanists in Barcelona could command fewer troops in May than the nationalists on the 19<sup>th</sup> July, and those had little more going for them than guns and uniforms, whereas the Working Class controlled ninety percent of the city and its suburbs, with their defence committees embedded at neighbourhood level. The Libertarian Youth surrounded the Carlos Marx

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<sup>50</sup> One of the defendants, Eduard Holtzman testified that in 1932 he had gone to Copenhagen for a meeting with Trotsky at which they discussed the assassination of Stalin. He was staying at the Hotel Bristol, and Trotsky had sent his son, Sedov to fetch him. Perhaps neither Holtzmann nor his interrogators were aware the Hotel Bristol had been demolished in 1917! In later debunking the confession, Sedov was able to provide an alibi, and in any case had never visited the city. Holtzmann, like most of the accused, was shot the following day, within the 72 hours officially allowed for appeal.

<sup>51</sup> *Inprecor*, xviii, 48, p. 1145, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1937

barracks throughout the disturbance; they could have taken it at any time, and although they had a machine-gun and a cannon, their self-discipline prevented them returning fire. During a tense meeting with Companys and the Stalinists, Santillan informed them that the Montjuich heavy artillery batteries were trained on the Generalitat.<sup>52</sup> He instructed the gunners to call every ten minutes, and if they received no response, to act as they saw fit; should the politicians break faith, they would all share the same fate. Recall of the militia from Aragon would have turned it into a rout, but also destroyed the Republic and left the Confederation isolated internationally, the world's anarchists having nothing comparable to the Communist propaganda machine.

The cobblers that clattered off the Comintern's presses was far too well prepared to have been made on the hoof in response to chaotic events, given the necessity of clearing everything with the boss it had to have been worked out well in advance. The groups who found themselves in the frame had obviously been caught on the hop, even the Friends, although expecting treachery had been reactive. Nevertheless it was taken at face value outside Catalonia; nowhere in the official government reports was it admitted that the police had acted unilaterally. The U.S. ambassador Claude Bowers, who passed the war in France wrote in his memoirs in 1954:

"A crisis had been provoked by the anarchists and the POUM (United Workers Marxist Party), which was composed of Trotsky communists. It was generally believed that many of these were Franco agents..."

In 'The Tragedy of Spain' written in August, Rudolf Rocker has it that the P.S.U.C. barricades were the first to be erected, at the instant shots rang out, and Robert Alexander<sup>53</sup> has pointed out that neither La Batalla nor Solidaridad Obrera were in worker-controlled areas and no arrangements had been made to defend or move either periodical before fighting broke out. Casa CNT-FAI was at the epicentre of activity, and was only fortified with two armoured cars on the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup>, and three more the following day, after its occupants witnessed the massacre of their comrades. De Santillan believed the plot had been hatched in France and Belgium during meetings between Russian agents and right-wing Catalanists that had been excluded from the Generalitat for their links to the nationalist bloc. The latter would seek to suppress the libertarian movement on the way to creating an independent state that would secede from the republic. The former wished to drive a wedge between the unions and destroy the political credibility of the C.N.T.'s National Committee as a prelude to replacing Caballero. They would then abolish Catalonia altogether and take Aragon. That is in fact what happened. He wrote:

"Long before the first shot was discharged in Barcelona, English and French cruisers were hurrying toward the port as if they had a prophetic presentiment of the things to come. If one takes all this into consideration, one asks oneself how much faith in the triumph of the anti-Fascist cause still exists among those people who invoke foreign protection against the workers of their own country?"

—Solidaridad Obrera, May 13, 1937.

Walter Krivitsky, director of Soviet Military intelligence in Europe claimed one of his agents had infiltrated the group of Russian anarchist exiles in Paris, and gained the trust of FAI activists in Barcelona.

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<sup>52</sup> The conciliatory tone of the National Committee led many workers to believe they had been taken hostage.

<sup>53</sup> 'Anarchists in the Spanish Civil war.' Volume 2.

“With only some thousands of supporters at its disposal it [the P.O.U.M.] could not hope to seize power for itself. But it could hope to disrupt and split the two great trade union organisations just when their relations were improving. This is shown by the fact that as soon as the putsch began the leaders of the P.O.U.M. tried to win over to their own side some of the wilder elements of the C.N.T. (National Confederation of Labour, the Anarcho-Syndicalist organisation) and tried to get them to take part in street fighting against both the forces of the U.G.T. (Socialist Trade Union) and those of the Catalanian authorities and of the Central Government. Thanks to the calmness and energy of the leaders of these two organisations, this disaster was avoided and the Trotskyists found themselves on the barricades alone with the Fascists of the Fifth Column and a handful of disorderly elements.”

—Georges Soria: ‘Trotskyism in the Service of Franco  
Facts and Documents on the Activities of P.O.U.M.’ 1937.

Soria was the Spain correspondent of French Communist daily, ‘L’Humanité’ and the Comintern’s ‘International Press Correspondence’ (*inprecorr*). This work of fiction was circulated by the Communist press to set the scene for the unsuccessful Barcelona show trials of October 1938. It contains some alleged transcripts of interrogation, fantastic tales of documents written in code and ‘invisible ink’ and a lot of self-referential Stalinist polemics against the POUM’s fundamentalist interpretation of Marxism. As usual, all evidence and conclusions must be taken on trust and further discussion or analysis is superfluous. Relations between the unions had never been worse, and the “disorderly elements” would have been the Barcelona workers’ district committees, the same ones that had defeated the army, created and maintained the militias, and been feeding the city ever since. Plus the Friends, veterans of the Durruti Column that had held the Aragon front for nine months, counting every cartridge. Apart from the fantastic allegations of collusion with the enemy, the main charge against the POUM was that they failed to endorse the Comintern’s popular front strategy — because they didn’t agree with it — and that they concurred with the nationalist press in warning against Spain becoming a Russian satellite — which was simply true. The most heinous crime in any totalitarian code is faulty propaganda. With Soria’s allegations discredited, that’s all he has left:

“On the one hand, the charge that the leaders of the POUM, among them Andrés Nin, were ‘agents of the Gestapo and Franco’ was no more than a fabrication, because it was impossible to adduce the slightest evidence. On the other hand, although the leaders of the POUM were neither agents of Franco nor agents of the Gestapo, it is true that their relentless struggle against the Popular Front played the game *nolens volens*<sup>54</sup> of the Caudillo”

—Georges Soria: *Guerra y revolución en España 1936–1939*.

Apologists for the Republic persist in the argument that collectivisation was a hindrance to the war effort — but what hindrance compared with the starvation of supplies to the front they enforced to prevent it? Given that social revolution was the main motivation for those who were actually doing the fighting. Accusing the left of creating division while relentlessly slandering part of the front line, imprisoning dissenters on vital war work, and even more incredibly, accusing them of secret communications with the fascists whilst publishing actual positions and troop numbers in their papers for the whole world, and the fascists to see!

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<sup>54</sup> ‘Willingly or unwillingly’

American Communist Liston Oak drew his own conclusions; whilst in Russia to take up a post on the English language daily Moscow News, he was assigned to the Spanish Republican foreign office as Director of Propaganda for Britain and the United States. One of his duties was showing around celebrity Civil War tourists such as Ernest Hemingway. In 1937 he found himself in Barcelona; given his position of trust within the Party and proximity to the arch-Stalinist foreign minister Alvarez Del Vayo, he was firmly on the inside, yet he interviewed Andreu Nin twice, then made himself scarce. He wrote an analysis of the May events that articulates both the anarchists' and the POUM's position and places it in context. As a Comintern insider, he knew Stalin was about to throw the game. It's quite a remarkable document; you can find the whole thing online and I'd urge you to read it.

"The Anarchists waited too long. If they had struck nine months ago, or even three months ago, they would have been able to capture power. ... Those who call the Government of loyal republican Spain a "Red dictatorship" are quite mistaken. If it were really "red", the Anarchists would not now be fighting in the streets of Barcelona. The Generalitat is not a workers' government and it is not revolutionary. ...

... During the past nine months of civil war there have been numerous armed fights, particularly in the smaller towns and villages. The question of collectivisation of agriculture loomed large in this feud. News of these "riots" was not often printed in the Spanish newspapers and it was, of course, censored in the despatches of foreign correspondents. ...

[The Communists, Socialists and Left Republicans] demand the dissolution of the Workers' Committees which have controlled the factories and collectivised farms — something like the Russian Soviets prior to the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution — constituting a dual power. ...

... I left Barcelona the day before the fighting began, after four months in Spain, three of which were spent working for the Valencia Government. I profoundly regret anything which weakens the anti-Fascist united front, but I cannot agree with the official version of events which makes the Anarchists the villains of the plot. The common conception of an Anarchist as a wild irresponsible hooligan is as far from the reality as the same conception of a Bolshevik some years ago. ...

[The Anarchists] charge that the "Stalinists" have organised a G.P.U. in Spain controlled from Moscow. They point to the imprisonment recently of the Anarchist Morato, who is now on hunger strike, and to the jailing of dozens of other Anarchists on one pretext or other of disobedience to the decrees of the Government, in Murcia, Lerida and elsewhere. They protest against the suppression of Anarchist newspapers. They point to the exclusion of the C.N.T.-F.A.I. from the Basque Government and the imprisonment of numerous Anarchists in Bilbao. And they remember that in Soviet Russia the Anarchists were long since "liquidated."

... If you are puzzled as to why the Communists and Socialists join with the Left Republican and Catalan Nationalists in opposing such a revolutionary programme, the Anarchists and the P.O.U.M. will answer that the politics of both the Second and Third Internationals are no longer revolutionary, but reformist and social democratic. They will tell you that the Comintern has long since abandoned its hopes for a world revolution — until after the world war they are sure is on the horizon. The Spanish Communist Party has become an instrument of the Soviet Foreign Office.

... *Soviet Russia seeks security and will sacrifice the Spanish Revolution because Anglo-French imperialism demands it as the price of possible military aid to Russia against German-Italian-Japanese aggression, Andres Nin, P.O.U.M. leader, told me last week.* He said that the only hope of saving the Spanish Revolution lies in an acceptance by the Anarchists of a Bolshevik line of action. ... "

—Liston M. Oak: 'Behind Barcelona Barricades' from 'The New Statesman and Nation', 15 May, 1937.

My italics; for more about Liston Oak: 'The Breaking Point: Hemingway, Dos Passos and the murder of Jose Robles', by Stephen Koch, Counterpoint, New York 2005.

He's still a Marxist; like Nin and Orwell he has no problem with the dictatorship of the proletariat and he wishes for a 'Lenin' to take charge, but he shows rare (under the circumstances) insight into the Iberian anarchist world-view and he echoes the sentiments of Garcia Oliver at that fateful plenum on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1936. He understands that the events of May and June 1937 amount to a coup against the Working Class, and a return to the misery of the 1931 compromise government.

Although the Communists and their allies had proved incapable of defeating the anarchist movement directly, and would do so again, even at the end of the war, when it had been greatly weakened, the balance sheet was vastly in their favour. In a little over a week they had brought Catalonia under military occupation, isolated the Catalanists, taken over command of the Aragon front, undermined the Caballero government, discredited the POUM and the district committees to a global audience, sunk the mooted pact between the unions and forced the CNT-FAI leadership to side with the Popular Front against its own rank and file.

The Spanish anarchist movement had shifted its focus from overthrowing the bourgeoisie to defeating fascism, the bastard offspring of capitalism and bolshevism, this it now held as the pinnacle of achievement. The Kremlin's agents had planted the idea of restoring the status quo, with a veneer of socialism but basically business as usual, reviving the old conflicts of interest and breaking the community of purpose forged on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July. Now the expropriated bourgeoisie, the thwarted right, marginalised officials and paramilitaries were taking revenge on the workers. Across provincial Catalonia, confederals were murdered or arrested, and union premises ransacked. They found themselves in the same bind as Caballero, having to play down both their own revolutionary intent, and the Russian takeover, to avoid giving ammunition to the enemy.

"The Regional Committee was informed that the armed forces of the Catalan Nationalists and the PSUC had taken possession of the village of San Juan. The armed workers of the CNT and the FAI entered the village, disarmed the enemy and liberated their comrades. In the open village square they had to answer for their actions. They were warned not to take up arms against the people. Then the anarchists set their enemies free again. ...

... At six o'clock they telephoned that 1,500 Assault Guards had reached Tortosa on their way to Barcelona. They occupied the headquarters of the CNT unions, the cultural centres of the FAI and the Anarchist Youth, arresting all those found inside. These troops had come from the central part of Spain. According to the evening paper *Noticiero Universal* of Saturday May 8<sup>th</sup>, these troops had come from the trenches of the Jarama front, where they had been fighting for four months alongside the International Brigade. The anarchists could also have called in their columns from the Aragon front, as well as armed forces from other parts of Catalonia, and there is no doubt that they could have been victorious within 24 hours. But they did not want to break up the anti-fascist front. They never did more than defend themselves against the attacks directed against them."

—Augustin Souchy, antifascist, Germany and Spain:  
'The Tragic Week in May'

The Spanish anarchists were betrayed again and again. A common thread running through all this is their disdain for revenge, even in the face of personal grief. This informs our attitude to prisons and other punishments. Violence was only to be used as a tool for creative purposes, to defeat fascism and defend the revolution; vindictiveness was simply regarded as a vice to be resisted.

That nobility of spirit survived the war and even the horrific purges that followed it. Refugees who were interned, tortured and starved in French concentration camps — some were held on beaches with no shelter, others put to slave labour — nevertheless fought with the Maquis and with La Nueve, the Free French armoured division under General Leclerc that liberated Paris. First in was Spanish anarchist Armando Granell, flying the flag of the long-defunct Second Republic.

The anti-Franco action groups formed by Spanish youth in the post-war period also swore off pursuing personal vendettas because it would have dissipated their energy. They had to live among the torturers, assassins and informers; every one of them had lost relatives and friends to these people and there were too many scores to settle, instead they were dedicated to cutting the head off the snake. They were also prepared to work with Communists.

Spanish politics had turned itself inside out, bourgeois Communists fighting communism, Catalanists abolishing Catalan autonomy, anarchist revolutionaries such as Oliver and Montseny interceding with the workers on behalf of the government, and the far left accused of collusion with the far right. Stalinism was a new phenomenon and not yet understood; as late as the 1<sup>st</sup> May, Orwell, a 'Trotsky-fascist' whose sympathies lay with the anarchists, but admired the Communists' efficiency, was still angling for a transfer to the I.B. on the Madrid front, so he could shoot some actual fascists.

CNT-FAI tore itself apart, and the National Committee voted to expel the Friends of Durruti, accusing them of 'Bolshevism'. The Friends themselves were split, some left the group rather than quit the union they regarded as their extended family. However, as Balus pointed out, they could only be expelled from the Confederation by a vote of their union locals, and the threat doesn't seem to have materialised. As the C.N.T.'s conscience, the FAI produced convoluted arguments as to how the progress of anarchism was being advanced by maintaining an entity which reserved to itself the rights of secrecy and coercive force, issuing Bolshevik-style denunciations of anyone who didn't agree. It abandoned the tried and tested affinity group structure and opened its ranks to anyone who claimed to agree with its principles — or rather the pronouncements of its self-appointed leaders. It was becoming a political party in all but name. So ambition, self-justification and vested interests could be hidden behind the concept of 'anarchism', as the Bolsheviks had once hidden theirs behind 'communism'.

"Since I wrote to you last week the frightful thing has happened, a thing most of us foresaw, only I tried so hard to explain it rather than condemn at the outset. The pact with Russia in return for a few pieces of arms has brought its disastrous results. It has broken the backbone of Montseny and Oliver and has turned them into willing tools of Caballero. I don't know whether you receive *Combat Syndicaliste*. I am writing [to] Mollie [Steimer] to send you the current copy. You will see that the murderous Stalin gang have killed Berneri and another comrade and that they were back of the attempt to disarm the comrades of the CNT-FAI. Still more terrible to me is that Oliver and Montseny have called a retreat and have denounced the militant Anarchists, to whom the revolution still means something, as counterrevolutionists. In other words, it is a



repetition of Russia with the identical method of Lenin against the Anarchists and S.R.'s who refused to barter the revolution for the Brest-Litovsk Peace."

—Emma Goldman: letter to Rudolf Rocker 14<sup>th</sup> May 1937.

The political manoeuvring did not prevent the C.N.T. losing its representation in the government either. In a cabinet meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May, the two Communist ministers Uribe and Hernández provoked a crisis by demanding the POUM be outlawed, or they would resign, when Caballero refused on principle, three of his Socialist rivals left with them. It became impossible for Caballero to form a new government, since he could not work with the Communists and the Republican Left would not participate without them. So on the 17<sup>th</sup> May, Azana replaced Caballero with the moderate<sup>55</sup> socialist Juan Negrin. They were finally rid of the 'Spanish Lenin'.

It was a reversion from Antifascist Front to Popular Front, a middle class government without the unions. Once the anarchists were out of the cabinet the new minister of war Indalecio Prieto lost no time in abolishing the famous Popular War Schools that had greatly impressed Caballero and some of the regular officers. These had been set up by Garcia Oliver on the model of the original in Barcelona to train militians for command; henceforth, military promotions would be political appointments.

Orwell took a bullet in the throat on the 20<sup>th</sup> May, which probably saved his life, and was back in Barcelona by the end of the month. On the 15<sup>th</sup> June, he and his friend Georges Kopp, a Belgian engineer who had rendered himself stateless<sup>56</sup> to fight in Spain, both left the city; Orwell on a mission to obtain his discharge papers, and Kopp for Valencia, where he would receive orders for a specialist posting. Suppression of the POUM began in earnest the following day; all its premises were raided simultaneously with hundreds of arrests. Where suspects gave the police the slip, their relatives were taken hostage, after the Russian practice.

"The POUM, unaware of the full implications of the swing of power to the Stalinists, did not foresee the wonderful efficiency of the police action modelled on GPU lines. Never in Spain, where the police were always poorly organised, was a roundup so efficient. This was because it was planned and directed by Russian experts."

—'The voice of the prisoners of Spain',  
Paris, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1937.

Amongst those arrested 'for espionage', was Andreu Nin. His disappearance provoked an international outcry and he was abducted by Soviet agents<sup>57</sup> from the prison in which he was being held. The official version, which no one believed,<sup>58</sup> was that he had been sprung by the Gestapo. Jesus Hernández later revealed, as feared, that Nin had been tortured to death under the

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<sup>55</sup> I find such labels pretty meaningless in this context.

<sup>56</sup> Kopp had been manufacturing ammunition and procuring arms for the Republic until the Belgian government shut down his operation. He made his way to Barcelona and joined the POUM militia. Following the purge he remained in jail until 1939, when he joined the French Foreign Legion. Wounded and captured by the Nazis, he escaped from a military hospital then worked for British Naval Intelligence; he lived in England and Scotland after the war, with his British wife Doreen Hunton.

<sup>57</sup> The operation was led by NKVD assassin Iosif Grigulevich, a close associate of senior members of the Spanish Communist Party. (Boris Volodarsky, 'Soviet Intelligence Services in the Spanish Civil War', 249–50).

<sup>58</sup> Juan Negrin was greeted with incredulity by his colleagues when he repeated the story.

direction of Aleksandr Orlov. Stalin's plan for a show trial and purge of POUMistas would follow the routine tried and tested in Moscow, whereby Nin would be induced to confess to spying for the fascists, at the instigation of Trotsky, as part of the conspiracy against Stalin, etc, etc. and implicate others to order. Nin thwarted the plot, despite his physical frailty he withstood several days of mediaeval brutality, and passed away on or about the 21<sup>st</sup> of June. He gave them nothing.

Not all of my heroes are anarchists. Nin's politics were faulty, but no more so than the senior committees of the CNT-FAI operating without a mandate. Nin had once tried to affiliate the union to the Comintern's Red Labour International, having been left to make the decision on his own.<sup>59</sup> That error pales in comparison with those made during the war by authoritarians De Santillan, Montseny and Oliver, the pompous buffoon Marianet and the sinister Esgleas. In the end he showed more courage than the rest of them put together. To die in such horror, without knowing if one will be remembered as a hero, a traitor, or at all, displays immense personal integrity, humanity at its highest level. In doing so he undoubtedly saved thousands of lives.

Coincident with the Barcelona purge was the Huesca offensive; it was supposed to take the pressure off Bilbao. Starting on the 12<sup>th</sup> June, the confederal and POUM militia remaining in northern Aragon were fed to the fascists' artillery and machine guns, repeatedly advancing across open ground without armoured support or artillery cover whilst the idle – and better armed – rearguard accused them of treason. The victors of Guadalajara, the 12<sup>th</sup> I.B., were also flung into the fire. Nine thousand antifascists had fallen by the time Mola's army entered Bilbao on the 19<sup>th</sup> and the siege was called off. The back of libertarian Aragon was broken, ready for the Communists to move in for the kill.

News of the purge had been carefully concealed from the Aragon front; the Valencia and foreign press ran the spy stories but the Barcelona papers did not, and militians on leave in the city were all rounded up. A squad was sent to the front to arrest Josép Rovira, the 'General' of the POUM column, (now called the 29<sup>th</sup> Division) without the knowledge of either the Ministry of War or the chief of Police. I.L.P. representative and POUMista Bob Smillie was arrested at the French border for attempting to export two empty grenade bodies that were to be used for a fund-raising tour back home. He was held incommunicado in Valencia, denied legal representation, and died in jail, reportedly from appendicitis, though his body was disposed of before anyone could see it. Ethel MacDonald was convinced he had been assassinated by the secret police, and said so publicly. Orwell reports that:

"Bob Smillie was only twenty-two years old and physically he was one of the toughest people I have met. ... Smillie's death is not a thing I can easily forgive. Here was this brave and gifted boy, who had thrown up his career at Glasgow University in order to come and fight against Fascism, and who, as I saw for myself, had done his job at the front with faultless courage and willingness; and all they could find to do with him was to fling him into jail and let him die like a neglected animal."

—George Orwell: 'Homage to Catalonia'.

Georges Kopp made the following statement in 1938:

"The doctor states that Bob Smillie had the skin and the flesh of his skin perforated by a powerful kick delivered by a foot shod in the nailed boot; the intestines were partly hanging outside.

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<sup>59</sup> See Chapter Eleven.

Another blow had severed the left side connection between the jaw and the skull and the former was merely hanging on the right side. Bob died about 30 minutes after reaching the hospital.”

Having secured his discharge, Orwell arrived back in Barcelona to find it in the grip of a Stalinist reign of terror. After a risky visit to Kopp in prison, he met up with his fellow militians John McNair and Stafford Cottman. His wife Eileen joined them at the railway station and the four fled for their lives; noting on the journey to France that the trains once again had first and second class carriages, the revolution was over. The propaganda machine was prematurely reporting McNair’s arrest by the time they arrived but fortunately Trotskyism was not an extraditable offence. Jenny Patrick left in August but MacDonald remained until September, passing information to and from the dungeons and helping foreign anarchists to escape, until she was herself imprisoned. She organised a hunger strike, and used her contacts on the outside to continue smuggling out letters. The British press called her the ‘Scots scarlet pimpernel’. The whole sorry episode was much exploited by the bourgeois media and the fascists, who wanted to highlight the Soviet takeover of the republic.

“The Secret Service operating today in Spain comes by night and its victims are never seen again. Bob Smillie they didn’t dare to bump off openly, but he may have suffered more because of that. Your Ethel certainly believes his death was intended. She prophesied it before his death took place, and said he would not be allowed out of the country with the knowledge he had. What worries me more than anything is that Ethel has already been ill and would be easy prey for anyone trying to make her death appear natural.”

—Helen Lennox: letter to Ethel MacDonald’s mother  
July 1937.

Treason charges were only brought against the POUM prisoners following the international outcry over Nin’s disappearance. Two international delegations visited Spain that year in the hope of shedding light on the matter.<sup>60</sup> James Maxton M.P., and John McGovern M.P. of the I.L.P. were welcomed by government ministers, but refused access to the Communists’ private prisons despite having ministerial authorisation to visit. Maxton had been represented in the P.C.E.’s ‘Mundo Obrero’ as a German agent, though not in the Daily Worker, as the C.P. fought shy of Britain’s libel laws. According to the defence minister Prieto there was no credible evidence for the Trotsky-fascist-POUM conspiracy and the arrests were illegal: “What is most grave is that the arrest of the POUM leaders was not decided upon by the Government, and the police carried out these arrests on their own authority. Those responsible are not the heads of the police, but their entourage, which has been infiltrated by the Communists according to their usual custom.” However, nothing could be done about it for fear of offending the Kremlin. Zugazagoitia, the Minister of the Interior, told McGovern: “We have received aid from Russia and have had to permit certain actions which we did not like.”

With the end of the control patrols, the communists took over the remaining prisons and the CNT-FAI investigation service went underground, now playing a purely defensive role.

“The Revolutionary Neighbourhood Committees of Barcelona, which had arisen during the days of July 19–20, 1936, lasted until at least June 7, 1937, when the restored forces of public order of the Generalitat dissolved them and occupied the various headquarters of the Control Patrols, as well as some headquarters of the Defence Committees, such as the Defence Committee of

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<sup>60</sup> Orwell (*op. cit.*)

the neighbourhood of Les Corts. Despite the Decree mandating the disbanding of all the armed groups, most of them resisted until September 1937, when the buildings they occupied were systematically assaulted and dissolved, one by one.

The last to be occupied, and the most important and strongest, was the headquarters of the Defence Committee of Central Barcelona, located in Los Escolapios de San Antonio, which was taken by assault on September 21, 1937 by Stalinists and the forces of public order, which used, in addition to armoured vehicles, an entire arsenal of machine guns and hand grenades. The resistance of Los Escolapios, however, did not yield to the force of arms, but to the evacuation orders issued by the Regional Committee. From then on the Defence Committees disguised themselves under the name of Sections of Co-ordination and Information of the CNT, and were exclusively devoted to clandestine tasks of intelligence and information, as they were prior to July 19; but now (1938) in a decidedly counterrevolutionary situation.”

—Augustín Guillamón:  
‘From Defence Cadres to Popular Militias’.

With Caballero out of the way, his commanders’ (chiefly the disgraced Ascensio’s) plan to divide enemy territory by attacking the lightly-defended Extremadura was shelved. The Communists had done everything possible to sabotage the action, brazenly telling the P.M. he would have to do it without ‘their’ tanks and aircraft — the Republican air force being controlled more or less directly from Moscow. Instead the Communists planned a great set-piece around the village of Brunete, twenty-five kilometres west of Madrid, where they hoped to encircle and cut off the fascist troops menacing the capital. Although a small gain in territory allowed the propaganda machine to claim the operation as a victory; the main objective of cutting the Extremadura road and lifting the siege was not achieved. The area captured was approximately ten miles by eight and cost twenty-five thousand lives.<sup>61</sup>

The fascists were initially taken by surprise and Brunete was captured, but instead of pressing on with the tank advance time was wasted neutralising isolated pockets of resistance that could have been left to second-line troops. The fascists rapidly reinforced their position and deployed the Condor Legion; once they had air superiority they maintained a continuous bombardment and the republican advance stalled in the fierce heat. Russian commanders were so desperate to impress Stalin that they frequently claimed to be ahead of their actual positions, disrupting supplies and communications; Mera was furious at being sent to relieve a division that had already fallen back. The battle lasted three weeks and the Nationalists regained Brunete. The Republic also lost eighty percent of its armour; the Soviets’ influential tank theorist Marshal Tukhachevsky<sup>62</sup> had just been purged and his erstwhile colleagues were keen to distance themselves from him. To avoid suspicion of Trotskyism their tactics had to be hastily revised so instead of using the Trotskyist tactic of punching deep into enemy territory in columns they all spread out on a broad front and succumbed to the German bombers. Lister’s men were decimated and four hundred were shot for desertion after a disorderly retreat. Two hundred and fifty of El Campesino’s division deserted to Mera, who refused to send them back to certain death; Miaja supported him, although he’d joined the Party he would balk at shooting antifascists. Mera had

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<sup>61</sup> Republican casualties, the fascists lost about seventeen thousand.

<sup>62</sup> The butcher of Kronstadt.

twice before returned from the front mob-handed to secure the release of his own officers being held in the Chekas.

The International Brigades were in some disarray after Brunete, with a third dead and a third hospitalised, the remainder demoralised by the losses, the witch-hunting and the summary executions. Amongst their notable casualties were the African-American Captain Oliver Law and the openly gay Major George Nathan, refused membership of the P.C.E. for his sexuality. Those Brigaders less inclined to blind obedience turned on their officers with accusations of incompetence, and a few small mutinies were violently put down. Also killed was the pioneering photo-journalist Gerda Pohorylle, a German exile, better known as Gerda Taro. Taro entered Spain with her former partner Andre Friedman, publishing their work under the name of Robert Capa, they produced the most striking images of the war. At Brunete she was with the Canadian writer Ted Allan<sup>63</sup> who served in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, recording the haphazard finale to the battle, where General Walter had stationed machine guns at the rear to shoot deserters.<sup>64</sup> Walter told Allan to get her out of the way, or he would not be responsible for her safety. Taro refused, and shortly afterwards their car was hit by a Russian T26. In a narrative clouded by morphine and a leg injury, Allan reports being told that she was alright, then she wasn't, her camera was nowhere to be found.

Public rallies were held to mark the first anniversary of the coup and revolution, Montseny spoke at the Olympia Theatre in Barcelona, referring to the Communist-bourgeois witch hunt against those workers who had liberated the city on the 19<sup>th</sup> July.

"The bulk of the prisoners in Catalonia and Barcelona were not imprisoned as a result of the events in May. The procedure is a lot more decorous. Some gentleman or lady pens a letter to the President of the High Court and in that letter this "gentleman" or "lady", a party member, complains that "in Puigcerdd on 19 July they killed the priest and they were this one, that one and the other one". As a result of this denunciation a hunt begins for the body of the priest and a criminal investigation is launched. Already we have a sizeable number of CNT and FA1 militants behind bars."

... We do not want to lose the war. And they are losing the war. They are losing us the war!"

—Federica Montseny: 21<sup>st</sup> July 1937.

Emma Goldman had been in Barcelona in September 1936 and visited the Modelo prison when it was under the control of the anarchists, she had been allowed to speak freely and privately with the (at that time) fascist prisoners held there, who had no complaints about their conditions. A year later she visited Valencia to enquire after some of her missing comrades, and encountered a brick wall. Returning to the Modelo in October she found it filled with antifascist volunteers from around the world, including members of the I.B.s, most were being held without charge.<sup>65</sup>

The Military Investigation Service (S.I.M.) was created to catch all the fascist spies supposedly lurking in the Republican armed forces, overseen by Orlov, who was himself on borrowed time. It formalised the Russians' private jails and terrorist methods. Networks of spies and informers

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<sup>63</sup> Alan Herman, who first adopted the pseudonym to infiltrate a fascist group as Montreal correspondent for the Communist Party's Daily Clarion. Allan survived the war and achieved success as a screenwriter; Friedman, as Robert Capa, went on to cover WW2, the Sino-Japanese war, Palestine and Vietnam.

<sup>64</sup> It's a wonder they didn't accuse him of Trotskyism.

<sup>65</sup> 'Political persecution in Republican Spain' by Emma Goldman, in 'Spain and the World', London, 10<sup>th</sup> Decem-

were constructed using bribery and blackmail. Its unlimited powers of arrest, detention and interrogation attracted not only Party loyalists but the ambitious, unscrupulous, and those having proclivities relating to torture. It turned out at the end of the war, that a great many SIM operatives were fascists. This was hardly surprising, there weren't many dedicated antifascists in the rearguard by 1938, and virtually everyone in the Communist Party had joined since the coup.

Recruiting from those who had no previous connection to left or libertarian politics was not only more fruitful in providing intelligence about potential fifth columnists, but ensured they would have fewer qualms about the torture and murder of those antifascists who fell foul of the commissars. This served both the P.C.E. and the nationalists, feeding propaganda about Trotskyism on one side and red terror on the other. So although the SIM did unmask enemy plotters its double agents did considerable damage and many innocents were caught in the net. The Soviets didn't particularly care who killed who; they knew the war was lost and they had other fish to fry. Negrin acquiesced to the growth of this political police force whose agenda took precedence over strategic considerations and undermined even the military command structure. Azana of course, wouldn't say boo to a goose.

"Diaz Baza, Vicente, and Santiago Garcés were the directors of SIM. The service had a budget of 22,000,000 pesetas. In Madrid alone it had 6,000 agents. These agents were assured a bonus of 30 percent of the value of whatever jewels they confiscated. Uribarri escaped abroad in April 1938, with several million pesetas in stolen jewels.

SIM soon became a spy network covering army units (companies, battalions, brigades, army corps) parties and organizations; even government offices were infiltrated by SIM agents. On the battlefield, SIM agents, located on all levels of the military hierarchy, had as much if not more power than commissars and officers. These agents were named by a mysterious process. A recently mobilised soldier could be transformed overnight into a SIM agent for a battalion or brigade, equal or superior in command to a captain or commander.

On the home front, SIM agents inspired fear even in the police. Every known SIM agent had another, secret one watching him. At first the Minister of National Defence was the only one who could name or remove agents, but a ruling in September, 1938, delegated this authority to the head of SIM."

—Jose Peirats Valls: 'Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution'.

One of the most macabre episodes of the Spanish Republic concerned the convent of Santa Ursula, a P.C.E. Cheka in which the Communists gave full vent to their obsession with destroying the personality. Individual courage did not sit well with Stalin's take on dialectic materialism, which viewed a human as no better than a piece of meat at the mercy of its nervous system. A front line soldier might be brave with a gun at his back and a wage to feed his family, anything more was dangerous.

Following the rule that a nun never left her convent, the cellar had been used to inter the dead, and bodies were placed in alcoves around the walls to desiccate and mummify. On opening this catacomb, peasants engaged by the Communists to remove the corpses performed the hateful task carelessly and left it incomplete. The space was littered with body parts and became infested with rats.

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ber 1937.

Workers were arrested without explanation then simply cast into the charnel house and left there. In the foul air, among the decaying flesh, without light, food or water, the prisoner might presume they had been buried alive, but worse was to come, after hours or days they would be taken for interrogation. In the dungeons of Santa Ursula, antifascists were confined in wooden crates, narrow wardrobes and stone tombs designed to induce cramp in the limbs and spine, denied mental or physical rest with buzzers, bells, electric lights and sharp tiles protruding from the sloping floors. Some lost their minds and would sign anything placed before them without even reading it, others endured months of this treatment.

Once Stalin had neutralised his Marxist rivals in the POUM and the Caballero faction he was free to turn his attention to his chief enemy in Spain, the libertarian movement. No sooner was the CNT-FAI out of government than the P.C.E. commenced a war of words against it. It had repeatedly played up the lively disagreements between the senior committees and the rank and file, concluding that the anarchist movement had been infiltrated by the fifth column, and inflamed the situation by praising the 'leadership' for its moderation. Now it claimed to have uncovered yet another conspiracy and the National Committee, supported by the FAI and Libertarian Youth demanded proof — a concept alien to the Communists at that time, and to their view entirely superfluous. 'Frente Rojo' (Red Front) belatedly took umbrage at some remarks of Montseny criticising the U.S.S.R.

The 450 kilometre Aragon front in August 1937 had barely moved since the initial advance of the columns from Barcelona a year earlier. Without war materiel the militia could do no more than hold their ground and defend the collectives; nevertheless, surplus production was dutifully turned over to the central government in support of the war effort. It could be said that the libertarian experiment was a success; productivity across the region was up to fifty percent higher than the previous year. A record harvest was anticipated and the political infighting that blighted the rest of the country was absent, because the parties exerted no influence whatsoever. Although the Council included members of all the parties and unions, the people had no use for them. With control of production vested in the producers, there was nothing for them to do, no power to compete for. The morale of the front-line militia was underpinned by the certainty that the peasantry at their back would fight for every inch of their land. Stalinism would have been a very hard sell, in fact, only ten of the four hundred collectives adhered to the U.G.T. A social wage guaranteed a minimum standard of living; one drawback being that the pay differentials in non-libertarian Spain attracted skilled trades so there was a slow bleed of talent away from the region.

At the beginning of the month the Popular Front parties met in Barbastro, declaring that: "the policy of the Council of Aragón is mistaken and contrary to the interests of the region's economy", and called on the government to appoint a regional governor. On the 10<sup>th</sup> August a government decree abolished the Council and dismissed its members. Four divisions of the Republican army comprising P.C.E. and Esquerra columns under Enrique Lister attacked and dissolved the collectives by force. The Communist press justified the invasion of Aragon with

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<sup>66</sup> A sorry tale: Shortly after the May events two members of the National Committee, Máximo Peris García and Aurelio Pernia Álvarez were apprehended by Negrin's Carabineros at the French border with a car full of gold bars and precious stones, having allegedly been instructed by Marianet to sell these for cash to purchase supplies. The latter persuaded Ascaso to accept responsibility for this illegal act, saying the money was for the agricultural collectives. This he did out of loyalty to the union. The leadership was thus spared from scandal but the Aragon Defence Council's days were numbered.

the usual ridiculous slanders. The Aragonese were supposed to have been collectivised against their will and welcomed their liberators with open arms, in fact the troops had been told they were advancing across enemy territory and were shooting them on sight. The villages were put under military occupation and Confederal premises raided. Collective property was confiscated – or looted, depending on your point of view – and the land returned to bourgeois ownership. Communal stores were piled up as evidence of hoarding, then taken away to be hoarded by the Communists. The president of the defence council Joaquin Ascaso was arrested.<sup>66</sup>

Once it was all in the bag, and the news reached militant workers in the wider world, the rhetoric softened somewhat; not least because some of the villages voluntarily re-collectivised immediately the occupation was lifted and they had to be allowed to complete the harvest. Stalin appreciated, as we all know, that the casual newspaper reader has a fantastically short memory. An angry and demoralised peasantry set about the work half-heartedly, the government were going to take it all anyway. Many militians left the front. The Communists now had nothing to lose by capturing Zaragoza, which they assaulted with their remaining armour, led by a unit of the Red Army.<sup>67</sup> They committed the same tactical errors as at Brunete, compounded by a personal feud between the Communist commanders Modesto and Lister, and decided to attack Belchite instead, reducing it to rubble. The failures were attributed to Trotskyist infiltration, especially in the XIV International Brigade, whose commander Hans Sanje tortured a French officer to death, without shedding any light on the matter.

“Statements in the Communist press itself support the notion of a political plot. They claimed that the glorious advance along the Ebro was due to the removal of the Council of Aragon and the use at the front of the *clandestine arsenals* discovered in the rear. The truth is that the libertarian militia of Aragon had received for the first time the arms and vital tactical support they had been requesting in vain since the beginning of the war. They knew how to use these materials so well that while most of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division was merely serving as police force for Governor Mantecón, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division and the 153<sup>rd</sup> Brigade<sup>68</sup> were taking the fortress of Belchite by frontal assault.”

—Jose Peirats Valls: ‘Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution’.

The final and most bloody phase of the war in the North pitted Carlist fanatics against the Asturian miners, who held out for two months despite the aerial bombardment and being outnumbered two to one. The government’s attempted sea evacuation was foiled by Axis bombers and naval blockade. The Nationalists eventually entered Gijon on the 21<sup>st</sup> October and set up their machine guns in the bullring. Some of the defenders slipped into the Pyrenees to conduct a guerrilla campaign, and Republican prisoners being used for slave labour were able to pull off sabotage operations in the rear. With the Northern campaign concluded the fascists were free to put the Basque arms factories to use and concentrate their forces in the centre. Nazi Germany finally got its hands on the coal and iron ore it needed to prepare for the Second World War and the Condor Legion received a fleet of new Heinkel bombers. As each new Axis technology was tried and tested in Spain the old kit was handed over to the Spanish fascists.

The General Secretary of the Comintern, Georgi Dimitrov, had since October the previous year been making overtures to the Labour and Socialist International, and the International Federation of Trade Unions, with a view to agreeing a joint strategy on Spain. It didn’t help that the parties

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<sup>67</sup> The U.S.S.R. having renounced the Non-intervention Treaty.

<sup>68</sup> The Land and Freedom Column.



of the Second international were repelled by the Moscow show trials; a telegram of protest to the Soviet government was signed by the presidents and secretaries of both organisations, and resulted in their florid denunciation as reactionaries. Friedrich 'Fritz' Adler, Secretary of the L.S.I. wrote a blistering response to Dimitrov<sup>69</sup> 'The Witchcraft Trial in Moscow'; after expressing his long-standing enmity to some of the defendants, and Trotsky, he ridicules the evidence against them, especially Holtzmann's confession.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1937 delegates of a number of Communist parties met in Paris, and issued an appeal to the I.F.T.U. and L.S.I. for tripartite action to pressurise the British and French governments over non-intervention, however they couldn't resist bickering about Trotskyism in their statement. In June 1937 Dimitrov sent them a telegram, proposing a joint committee to help the Spanish government. Coincidentally, in Spain the P.C.E. was once again angling for a merger with the Socialist Workers' Party but was rebuffed by the Caballero faction. Now they set about ousting him as General Secretary of the U.G.T. a rival executive committee was set up comprising Communists and right-wing Socialists, forcing his resignation.

By the end of 1937 the entire republican zone was controlled by the P.C.E. Although on Stalin's instructions it never held more than two ministries, its agents had penetrated every level of society and state terrorism reigned. Meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January 1938 the Spanish politburo reported to the Comintern that the party was "the most powerful organization in Republican Spain". The Catalanists had, in their turn outlived their usefulness, with all traces of revolutionary Catalonia erased, the central government rubbed their noses in it by relocating to Barcelona. For some, even the cause of antifascism had lost its appeal; many workers speculated that a home-grown dictatorship could be no worse than the one being imposed by Moscow. Diego Abad de Santillan remarked: "Whether Juan Negrin won with his Communist cohorts, or Franco won with his Italians and Germans, the results would be the same for us."

"The thing for which the Communists were working was not to postpone the Spanish revolution till a more suitable time, but to make sure that it never happened. This became more and more obvious as time went on, as power was twisted more and more out of working-class hands, and as more and more revolutionaries of every shade were flung into jail. Every move was made in the name of military necessity, because this pretext was, so to speak, ready-made, but the effect was to drive the workers back from an advantageous position and into a position in which, when the war was over, they would find it impossible to resist the reintroduction of capitalism. Please notice that I am saying nothing against the rank-and-file Communists, least of all against the thousands of Communists who died heroically round Madrid. ...

... In England the Communist war-policy has been accepted without question, because very few criticisms of it have been allowed to get into print and because its general line — do away with revolutionary chaos, speed up production, militarize the army — sounds realistic and efficient. It is worth pointing out its inherent weakness. In order to check every revolutionary tendency and make the war as much like an ordinary war as possible, it became necessary to throw away the strategic opportunities that actually existed. I have described how we were armed, or not armed, on the Aragon front. There is very little doubt that arms were deliberately withheld lest too many of them should get into the hands of the Anarchists, who would afterwards use them for a

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<sup>69</sup> Both men had themselves been defendants in famous political trials. Adler is best known for having assassinated the Austrian prime minister in 1916; Dimitrov for his acquittal on charges related to the burning of the Reichstag in 1933, during which he aggressively cross-examined Herman Göring.

revolutionary purpose; consequently the big Aragon offensive which would have made Franco draw back from Bilbao, and possibly from Madrid, never happened. “

—Orwell: (*op. cit.*)

The winter of 1937–1938 was very harsh, and in December blizzard conditions around Teruel provided the Republic with cover to besiege the Nationalist salient; at times the weather was so bad the German bombers could not fly, but the Republic lost more aircraft. The town was captured twice, in house to house fighting, and lost twice. Around a hundred thousand troops died, of whom two-thirds were on the republican side,<sup>70</sup> in February they withdrew. Civilian casualties, from crossfire, cold and hunger were also high. The loss was followed by furious buck-passing between the rival Communist commanders, accusations of Trotsky-fascism and fifth-columnism flew back and forth. Professional non-Communist officers, and those who had joined the party just to smooth their way were generally disgusted with the political games being played in the middle of a war.

The Nazis' blitzkrieg technique reached its full development in the bombardment that commenced the invasion of Aragon, with the deployment of the new Junkers 87, the Stuka dive bomber, followed by tanks and infantry. On the 12 March 1938, Negrin went to Paris to ask for arms and aircraft, the same day the Third Reich invaded Austria, in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles. The 'Anschluss',<sup>71</sup> which terrified the French government, was met with abject appeasement by the British one, which signed a treaty with Italy whilst the latter's submarines torpedoed its merchant fleet with impunity. France did however re-open the border and supply eighteen thousand tons of war materiel, prompting Franco to advance on Valencia to pre-empt French involvement. Negrin returned to heavy bombing raids over Barcelona from the Italian air force base in Majorca. The Republic was cut in two on the 19<sup>th</sup> April when the Carlists reached the Mediterranean, nevertheless the Levante had strong defensive positions and put up a fierce resistance, Valencia held, inflicting proportionately the heaviest losses of the war on the fascist troops.

Defence minister Prieto was the first to suspect the game was up in February and suggest suing for peace, which cost him his job. A close associate of Negrin, he had been extensively used by the Communists in their manoeuvres against the left and the anarchists, but now they turned on him. Dolores Ibarruri denounced him publicly on 27<sup>th</sup> February; Negrin sacked him on 5<sup>th</sup> April, and took over the Defence Ministry. Alvarez del Vayo became Foreign Secretary, and Prieto was sent to America to try and borrow money. For its own part, the P.C.E. wrote a

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<sup>70</sup> Teruel resulted in one of the British Battalion's two executions. It was not the policy of the Battalion to shoot deserters. Allan Kemp was caught with another volunteer attempting to switch sides in December 1938. He had with him a map of the British machine-gun positions. He was shot by firing squad not for desertion but for endangering the lives of his comrades.

—From Interview with Bob Cooney in

'The Road to Spain: Anti Fascists at War 1936–1939'.

<sup>71</sup> Austria had a Catholic-fascist government and was close to Italy, although it had never been part of Germany there was a sizeable constituency for unification, however terrorist operations by Austrian Nazis weakened their case. Hitler's impatience to have his birthplace inside the Reich led him to launch an invasion ahead of a scheduled referendum on the subject. The occupation was followed by a highly selective plebiscite from which about ten percent of the eligible electorate were excluded. The ballot paper is rather comical; under its loaded question are two circles, a large one for 'yes' and a small one for 'no'. The roundup of Jews, leftists and other potential opponents began within days.

script for Negrin to negotiate with the fascists, but not only had he nothing to bargain with, the document offered neither Franco nor Hitler anything they wanted. Franco's new constitution granted him full autocracy, his ministers swore allegiance not to God or Spain but to Franco, in the name of those concepts. New laws placed all industry, and the press in the service of the head of state; the church was given responsibility for education. Herman Goering insisted on taking control of Spain's mining industry to oversee the export of its mineral resources to the Reich, and the Condor Legion was briefly grounded in support of his case.

The Republic was saddled with Negrin's authoritarian leadership, since he was Stalin's man and the P.C.E. controlled the armed forces. It further overstretched its resources with the ambitious and ill-conceived Ebro offensive; the fascists had been creeping closer to the river, to cut off Catalonia. To deflect them away from Valencia, the republic counter attacked in July; it was entirely a Communist operation, calculated for propaganda effect, costly, long-winded and fruitless. Casualties on both sides were boosted by the obsolete obsession with capturing and holding ground at any cost, rather than inflicting damage on the enemy's assets. The hastily assembled Army of the Ebro included conscripts as young as sixteen and Nationalist prisoners of war, who were automatically pardoned if they would enlist. Although the influence of the anarchist movement had dwindled beyond recognition, about sixty percent of the army of the Ebro were confederals and/or members of libertarian associations. Most of the officers were Communists of conviction or convenience.

"A secret F.A.I. — Federacion Anarquista Iberica — circular of September 1938 pointed out that of 7,000 promotions in the Army since May 5,500 had been Communists. In the Army of the Ebro out of 27 brigades, 25 were commanded by Communists, while all 9 divisional commanders, 3 army corps commanders, and the supreme commander (Modesto) were Communists. This was the most extreme case of Communist control, but the proportions for the Anarchists were nearly as depressing elsewhere. In all six armies of Republican Spain the Anarchists believed the proportions to be 163 Communist brigade commanders to 33 Anarchists, 61 divisional commanders to 9 Anarchists, 15 army corps commanders to 2 Anarchists (with 4 Anarchist sympathizers), and 3 Communist army commanders, 2 sympathizers and one neutral."

—Hugh Thomas, 'The Spanish Civil War' 1961

Preceded by a commando raid, and with the element of surprise, the river crossing on the moonless night of the 24<sup>th</sup> — 25<sup>th</sup> July was initially successful but succumbed to two-to-one Axis air superiority. There was an inexplicable delay in deploying the air force; perhaps it had to await orders from Moscow. The Republican supply lines relied on pontoon bridges that were repeatedly destroyed by heavy bombing and opening the dams in the Pyrenees.

"The crossing of the Ebro at night was a remarkable performance. The pontoons consisted of narrow buoyant sections tied together and men would sit straddled across the junctions of these sections to hold them firm, because the Ebro was a very fast-flowing river. And then others went across in boats. The mules were swum across. We went across the pontoons carrying our weapons, our machine guns. We had light machine guns as well as the heavy ones. We had five machine gun groups in our Company. No two people had to be on one section at the same time. We got across all right, lined up and marched up to the top of the hill.

The Fascists got scared stiff. They had been about to celebrate Mass, some of them, down in the valley, and there were tons, great streams of white muslin, which had been part of the preparation for this mass. We used them as mosquito nets, as a matter of fact, later on.

But we crossed the Ebro and made a rapid advance towards Gandesa. The real fighting then began, because the Nazi German planes were sent back and they bombed us like the devil. However we got our machine guns set up and we defended ourselves. I think we maybe made a tactical mistake in not rushing down right past and round Gandesa to prevent the Fascists fortifying it, which they did next day.”

—Tom Murray, antifascist: quoted in  
‘Voices From the Spanish Civil War’ 1986.

Still hiding behind the non-intervention agreement, Britain proposed a withdrawal of foreign personnel in return for granting the Nationalists belligerent rights. With only a partial withdrawal on offer from the Axis, comprising mainly wounded or incompetent Italian Blackshirts who were going home anyway, Negrin offered to unilaterally repatriate the greatly depleted International Brigades, excepting exiles from fascist regimes who would acquire Spanish citizenship and be incorporated into the regular army.

Germany had designs on Czechoslovakia so Hitler had planned an invasion for the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1938, at the same time making preparations for hostilities against Britain and France should they interfere. Its bone of contention was Sudetenland, an industrial German-speaking region retained within the periphery of Czechoslovakia by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nazi agitation amongst ethnic Germans led to hostilities between Czechs and paramilitary gangs based over the border. In the early hours of 30<sup>th</sup> September at the Munich Conference, representatives of Britain, France, and Italy ceded the disputed territory to the Third Reich over the heads of the Czech government, which was told it would be abandoned to its fate if it resisted.

The Munich Agreement soured relations between Russia and France, convincing Stalin he had backed a loser in the Western democracies. His unfinished business in Spain was the Barcelona show trials of the POUM leaders. The bar having been set incredibly high by Nin, his comrades rose to the challenge<sup>72</sup> and in the end none of the POUMistas succumbed to torture, threats or bribery. When the original defence counsel went into hiding, CNT-FAI engaged one of their own lawyers, Vicente Rodriguez Revilla. In the absence of evidence and without a single confession, the case for treason collapsed and the defendants were convicted instead of public order offences relating to the May events. Goldman commended the judge on his impartiality and believed their heavy prison sentences — which would depend on an unlikely continuity of administration — were simply to protect them from the Stalinists. Caballero, Montseny and Oliver testified for the defence and a submission from Trotsky himself was entered into evidence. It was a massive slap in the face for Stalin, who took no further interest in Spain; Britain and France likewise wanted the conflict over quickly. As the republic weakened militarily and economically, its value as a potential ally in the approaching pan-European war — on which Negrin had pinned his hopes — evaporated. The cost of re-building its armed forces after the losses at Ebro would be a prohibitive

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<sup>72</sup> “It [POUM] is a Marxist party and I have been and am absolutely opposed to Marxism, but that cannot prevent me from paying respects to the mentality and courage of Gorkin, Andrade, and their comrades. Their stand in court was magnificent. Their exposition of their ideas was clear cut. There were no evasions or apologies. In point of fact the seven men in the dock demonstrated, for the first time since the demoralization of all idealists in Russia, how revolutionists should face their accusers. At the end, after the prosecuting attorney had tried their patience to the breaking point, Gorkin, Andrade, Bonet, Gironella, Arquer, Escuder and Rebull rose to their full stature with their clenched fists held high in the air, sure of themselves and defiant against their enemies.”

—Emma Goldman, to ‘Vanguard’ November 1938.

drain on countries that were still struggling to re-arm themselves; a neutral Spain would be a better prospect for the allies.

In her many letters to Rudolf Rocker since the beginning of the social revolution, Goldman had expressed her growing dismay over the collaborationist tendencies within the C.N.T. especially Montseny, who she described as “a politician”, “a Lenin in skirts”. Like many foreign anarchists, she kept her criticisms, whilst recognising the magnitude of the challenges the Spaniards faced and appreciating what they had achieved under those circumstances. In particular she argued that they should have stopped appeasing the Communists after May 1937 as Soviet aid was already being run down while their comrades were being arrested and slaughtered.

The cracks were beginning to show, however. There were now fundamental differences between the C.N.T. National Committee, which defended Negrin’s government, and the FAI Peninsular Committee. A national plenum of regional libertarian organisations was held in Barcelona between 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October 1938, two months before the fall of Catalonia. On her arrival Goldman was surprised to find erstwhile supporters of collaboration Herrera, Santillan, Montseny, and Esgleas now completely opposed to the policy. They submitted to Goldman and the other delegates an elaborate critique of the committee’s mistakes along with their charges against Negrin and the Communists. A commission was mandated to approach President Azaña with a view to getting Negrin replaced, but the latter had threatened him with the army and Azaña’s customary timidity won out.

“Although she found movement division quite deep, she reports also that both sides come together as a solid whole in the face of potential involvement by outsiders. This she regards as fortunate because an open split would destroy the CNT and FAI, a development their enemies would welcome. At the same time, she is confident that FAI opposition eventually will pressure morally the CNT to take a stronger, more effective stand against the Negrin regime and the Communists.

Despite these clashes, Goldman remains impressed with the outstanding courage and commitment shown at the plenum generally, at a time when Barcelona itself and the CNT headquarters were under bombardment. She reports that only several out of the large numbers of delegates left the meeting place for safety. The rest continued their discussion as intensely as ever, an attitude Goldman finds unequalled any place else in the world.”

—‘Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution’  
edited by David Porter.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> October Goldman tells Rocker she is encouraged, even at this late stage, to see the FAI finally criticising state collaboration strongly, at least at anarchist gatherings. She did not speak on these matters at the plenum and remained circumspect about discussing them publicly. This was not due to any loyalty to the National Committee, however:

“It is because I realise that a real exposure of the treacherous part played by the Communists at this time would in the first place not be believed even by the anarchist critics and would probably work into the hands of Franco and his backers: but you may believe me that it cost me no amount of effort to control myself.”

(*ibid.*)

Marianet remained firmly on the other side, he seemed to enjoy his role as a politician and questions were already being asked about his use of union funds. Like his predecessor Horacio

Prieto, he was a 'libertarian possibilist' who integrated readily into centralising and bureaucratic structures. His appointment as Catalan, and subsequently national, secretary of the C.N.T. was a fluke that cost the Spanish Working Class dearly. In the tradition of the Bakuninists who refused administrative positions in the First International, the most militant anarchists declined positions of responsibility to avoid the conflict of interest between revolutionaries and union officials. In the election for Catalan regional secretary, the winning candidate Marcos Alcón turned down the role, as did the runner-up, Germinal Esgleas, this left only Marianet with four votes — who according to García Oliver<sup>73</sup> had been put forward as a 'joke' by the builders' union.

The invasion of Catalonia began on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January Negrin called up all men between seventeen and twenty-five at the behest of the P.C.E. and with the apparent assent of the National Committee, notwithstanding the devastating effect this would have on Confederal organisation and socialised production. It deepened the rift with the FAI Peninsular Committee, who noted that the mobilisation would place all production under control of the state, and began an enquiry into the matter. A national plenum of the entire libertarian movement convened in Valencia on the 20<sup>th</sup>; it considered the decree was politically motivated, noting that only about a third of combatants were armed, whereas Negrin held two hundred thousand well equipped Carabineers in the rear for political purposes. They were only meant to guard the treasury — which was in Moscow — and enforce customs, not that anything was coming into the country in January 1939. A liaison sub-committee of the libertarian movement had been mandated to approach Miaja with a view to setting up a national defence junta. Negrin's position was untenable but there seemed little point in formally removing him.

Pi Sunyer, the Esquerra's mayor of Barcelona, told Azaña that "the Catalans no longer knew why they were fighting, because of Negrin's anti-Catalan policy."<sup>74</sup> Martial law was declared throughout the Republican zone on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the government evacuated itself to France. Having recently betrayed Czechoslovakia the British government warned the French one it would receive no assistance if it intervened. Five thousand International Brigaders who had yet to be repatriated managed to get themselves armed by the Communist Party and were able to slow the advancing Italian army a little with a series of daring ambushes as they made their way to the border.

Barcelona fell on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1939 after four days of aerial bombardment; the familiar carnage followed. The Luftwaffe divided its time between attacking refugees on the road and preventing stranded Republican aircraft from rejoining the fray in the centre. The Fascists banned the Catalan language, confiscated the printing presses and burned all the books, even local cultural practices such as the traditional 'Sardana' folk dancing were made illegal. Half a million refugees crossed into France only to be interned in work camps. A hundred and fifty volunteers from the Durruti Column stayed behind to slow the advance and cover the evacuation. The British and French governments recognised nationalist Spain on 27<sup>th</sup> February, and gave the fascists all Republican war materiel remaining on French soil, including the latest shipment recently arrived from Russia, and the Spanish gold on deposit in the bank of France.

Negrin telegraphed President Azaña, who had taken refuge in their embassy in Paris, to come and resume his post; but the butcher of Casas Viejas, who had fled from Madrid to Valencia, then

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<sup>73</sup> Juan García Oliver: 'El eco de los pasos'.  
Barcelona, 1979. p183.

<sup>74</sup> Burnett Bolloten: 'The Spanish Civil War: revolution and counterrevolution' 1991.

to Barcelona, and back, and forth, at every turn putting his own safety before the momentous considerations of his life and times, resigned instead, declaring the war lost and “further sacrifice useless”. The rest of the government followed suit; Martinez Barrio offered to return and conduct a presidential election, but only to negotiate a surrender. CNT-FAI officials meeting in Paris doubted Negrin’s sincerity in continuing to prosecute the war, suspecting him of preparing a selective evacuation using the Communists’ control over the military, just to get his money out of the country. Negrin promoted Modesto and Lister, Val flew back to Madrid, Rojo refused to leave France, Miaja said he would fight on.

Before the Communist coup became a fait accompli, on 4<sup>th</sup> March, Segismundo Casado, commander of the Republican Army of the Centre, established the anti-Negrin National Defence Junta with Cipriano Mera and the socialist Julián Besteiro. Its priority would be the evacuation of the republican army, and minimising civilian casualties. Contact was made with the enemy and with British diplomats who offered to mediate and try to obtain guarantees, considering the army would get better terms than a Communist-controlled government.

Franco however was not about to share credit for saving Spain from Stalin, and would accept no conditions. He portrayed the entire Popular Front as a criminal conspiracy and decreed a law of political responsibilities, making it retrospectively an offence to have resisted the nationalist movement, by any means, active or passive, at any time since 1934, thereby giving himself impunity to prosecute any actual or potential disloyalty. On 6<sup>th</sup> March José Miaja joined the junta and began arresting Communists in Madrid. On his way into exile, Negrin ordered Luis Barceló, commander of the First Corps of the Army of the Centre, to try and regain control of the capital. His troops were defeated by Mera’s 14<sup>th</sup> Division and he was shot. Casado’s attempt to negotiate an orderly transfer of territory and equipment collapsed when bad weather and equipment failure delayed the handover of the air force. Franco had no interest in limiting casualties, wishing to eradicate all traces of the Second Republic.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> March the remaining fighters withdrew and evacuation began in earnest; most headed for Alicante, the furthest port from the front, vainly anticipating the compassion of the liberal democracies. About four thousand were taken prisoner by Italian troops on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, and subsequently executed; many chose suicide over surrender.

Of course the decade ended with the outbreak of the long-anticipated Second World War. When it finally got underway, both dictators cautiously hedged their bets. Franco declared Spain neutral whilst availing the Kriegsmarine of its coastal facilities and planning an invasion of Gibraltar. Franco’s terms for entering the war included that territory plus all French possessions in Africa and a great deal of military equipment. The price was too high, and Hitler had already promised the Mediterranean to Mussolini. It was agreed that Spain would join Germany in attacking Gibraltar when it was ready but Franco bottled at the last minute. Meanwhile German and British agents worked on the faultlines in the Falange by bribing various generals to pull the regime one way or the other. The 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact abruptly terminated Stalin’s opposition to fascism, which he appeased by embracing anti-Semitism and removing Jewish officials from their posts. Shortly after Germany invaded Poland, Russia invaded Finland.<sup>75</sup> When the Reich eventually reneged on the deal, it was fought as the ‘Great Patriotic War’. The people’s war against fascism had turned into an imperialist turf war; six years and sixty million deaths

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<sup>75</sup> Though heavily outnumbered, the resistance of Finnish guerrillas was ferocious, in the end about 11% of the territory was ceded to the U.S.S.R.

later, the great powers would carve up Europe between themselves, and the cold war gave Franco the opportunity to re-align his regime with the West.

Spain's maverick fascism was to be one of the most durable and refined examples of the genre. Altogether Franco killed more of his countrymen than Hitler did, but he had thirty-five years to do it. The executions went on for years and untold numbers died from disease and neglect in the corrupt prison system. The garrotte was retained and even drinking water was withheld from the disobedient. Thousands of prisoners of war were starved in concentration camps or consumed on grandiose and impractical civil engineering projects. Peirats estimates a third of the Spanish population was incarcerated one way or another. It's instructive to note that Stalin's materialist misanthropy and Franco's metaphysical necrophilia produced very similar results. Having rescued Spain from Bolshevism, Franco's obsession with Freemasonry resurfaced, meanwhile under its mediaevalist rhetoric his one-party state walked the invisible line between state-capitalism and National Socialism.

The command economy, like its Soviet counterpart, was wasteful and inefficient even by the standards of pre-war Spain. A vertical bureaucracy moulded the entire society in the dictator's image, with state-run associations for workers, employers and students controlling all access to the economy and cultural life. The wealth and prestige of the church was restored, but it was expected to adhere strictly to its function of policing the minds of the people; it resumed responsibility for education, with a rigidly prescribed syllabus. Likewise the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, whose title to the means of production was purely nominal, also worked for the one boss. The façade of religion, property and cultural tradition had no more significance in Nationalist Spain than did Marxist theory in the U.S.S.R.; all were pressed into the service of the leader's personality cult. In both regimes, membership of the Party was a prerequisite for advancement, faulty propaganda was treasonable, and fear of independent thought kept the firing squads busy.



## 21. Fascism and antifascism. Part three.

### Populist fascism: perpetual counter-revolution.

“What is this liberal rubbish?  
Are you some kind of mug?  
Don’t talk to me of ‘free speech’  
For murdering fascist thugs  
We remember Mosley  
And how Cable Street folk fought him  
When we see the fash  
We let the boots do the talking”

—Oi Polloi

Now I started writing this chapter in 2012, then I paused it to see what would happen, and quite a lot has happened since. Ten years on, Britain has the most explicitly right-wing authoritarian government in its history, suppressing dissent by any means at its disposal. It is supported by computerised surveillance and detection, a police force as brutal, sexist and racist as ever, tamed media and a judiciary who mostly went to the same schools as the executive. The entire island is in counter-insurgency mode.

We’ve seen the rise and fall of the English Defence League and the United Kingdom Independence Party, the election of far-right governments around the world. The United States elected a reactionary-comic television presenter as its 45<sup>th</sup> President, who clowned around for five years making his office even more of a laughing stock while we wondered if anyone had the sense to disconnect the nuclear button.

In 1945, after six years of war against Nazism, a British labour government permitted the fascists detained under Regulation 18b to resume their activities, and gave them a police escort wherever they went, as unsurprisingly they had no popular constituency whatsoever. They were joined by Axis prisoners of war who were supposedly being rehabilitated. Some of those returned to Germany and maintaining their British contacts, plotted a fourth Reich, under cover of a crank spiritualist group called Ostara. Recently demobbed British Jews reacted with disbelief:

“I had been in the merchant navy, survived two torpedo attacks on the Atlantic convoys, and I came back home to Amhurst Road, Hackney to hugs and kisses. My mother went out to make some tea and my dad said, *The bastards are back — Mosley and his Blackshirts*”

—Morris Beckman, antifascist: to ‘The Guardian’ 2009.

Apart from Spain and Portugal, which retained fascist governments, the only country in Europe where it was legal to glorify Hitler and the holocaust was Britain. Mosley took advantage

of this to publish a German-language paper and antisemitic propaganda for distribution by right-wing British service personnel in the occupation zone. After three years of that, Mosley again combined the splinters into the Union Movement, and embarked on an electoral campaign.

“Going from a cinema showing newsreel of piles of Jewish men, women and children being bulldozed into lime pits in the concentration camps, and then passing an outdoor fascist meeting or seeing swastikas whitewashed on the walls of Jewish homes and synagogues affected these ex-servicemen with emotion ranging from choleric anger to a cold hard desire to kill the perpetrators.”

—Morris Beckman: ‘The 43 Group’

The conflict in the British Working Class was inflamed on the one hand, by newsreels of the holocaust, and on the other, by the civil war in Palestine that preceded the establishment of the state of Israel.

“Above all, it was the unfolding extent of the concentration camp horrors that really unhinged us all. It imbued every ex servicemen with a sick sense of shame that no action had ever been taken to try to save the camp inmates. Air crews had no doubt that specialised attacks could have taken out gas chambers, furnaces and SS barracks. Ex-paratroopers and Special Forces veterans argued that drops into and around the camps could have saved many, but nothing was ever attempted, ...”

(*ibid.*)

You have to keep in mind that Churchill had been an anti-Semite when Hitler was still in short trousers, and so was post-war foreign secretary Ernest Bevin. Bevin was an enthusiast of the ‘Truman Doctrine’ against Soviet influence, so the pre-war squabble between socialist and Communist internationals was still playing into fascist hands. A dedicated imperialist, Bevin opposed Indian independence and set about re-establishing Dutch control in Indonesia, using British, Indian and even Japanese troops to wrest the islands from the indigenous people who had recently liberated them. He was also concerned to limit Jewish emigration to Palestine, declaring to the press on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1946: “*Jews must not try to get to the head of the queue*”, sparking riots in Tel Aviv that left six civilians dead, shot by British troops. Some Jewish soldiers refused to clash with their co-religionists and were quietly posted elsewhere.

“Watching the Royal Navy stop Greek and Turkish bucket ships crammed with the sick and broken survivors of the camps and the Pathé Gazette and Movietone films of these same derelicts being incarcerated behind barbed wire in Cyprus, seemed to plumb the very depths of inhumanity.”

(*ibid.*)

Just as they had been before the war, the fascists were driven off the streets by autonomous direct action. The ‘43 Group’, composed of Jewish ex-service personnel and their allies, broke up their meetings, diverted and destroyed their literature, ambushed vandals, infiltrated their ranks, intercepted correspondence then used the evidence to compromise their supporters in the establishment. It published its own paper, ‘On Guard’.

The group started after a spur-of-the-moment decision to turn over a meeting of the ironically named British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women, addressed by 18b internee Jeffery Hamm. Out for a drink with some mates: ex-paratrooper Gerry Flamberg, ex-guardsman Len Sherman (a wrestler and judo player), and ex-fighter pilot Alec Carson; Beckman relates:

“We confronted the stewards. *The platform’s mine* whispered Gerry. *I’ll take the two on the left*, Len responded. Alec and I picked a target each. Len walked up to his pair and pretended to fumble in his pocket for coins, saying, *I’ll take two of those ‘Britain awake’*. Then, with the lightning speed of the trained, he grabbed the heads of his two targets and banged them together. I heard the thud and saw them drop. Gerry toppled the platform and I saw Hamm falling backwards into the grass. A woman shrieked. I kicked my target between the legs and he crumpled in pain. Alec struggled with his opponent who broke away and sped downhill ...”

(*ibid.*)

As the fascists dispersed in disarray, an elderly German Jew congratulated the four and urged them to make themselves scarce. Flushed with their success, they returned to their regular haunt at the Maccabi sports club where they arranged a meeting the following week for invited guests only. It was attended by thirty-eight men and five women, hence the name. They had seen the way forward and resolved to continue.

“We started to get organised straightaway, and within two months we had three hundred members, mostly Jews but with a sprinkling of Gentiles. We were very disciplined, we had to be. Our job was to put as many fascists in hospital as we could.”

—Morris Beckman: Quoted by Dave Hann (*op.cit.*)

The usual game was to knock over the speakers’ platform, forcing them to abandon the meeting. The task would be accomplished by selected ‘commandoes’, many of whom had actually performed that role during the war. They would quietly take their places in the hall, then at a pre-arranged signal charge in wedge formation at the line of stewards protecting the platform. A large and well-stewarded meeting could require several wedges, precisely timed and co-ordinated. Supporters would heckle, pick fights in the audience and try to give the cops sufficient cause to shut the event on public order grounds.

In 1946 the government handed the fascists a gift, an amendment to the Public Meetings act of 1908 made it an offence to “*act in a disorderly manner at a lawful public meeting for the purpose of preventing the transaction of the purpose for which that meeting was called*”. It authorised police to take the names and addresses of persons suspected of such an offence, so the speakers would point out opponents to the police who could then ask their names. Failure to comply amounted to obstruction, which meant your name was given in court anyway, and the fascists made full use of this intelligence-gathering tool.

Although it worked with the Communist Party and others, the 43 Group had no political agenda beyond neutralising the existential threat to British Jewry, and would have been content for the state to do the job. It benefitted from the recent military experience of its founders, who emphasised disciplined action and meticulous intelligence-gathering. Its rules were simple: Members were to do whatever they committed to do and stand by their comrades at all times. They were sworn not to lay hands on the police, or to resist arrest, as the real battle was for public opinion. There were to be no political arguments about Communism or anti-Communism, Zionism or anti-Zionism. It mattered not that Communists were equally happy to be fighting Trotskyists as long as they didn’t do it when there were fascists to be beaten up.

It was happy to lobby politicians, to use the media and seek help from trade unions or other bodies. A wide variety of trades and professions were represented and put their facilities at its disposal. At times it sought and received funding from Bourgeois Jews — and the odd gangster,

but it was driven from the ground up and most of its personnel were Working Class. It was often at odds with the 'community leadership' whose relationship to the state was all-important. The state, of course, only takes note of existential threats to itself, and its monopoly on violence.

"The Working Class who voted Labour into power may well stand bewildered and indignant as they witness Mosley and the fascists holding provocative meetings under the protection of large numbers of police specially detailed for the job, when they witness the Labour-controlled London County Council affording facilities for Mosley and his movement to meet in schools and halls under their control. This at a time when the fascists have the utmost difficulty in booking public halls because of the pressure of public opinion. Arising out of protests Home Secretary Chuter Ede replied that he is "considering" the banning of loudspeaker equipment at public meetings. But this would apply to "all" parties who use loudspeakers at meetings. This, instead of striking a blow at the fascist movement, in practice would be a blow against working-class organisations who use such equipment for propaganda. *This is the result of the "impartiality" of the reformists. Their "impartiality" consists in hamstringing the anti-fascists and allowing the fascists to carry on.*"

—Ted Grant: 'The Menace of Fascism. What it is and how to fight it.' June 1948.

My Italics, bored with this theme yet? We've got another seventy years of it to get through.

A turning point came when Mosley attempted to launch the Union Movement in Brighton, which had both a fascist presence and a sizeable Jewish community. Working together with the locals, the 43 group transported antifascists from out of town, residents came out in force and the fascists were routed.

As older members succumbed to legal constraint, injury and family pressure, youngsters stepped up to take their place. A generation that had 'missed' the war wanted to play its part and recruitment had to be limited. By October 1947 the group was attacking an average of fifteen meetings a week.<sup>1</sup>

Cracks soon appeared in Mosley's coalition; there was an obvious fault-line between the union-jack merchants and the sleazy fourth Reich movement. When a speaker at Notting Hill Gate announced that one day the swastika would fly over Buckingham Palace his audience fell about laughing. Being in closer physical contact with the leader than they had been before the war, some of his lieutenants began to see him as a self-serving charlatan who made it up as he went along. The U.M. was short on policies, beyond robbing Britain's colonies, and the Atlee government was already doing that with a vengeance.

Anti-Semitism was a minority obsession and they weren't all into it. Mosley himself blew hot and cold, having opportunistically taken it up in the 1930s to curry favour with Hitler, at times it appeared to be all he had going for him. The post-war Palestine debacle kept it alive, but was it worth the battering they were getting? Those who thought so defected to the fanatic Arnold Leese's Imperial Fascist League, while others switched sides entirely and formed the National Anti-Fascist League, notably the Birmingham organiser Michael Maclean, an 18b detainee. For the first time the 43 group started to hold its own meetings to host these ex-fascists, many of whom were accomplished orators, speaking frankly about the U.M. leadership. The commandoes' role reversed, now protecting the platforms of their former foes.

In the 1949 local elections the fascists again failed to secure the populist vote and after one last desperate orgy of violence the Union Movement fizzled out. With nothing more to do the 43

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<sup>1</sup> Beckman: (*op.cit.*)

Group disbanded and its commandoes at last slipped back into civilian life. Some would come out of retirement at the end of the 1950s when Mosley tried again against the background of Cold War, Commonwealth immigration, and the collapse of Empire.

In 1958, after weeks of violence from Mosley's supporters in West London, African-Caribbean residents of Notting Hill formed a defence force to escort black people home from work. Soon they got word of a planned assault on their headquarters, which proved decisive:

"When they told us that they were coming to attack that night I went around and told all the people that was living in the area to withdraw that night. The women I told them to keep pots, kettles of hot water boiling, get some caustic soda and if anyone tried to break down the door and come in, to just lash out with them. The men, well we were armed. During the day they went out and got milk bottles, got what they could find and got the ingredients of making the Molotov cocktail bombs. Make no mistake, there were iron bars, there were machetes, there were all kinds of arms, weapons, we had guns. ... I was standing on the second floor with the lights out as look-out when I saw a massive lot of people out there.

... I says, 'Start bombing them.' When they saw the Molotov cocktails coming and they start to panic and run. It was a very serious bit of fighting that night, we were determined to use any means, any weapon, anything at our disposal for our freedom."

—Baker Baron, antifascist, from: 'Forbidden Britain',  
Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, BBC Books, 1994

South African fascist Arthur Chesterton, a former Mosleyite who had returned to the Conservative party, began gathering racist and antisemitic colleagues around him into a rival group, the League of Empire Loyalists. He was joined by a younger generation of Nazis: Colin Jordan, a disciple of Arnold Leese; John Bean, John Tyndall and Young Conservative Martin Webster. Bean and Webster left and started the National Labour Party. Jordan having inherited Leese's house, launched the White Defence League with Tyndall, which fused with Bean's N.L.P. calling themselves British National Party.<sup>2</sup> They went on to found the explicitly named National Socialist Movement on Hitler's birthday, without Bean. Jordan and Tyndall squabbled over heiress Françoise Dior, (or more likely her money) who shuttled back and forth between the two while one or the other was in prison. Chesterton, with Bean, Tyndall and Webster then formed the National Front.

A new Jewish formation, the 1962 Committee (62 Group) emerged to take up the challenge. Drawing on the experience of the 43 Group, with an emphasis on intelligence gathering it was successful in foiling the N.S.M. in particular, which had begun to dabble in terrorism and fell foul of the state. It's fair to say it was a cross-class alliance, started by businessmen Harry Bidney and Wally Levy, with Communist Party candidate Gerry Gable.

The terrain had changed however, the Jewish community in the East end was less cohesive and Communism was out of fashion, owing to the rise of Israel and revelations about purges in the U.S.S.R. The left in general had shifted its focus to anti-imperialism and nuclear disarmament. The 62 Group shared intelligence with the state to obtain convictions but the state had other priorities. This was the height of the Cold War and antifascists were of equal interest as potential 'Communist subversives'. If they beat up Nazis and got locked up for it, (or vice versa) the state was content to kill two birds with one stone. An offshoot, Searchlight, became a periodical edited

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<sup>2</sup> The name would later be recycled by Tyndall after he fell out with Webster.

by Gable. He got tip-offs from Special Branch but the traffic was not all one way and he acquired a reputation as a grass. The Israeli secret service was now active internationally and the whole thing became somewhat murky. Had they forgotten the lesson of Italy that both fascism and antifascism are outside the law?

The 1968 race relations act prompted Jordan to re-brand the N.S.M. as the British Movement, it remained in competition with the N.F. but focussed more on hooliganism than politics. Attacks on Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets culminated in the killing of kitchen porter Toshir Ali in 1970. Jordan stood down as leader in 1975 after being caught shoplifting women's underwear.

The first person to be killed in a public demonstration on the island of Britain for fifty-five years was a second-year mathematics student, Kevin Gately, killed by a Metropolitan police cavalry charge in Red Lion Square as the crowd tried to block a National Front meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1974. Gately was six feet nine inches tall and his head can be clearly seen in press photographs above the others, it must have presented a tempting target for a mounted policeman.

For African-Caribbeans the most dangerous fascist organisation was the police. Having lost faith in the British left the Black Panthers, Black Liberation Movement, Black Parents Movement, Black Freedom and Unity Party, Racial Adjustment Action Society and Race Today Collective confronted both forms of racist violence. The persecution of Frank Critchlow and the patrons of the Mangrove Restaurant in All Saints Road led to a show trial of nine black activists. Their acquittal judgement included the first public admission of what everybody knew, that the police were racist. Critchlow himself was in and out of custody for years and eventually received £50,000 for false imprisonment, battery and malicious prosecution.

Similarly, the regular assassinations of South Asian workers by racists went uninvestigated. Student engineer Gurdeep Singh Chaggar was fatally stabbed in Southall outside the Dominion Cinema, which belonged to the Indian Workers' Association, on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> June 1976 leading National Party chairman John Kingsley Reed,<sup>3</sup> to remark: *"that's one down, one million to go"* He was charged with inciting racial hatred under the 1965 Act but acquitted. The judge told him: *"I wish you well in your project"*. The next morning Suresh Grover stopped by the blood stain on the ground and was told by a policeman *"it was just an Asian"*. He and a friend painted *"this racist murder will be avenged"* on the pavement.

On Monday Detective Chief Superintendent Jim Sewell refused to accept there had been a racist motive telling the *Evening Standard* that *"The whole affair has been carried away on a wave of mass hysteria"*. The same day, a public meeting was held at the Dominion, with four arrests resulting in a march on the police station. The Southall Youth Movement was founded there and then. The following year two white youths pled guilty to manslaughter and got four years each. Trial Judge Neil Lawson expressed his belief that they had no racial motive for killing Chaggar.

Following the Southall example, regional Asian Youth Movements were able to transcend cultural, national and religious differences, to protect their communities. The AYM reached out to African-Caribbean organisations and sent delegates to the North of England Irish Prisoners' Committee, it supported striking Miners and anti-imperialist struggles.

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<sup>3</sup> Holocaust denier Reed was considered a moderate on the British neo-Nazi spectrum, drawing his National Socialism from Ernst Röhm, co-founder of the *Sturmabteilung* who fell out with Hitler and was purged. Reed was variously Chairman of Blackburn Young Conservatives and the N.F. where he unsuccessfully challenged Tyndall. The N.P. won two seats on Blackburn Council that year.

“We were British Asians with black politics and we wanted to unite people to combat the issue of racism. We realised religion, ethnicity, identity had no role or significance in what we were doing, so those issues didn’t come up.”

—Suresh Grover, antifascist, Southall Youth Movement,  
to the BBC, 2015.

Outlaw motorcycle clubs like Hells Angels had been in the habit of wearing swastikas ‘Jerry badges’ to antagonise outsiders, especially their parents’ generation who had lived through the war. Some punk bands and fans appropriated the style, actual fascism seeming abstract to them.<sup>4</sup> White British youth in the 1970s were very politically naïve. For a flavour of the time (and some superb live footage of The Clash) see the film ‘Rude Boy’. Rock Against Racism was in answer to the provocation of the heroin-addled guitarist Eric Clapton whose entire career had been built on the work of black artists, drunkenly spouting racist filth from the stage, and equally wasted old paedophile David Bowie who thought it fashionable to flirt with fascist imagery.

Some time in 1976 or 1977 the S-n newspaper ran a feature entitled “Swastika rock revolution” featuring punks it identified as Nazis, and the movement split overnight. Some bands supported R.A.R whilst others such as Skrewdriver re-invented themselves as ‘white supremacists’, and latched onto the skinhead revival — much to the annoyance of traditional skinheads. It turned out any journalist could make cheap copy by going into a pub full of skins and offering them a tenner each to have their picture taken with their arm up. I’d say the whole thing was manufactured — too easily.

Effective community organisation confounded the National Front march in Haringey on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1977. It was a rare example of successful collaboration between political parties, unions and neighbourhood groups. Although each outfit had its own agenda they managed to get three thousand people out to oppose just over a thousand N.F. with sufficient militancy to turn it into a rout. All North London’s immigrant communities were represented including Turkish and Greek Cypriots. As the fascist march started up Wood Green High Road it came under a barrage of missiles. There were eighty-one arrests of whom seventy-four were antifascists.

The largest antifascist mobilisation since Cable Street occurred in South East London in August 1977. Tension built after the police made dawn raids on thirty homes<sup>5</sup> in New Cross and Lewisham arresting twenty-one young black people on suspicion of street robbery. The Lewisham 21 Defence Committee was set up to support the arrestees, and three others from a subsequent incident. They held a number of demonstrations over the summer.

The Front had grown in confidence due to electoral success in local government and had a significant presence on the streets. They had a few minor clashes with the Socialist Workers Party over paper sales pitches, and with the Lewisham 21 Defence Committee. There were arson attacks and police raids on black venues. They called on their entire membership to descend on the London borough on the 13<sup>th</sup> August, Councillors and churches tried to get the Met to ban it, knowing it would be heavily opposed. The Defence Committee squatted an empty shop on New Cross Road to be campaign headquarters.

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<sup>4</sup> Working Class youth were already ‘under heavy manners’ from brutal, racist police, bent landlords and unemployment. The Callahan regime was extremely authoritarian: he put the army into Ireland and oversaw its collusion with loyalist paramilitaries; amended the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, so that the British state went back on its word to its former colonial subjects and was responsible for the Special Demonstration Squad that spied on dissidents.

<sup>5</sup> The Times 31<sup>st</sup> May 1977.

The All-Lewisham Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, comprising Labour Party, religious and community leaders, offered a counter-demonstration in Ladywell Fields with the usual speeches and paper-sales, then a march to the N.F. starting point at Clifton Rise in New Cross. The police refused permission for this route, but residents had other ideas and were backed by ten thousand Working Class militants. The August 13 Ad Hoc Organising Committee called on antifascists to assemble at Clifton Rise at noon, the ALCARAF march would arrive at 13:00 ahead of the fascists' assembly time of 14:00.

Martin Lux was one of those who joined the demo in the hope of diverting it to New Cross, where they could block the road.

"Gauging the reactions of those we'd already agitated, we concluded that substantial sections of the crowd were up for major aggro. The idea developed to seize the initiative as soon as the demo left the park. We'd split off, taking a sizeable chunk with us. Lacking a loudhailer for communication, it became a case of circulate, mingle, verbalise, persuade. Not that we needed to do much of that. The mood of most, party and union hacks aside, was business-like: this was the opportunity to finally get to grips with the nazis rather than echo empty chants down empty streets, to really do it in a set-piece confrontation. "We're gonna 'ave 'em, and now!" was a fair summary of the general feeling."

—Martin Lux: 'Anti-Fascist'

Sure enough, half the demo legged it straight to the militants' meeting point, dodging a police cordon. A fight broke out when the cops evicted the squat shortly after mid-day. The police refusing to let the official march proceed, the organisers disbanded it there and then rather than have it diverted out of the area. Most then made their own way to New Cross where several thousand had already gathered including local youth, black and Asian residents, many older people with scores to settle. As at Cable Street, initial contact was with the police, who stood in the way and had to be dispersed to get at the fascists.

"In a final effort to clear the road, mounted police were deployed. They trotted their animals, nostrils flaring, right to the edge of the mob who stood solid, resisting all attempts to budge them. Foolishly they succeeded only in pushing most of the crowd close to the point where the nazis were assembling. So far I hadn't actually seen a single fascist. It was impossible now to gauge crowd numbers. Four, five, six thousand. More? Who knows? With a couple of hundred people, all of us brandishing weapons, I moved to the right of the heaving masses, towards the point where the nazis were long overdue to emerge. Progress was painfully slow until a great roar went up and I could see, surrounded by a thick cordon of police, the pointed flagpoles of the Front moving like masts in the distance. The party was on."

(*ibid.*)

The babylon having ceded the road to the mob, it bombarded the National Front with missiles, then charged.

"Everyone without exception was brawling toe to toe, the road strewn with broken glass, bricks, bits of timber. I joined the general mêlée in the centre of the road, propelled by the sheer momentum of it all, from one punch up to another, cutting my fists, getting kicked, booting back. I was struck on the side of my face, a small trickle of blood ran from somewhere near my ear, I didn't feel a thing however amidst the brick dust and confusion."

(*ibid.*)



“What I can clearly remember is that initially very few of us seemed to be in amongst the NF, that there was a hail of missiles landing in the area, many of the NF were bleeding from head wounds and all were clearly terrified. They made no attempt to defend themselves at all. I think the hail of missiles also encouraged the cop to let go of me.”

—Mick Woods: to Lewisham77 blog

Thousands of police blocked side streets and lined pavements to get the master race out of New Cross High Street where they were being battered. Unable to reach Lewisham town centre, Tyndall addressed a few hundred of his Nazis in a car park in Conington Road, police ushered them *“through a tunnel in Granville Park and then into Lewisham station, where trains were waiting to take them away”*<sup>6</sup> The crowd, now estimated to be black and white in equal numbers, headed towards the fascists’ intended rally point, gathering rubble on the way, to finish the job. The front were nowhere to be seen however. More contact with plod and a couple of vans destroyed. Convoys of bacon streamed in and a spirited plan to burn down the police station was aborted.

The “Battle of Lewisham” put both the filth and the front in their place and seemed to herald a new era of direct action. Riot shields, which would become ubiquitous, were deployed for the first time on mainland Britain. The following week, when their election rally in Birmingham was similarly routed, shields had to be borrowed from the army. It was the start of the N.F. decline from political player to minority<sup>7</sup> skinhead cult. Some have postulated that the state set them up for a hiding because they were becoming a nuisance.

The Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in the 1970s was a very different organisation to its latter day incarnation, not in its authoritarian ideology or its entryist tactics, but in its demographic. It had a fair proportion of Working Class and trade union activists who wanted to get to grips with the enemy. S.W.P. members had been involved in the August 13 Ad Hoc Organising Committee, and the squat on New Cross Rd. After Lewisham, they decided to set up the Anti Nazi League, one of their most successful front groups, to push populist antifascism as distinct from some of their more controversial policies.

In were Peter Hain of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the N.U.M.’s Arthur Scargill, Tariq Ali of the International Marxist Group, the comedian Dave Allen and the football manager Brian Clough. Ernie Roberts, former Secretary of the A.E.U. brought along forty-five Labour M.P.s. The Communist Party belatedly jumped on the bandwagon. It was a classic popular front, spanning everyone from parliamentarians, media luvvies, and the Rock Against Racism bands to the Working Class fighting squads soon to be kicked out of the party. It made good use of the S.W.P.s propaganda machine and got free newsprint from a supplier in Stratford. As a fashionable cause, it stood to show up Tyndall and Webster as yesterday’s men.

Meanwhile Brick Lane in Tower Hamlets was a regular battleground between Anti-Nazis, Bengali youth and fascists. In the space of two months during 1978, three Asians were murdered in London: Kenneth Singh in Canning Town, Altab Ali outside the Whitechapel park that now bears his name, and Ishaque Ali in Hackney.

1979 was an election year and the N.F. held heavily-policed rallies in immigrant communities. After clashes in Leicester and Islington, Southall determined to show them the door, five thousand residents marched against them the week before. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, the second anniversary of

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<sup>6</sup> The Times, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Tabloids to the contrary, most of the skinheads I’ve known personally have been active antifascists.

Wood Green, local youth and antifascists began surrounding the hall in the morning. At 7:30 p.m. a coach with large police escort was driven at speed into the crowd to allow about forty fascists to enter the Town Hall and listen to candidate John Fairhurst. Cable Street veteran Betty Davis was there:

“The behaviour of the police at Southall was shocking. They were really nasty. Lashing out at anyone they could reach, pregnant women, young boys, even people who were trying to stop the violence”

—Betty Davis: Quoted by Dave Hann. (*op.cit.*)

Eighty or so elderly residents took refuge in the Holy Trinity churchyard where they were set upon by police. A socialist teacher, Blair Peach, was beaten to death as their cavalry tried to clear the residents surrounding the Town Hall. The S.W.P. hastened to claim Peach as their own, having only recently suspended him.

Also beaten over the head was Clarence Baker, manager of Misty in Roots band, who occupied the People Unite Musicians’ Co-operative on Park View Road, an open cultural and creative centre with recording and rehearsal facilities dedicated to supporting local youth. On the day it was being used as a medical centre to treat the wounded. That evening police broke down the doors and attacked the casualties, doctors, nurses and solicitors inside.

“The music thing was so free in Southall. We young musicians got together as Misty, and then we wanted to help the younger ones.”

—Walford ‘Poko’ Tyson

Baker survived with a fractured skull, but was in a coma for five months, by the time he woke up thatcher was Prime Minister and the racist values they had fought were now mainstream. Their talented and soft-spoken Guyanan keyboard player Vernon ‘Zapatta’ Hunt, tried to defend himself and received a long prison sentence, from which he never recovered.

“That’s where the band changed again. It was particularly wicked what happened to Vernon — he got sent to jail for years. He was a fine keyboard player. Half the band got locked up and the other half was stuck in the legal system with show trials for two years. It does leave you mashed up, though you survive.”

—Poko

I was sixteen at the time, antifascist by upbringing and conviction, a big fan of M.I.R. and Southall prompted me to put my own boots on the ground. I have been involved in autonomous antifascism, on and off, life permitting, ever since. I’m glad to say that Misty are still going strong, though Vernon’s career was over.

The following day a meeting in Plymouth was abandoned when antifascists occupied the venue, as was another in Binas Powys. The Anti Nazi League provided a rallying point for youth to show their opposition to racism — I remember we were all in it regardless of affiliation — and a range of activities from ‘lawful’ protest to militant direct action. The success of the latter often depended on the numbers who turned up for the former and we could readily switch from one

to the other then merge back into the crowd. Intelligence-led 'squadism' along 43 Group lines,<sup>8</sup> still went on of course, but the leadership was becoming uncomfortable with it. It was still an S.W.P. project and now they were hob-nobbing with mainstream politicians, rock stars, actors and playwrights they had an investment in the status quo.

The squads were autonomous and not all were in the party, dedicated antifascists will work with anyone who is serious about putting fascists out of action, but authoritarians have no use for anything beyond their control. The S.W.P. disowned them and turned to campaigning for a labour government. Their descent into liberalism has been shameful.

In 2013, ahead of an antifascist protest in Newcastle they 'banned' their rivals in the Revolutionary Communist Group from attending organising meetings and touted them to the police. Fourteen of the latter were pre-emptively arrested and their houses ransacked, those that made it to the march, plus a few anarchists, were pointed out to babylon by S.W.P. stewards, just so they could have a free pitch to sell their papers. Other attendees were shocked to find the organisers had secretly agreed to disperse half an hour before the racists arrived. Latterly their shadowing of the labour party has led to them switching support from Palestine to Israel.

Throughout this volume I have documented the betrayal of anarchists by the authoritarian left, I've expressed the view that Bolshevism prepared the blueprint for fascism, and handed it to the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless I've been prepared to hold my nose and work with people who stand for everything I detest. Antifascism is a single issue that requires numbers and we haven't the luxury to indulge in ideological hair-splitting. I interact with people not parties and judge them on their conduct, those individuals prepared to keep their word and stick their necks out are distinguished by that fact alone.

Late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century fascism has repeatedly re-branded itself in the effort to appeal to those who have not the stomach for genocide, whilst remaining true to its fundamentals as outlined above. At its core are the white supremacists, the holocaust deniers, national socialists and Jewish-conspiracy nuts. Most of us would have no trouble identifying General Pinochet as fascist for using political repression and state terrorism in support of his neo-liberal counter-revolution; but what about his sponsors, Reagan and thatcher, who subscribed to the same economic policies and social conservatism?

Their neoliberal ideology itself echoes the long discredited social Darwinism. They had a lower threshold of dissent to overcome, but thatcher had no qualms about using paramilitary police against striking miners and the residents of Brixton, conducting political assassinations in Ireland and Gibraltar, manipulating the media or actively persecuting gays. The demise of the National Front was due in part to regular hidings from dedicated antifascists but also the fact that thatcher stole their clothes and gave their constituency everything it wanted: institutional racism, homophobia, xenophobia, union-busting and a Victorian-style imperialist war; the real fascists were in government.

The racist hooligan contingent gravitated towards the British Movement, their presence was on the street and they would be beaten on the street. In 1978 five London anarchists associated with Anarchist Black Cross and Black Flag magazine were arrested and charged with conspiracy to cause explosions, with "persons unknown". The involvement of former Irish Republican Socialist prisoner Ronan Bennett had attracted the attention of the Met's anti-terrorist squad, which was

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<sup>8</sup> Between demonstrations prominent fascists would be ambushed or visited at home, their pubs attacked and their offices broken into.

under scrutiny for its lack of activity. It was to be a political show trial, but the heavily vetted, hand picked jury defied the judge's prejudice and acquitted the defendants.

With the trial set for 17<sup>th</sup> September 1979 a benefit gig was arranged the week before at Conway Hall with Crass and Poison Girls. Martin Lux agreed to mind the door at short notice, arriving late he found the event had already been gate-crashed by the B.M. 'leader guard'<sup>9</sup> supposedly the toughest skinheads in London. They were waiting in the concourse for the headline act Crass to appear so they could invade the stage and kick their arses. He identified half a dozen anarchists as dependable, the rest being unlikely to fight.

Veteran antifascists hastily assembled in a nearby pub while Martin struggled to avoid it kicking off too soon, breaking up fights by hauling the victims away, admonishing them for "winding up" the heavies, then quietly apologising. Eventually the call came from the pub, and Martin's group joined the others outside, bringing the total to just over a dozen. In tried and tested fashion they burst open the doors and charged the forty or so stormtroopers, of whom about half stood their ground and were battered into it with clubs and bottles:

"Within a minute a heap of semi-conscious bodies lay where they had fallen, blood splattered on the walls, pools of claret leaking in steady trickles onto the floor. Some nazis were trying to crawl under chairs and tables to escape the kicks of those they'd previously scorned and terrorised. ... We split into small groups, chasing the Nazis into the main hall and corridors. The übers fled in all directions, leaving them vulnerable to our frenzied attack. We smashed them to a pulp, iron bars smacking into heads and bodies. No mercy was shown as we hunted down the heavies, the foot soldiers hurriedly discarding nazi insignia and badges, running for cover."

—Martin Lux (*op.cit.*)

The fire exits had been bolted shut, forcing the fleeing master race to face their destiny. It's remarkable that no-one died but the incident just about finished the British Movement in London.

Crass didn't get to play, and their next gig at Conway hall having been pulled by the council, the band did their best to make political capital from the incident. They issued a petulant and faintly ridiculous statement blaming the violence on the Socialist Workers Party, denying the involvement of the B.M. The shaven-headed ranks that stood scowling at the stage and abusing the punters were not all fascists, "*no one was given the chance to state their political belief and a lot of completely innocent people got hurt.*"<sup>10</sup> In a contorted mixture of pacifism and the hackneyed free speech argument they declared themselves neutral between left and right, and had a good old go at Rock Against Racism for exaggerating the threat. It was the same abject stupidity that had facilitated the rise of Hitler.

Apparently they "*didn't like reggae either*",<sup>11</sup> unlike the antifascist skinheads I knew. Having lived through this era I can confirm that round our way at least, some of the lads who sported Crass signs on their jackets were themselves part of a violent hooligan subculture, and the band's "neutrality" meant they didn't mind too much who they hit, or why. What a load of crap.

Antifascism returned to its roots in the mid-80s with Anti Fascist Action. Initially launching as a popular front including Searchlight, it quickly broke up over irreconcilable political differences, in particular Searchlight's unwillingness to work with anarchists.<sup>12</sup> It was reconstituted

<sup>9</sup> Jordan always had a bodyguard as he couldn't fight for toffees.

<sup>10</sup> Crass/Poison Girls leaflet, November 1979.

<sup>11</sup> (*ibid.*)

<sup>12</sup> Searchlight fabricated a story that Class War had been infiltrated.

in Liverpool in 1986 primarily to defend News From Nowhere bookshop from the dominant fascist group that year, the British National Party. It remained as a loose collaboration of socialists and anarchists, involving the Marxist Red Action and Workers' Power, anarchosyndicalist Direct Action Movement, Class War and other non-aligned anarchists.

Their common ground was that the liberal-bourgeois state was part of the problem and they would have no truck with it. If they would not commit to oppose the state, fascism would be the radical alternative by default. Red Action made regular trips to Belfast so that members could see it in its true colours. AFA followed a dual strategy of direct action to disrupt fascist activity, with political and cultural events to develop class identity. It organised several mass-mobilisations, the most famous being against Blood and Honour at Waterloo Station in 1992,<sup>13</sup> large demonstrations, carnivals and a periodical "Fighting Talk".

To understand the evolving relationship between fascism and the state, it is necessary to consider how the bourgeoisie benefits from it, beyond the simple divide and rule effect. There is no imminent threat of proletarian revolution, at least in Western Europe, as our class is no longer a coherent mass with a few self-identifiable strata but a socio-economic continuum with everyone half a point above someone else. The imposition of neoliberalism and its somewhat precipitous collapse has resulted in austerity and a state of continuous imperialist war on a scale not seen since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, colossal military expenditure being the only way to keep all that fictitious capital circulating.

To pull this off, a desperate ruling class has had to drag the political debate ever rightward, creating moral panics over economic migration and 'radical' Islam, both of which it was responsible for. In a mere 30 years, the 'end of history' has given way to 'clash of civilisations', a very dangerous game. However mainstream politicians and media can no longer use explicitly bigoted language, these things being proscribed by legislation, so the fascists do their job for them, just as their scab army formed the first line of defence against 'the reds' in the 30s. Violent subcultures still appeal to a section of the youth, the fetishisation of the military being vigorously promoted by Hollywood and the burgeoning computer games industry, which somehow make mass-murder appear romantic. In fact the newly-minted Islamophobes and the radicalised Western Islamists or 'gap year jihadis' both draw heavily on this culture, presenting mirror images of each other.

Fascism does not arise in a vacuum, but relies on a climate of fear systematically promoted by corporate media. Groups like the English Defence League with their silly jingoism and crude racist paranoia were fed with scare stories about illegal immigrants and 'Islamists', just tweaking the language slightly to stay within the law; the target audience however politically naive knows exactly what they mean. The tabloids neglect to mention that globalisation of labour is the result of globalisation of capital, that smashing the infrastructure of four countries is liable to have consequences, that a century of meddling in middle eastern politics no one would have given a damn about but for oil, has brought misery to the region and terrorism to first-world cities.

When the U.K.'s migration restrictions with Bulgaria and Romania expired at the start of 2014, the media coverage was relentless, with public service broadcasters blatantly prompting phone-in callers for reactionary comments and reassuring wavering racists that it was perfectly natural to be scared of foreigners. BBC Radio 4's New Years Eve programming was almost entirely devoted to the anticipated influx, repeating the deadline hourly in case we were talking about anything

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<sup>13</sup> British Rail pandered to the racists by giving black and Asian workers the day off.

else. Correspondents were dispatched to both countries desperate to find someone who would say they were coming here to live on benefits or have an operation: “but you can’t live on the benefits in Britain and the NHS is buggered” was the standard response.

So as ever, the ruling class has its cake and eats it, the fascists can make the other parties look somehow reasonable; their most reactionary sentiments can be passed off as “genuine concerns that need to be addressed” or some such cobblers, then used to justify repression, surveillance and so forth. As the E.D.L. built up the threat from Muslim extremists, an unholy alliance of cops, politicians and the media menaced us with the far right while keeping its agenda on the table. Most of the tenets of fascism are those of the ruling class anyway: obedience to the boss, nationalism, imperialism, reliance on the threat of force, maintenance of petty hierarchies, defence of the status quo, fear of the left, union bashing, xenophobia, patriarchy, censorship of dissent, work ethic etc.

In 1993 a centre-left single-issue party, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was founded by historian Dr Alan Sked to campaign against the British state’s membership of the European Union. Sked walked away four years later *“as it became a magnet for people whose vision of the future is the 1950s — a supposed golden age before the EEC, black people, Muslims and other immigrants, gays, lesbians and other products of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, desecrated this island Eden.”*<sup>14</sup>

UKIP was taken over by a gang of right-wingers led by stock-exchange swindler Nigel Farage who rapidly converted it into a nationalist, proto-fascist movement. Sked publicly disowned it, reportedly dismayed by Farage’s racist language and intention to recruit former neo-Nazis. Their role was to give the Tory party room to move to the right and drag the others with it, egged on by the corporate media. The British state would implement its neoliberal austerity programme and everyone would blame it on foreigners. It worked too well and Prime minister David Cameron had to throw a referendum to stem the haemorrhaging of supporters to UKIP. Who knows how many of the 24% who voted for him in 2015 did so solely for that reason?

In 2013 I upset an antifascist meeting by describing UKIP as fascist. I was told (by a Leninist, if memory serves) that this was “faulty politics”<sup>15</sup> and our outfit could not put its name to such a statement. My contention was based on the observation that the Eddles’ modus operandi of marching their piss-artist ‘street army’ into places where it was unwelcome in the hope of stirring up racial tension, had run into a law of diminishing returns. The defection of its founders, a string of criminal convictions, internal splits and financial irregularities reduced its support to a core of racist bigots. Plus the historical fact that all British fascist groups have originated in the Conservative Party, taken briefly to the streets then returned to electoralism in a different form.

The simplistic integralism E.D.L. once claimed gave way to old-fashioned xenophobia and UKIP fit it like a glove, to the extent that a Dorset fascist who does not deserve to see his name in print went on social media exhorting his ilk to vote for “a party of the right who agree with us but obviously can’t say so” — except of course sometimes they do. Well-known fascists were seen on the periphery of UKIP gatherings, giving the Eddles the political platform they always lacked and UKIP some thuggish stewards for their meetings. So two single-issue groupings, the anti-European and the Islamophobic, from the golf club to the Wetherspoons, coagulated on an anti-immigration, and by extrapolation, an anti-immigrant platform.

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<sup>14</sup> Dr Alan Sked, in *The Guardian*, May 2013.

<sup>15</sup> I’ve already said that fascism never needed a coherent ideological framework. This can be a big problem for

UKIP's subsequent electoral success in 2014/15 came about in spite of the frequent racist, misogynistic and homophobic gaffes of its candidates. Any time one of them opened their mouth in public they had to be sacked. This did it no harm at all but rather allowed a party full of ex-Tories, led by a banker, with an extremely anti-Working Class agenda to differentiate itself from the 'establishment'. The electorate has a really hard time telling the Westminster suits apart as they propose near-identical austerity programmes with equally spurious justifications. Maintenance of this mirage does not allow for any political or economic analysis whatsoever. Virtually the only political choice left up for grabs is precisely how miserably society is to treat its most vulnerable. Had we been told that nine percent of the electorate were racists we would not have been surprised, all that changed is they stopped being embarrassed about it. In the 2015 U.K. general election the B.N.P. collapsed at the polls for precisely the same reason as the N.F. before it and UKIP received four million votes.

To be honest I never believed the British state would allow itself to be extricated from the European Union. Global capitalism relies on these trans-national structures being beyond the reach of the working class — which was Sked's original point. In case you're reading this twenty years from now, I'll sketch how the referendum went. A hack journalist and amusing after-dinner speaker named Alexander Boris de Pfeffle Johnson had, by fluke, become Tory Mayor of London. Hedging his bets until the very last moment, he declared for the "vote leave" campaign — or maybe the state decided to put its most ridiculous comedy toffs in charge, along with the increasingly preposterous Farage, in the hope that no one would take them seriously. Their task was to look more ridiculous than a man who fucked a dead pig.<sup>16</sup>

As the referendum ran away with itself, British Member of Parliament Jo Cox was assassinated by the fascist Thomas Mair. He was put up to it by right-wing group Britain First, which we believed had 'state' written all over it, being too cartoonish to take seriously. Was this then a last-ditch attempt to rehabilitate the political class? The British state has plenty of form for using agents provocateurs and facilitating political assassinations. A couple of days before the vote, the leave campaign did its level best to throw the game. Farage unveiled a highly racist poster and was immediately vilified by his colleagues. But Working Class people are used to being misunderstood and were past caring, they were given a spanner and they threw it. Half an hour before the result came in Nigel Farage appeared on the BBC to apologise for losing, how odd! Was he buying time for himself and his mates to get their money out of Sterling, or could it be that he just stuck to his script?

The British government went through several convulsions in its attempt to "take its egg out of the omelette", twice defeating the opposition led by old-fashioned Bennite possibilist Jeremy Corbyn. The latter suspended his visceral disdain for European political union in deference to his parliamentary party, a gang of uninspiring careerists and time-servers chained to the arms industry and by extrapolation, the state of Israel who would rather see a thousand years of fascism than a return to the social democratic settlement. Despite having a record of antifascism<sup>17</sup> and close ties to radical Jewish groups in his area, antisemitism was the stick they chose to beat

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Leninists who struggle to distinguish their own authoritarianism from that of the fash.

<sup>16</sup> Reportedly Cameron did this as a student.

<sup>17</sup> Corbyn had been an organiser at the battle of Wood Green in 1977 and was on the original board of AFA. The Jewish Board of Deputies has always opposed any action against street fascism. It would seem to have an investment in perpetuating antisemitism that affects primarily Working Class Jews. Is it not racist to suggest such a select body represents an entire Diaspora — or even that anybody needs to?

him with, using his support for Palestine as evidence. Bourgeois ‘community organisations’ who had opposed the actions at Cable Street, the 43 Group and A.N.L. were wheeled out to express their alarm. Like ten green bottles, party members awaited their turn to jump, this was one election they dare not win. Corbyn blew it by declaring he wanted a second referendum but would remain neutral, suggesting that he didn’t care about the issue everyone else was obsessed with. He got his wish, the election was a de-facto referendum on ‘Brexit’ but posh buffoon Pffeffe only needed a quarter of the vote to pull it off, rather than a majority.

‘Antifa’ is a word much bandied about in the right-wing media and political circles by those who haven’t the faintest idea what it means. It originated in Germany with Antifaschistische Aktion, a last-ditch attempt by a coalition of Social Democrat and Communist Party members to oppose Hitler. In 1945, survivors of these movements reconvened to weed out Nazis from the occupied administrations, in which task they were thwarted by the allies on both sides of the wall who were more interested in the Cold War.

Conveniently, antifa is an abbreviation for antifascist in most languages that use the Roman Alphabet, and works phonetically in others. In the 1990s, noting that fascists were organising across borders<sup>18</sup> many antifascist groups in mainland Europe began attaching antifa to their name to emphasise their common purpose. They also revived the antifa two-flag logo, now in red and black to include socialists and anarchists. Community of action however, beyond the sharing of intelligence, was rare.

In Britain [District] Antifa gradually became interchangeable with [District] Antifascists, and I know groups that use either or both. Following the dissolution of AFA, some members regrouped calling themselves Antifa U.K., which in turn faded away after the abortive Welling Station action<sup>19</sup> due to an enormous police operation, two trials and the imprisonment of six activists for “conspiracy”.

In this century, the word Antifa has caught on amongst American antifascists and attracted infamy from the far right, who like to portray it as an underground left-wing conspiracy, sometimes funded by foreign governments, or even Jewish financiers — if only! I can confirm that antifascists have never achieved a coherent transnational, or even national organisation. The nature of the problem is that it needs immediate solutions, driven by local intelligence, so that *ad hoc* coalitions tend to arise from the ground up, involving very different political tendencies who could not be expected to work together for very long. Ideology is of no importance in a melee, and people whose lives are devoted to vote-begging or jockeying for position as big fish in small ponds are worse than useless.

Mass callouts do happen, governed by the confederal collective of whoever happens to turn up on the day. You never know who you’ve got until you get there, or how they will behave. The turnover of activists is rapid, owing to pressure from the state, work and family, injury, arrest, imprisonment, burnout and the ageing process. Somehow though, we’ve managed to keep you all out of the gas chambers.

A fascist rally gives the cops an opportunity to check out the militant opposition, take pictures, gather intelligence and get some free crowd control practice at little risk to themselves, as in the

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<sup>18</sup> The Blood and Honour ‘music’ network has basically been a front for this, giving fascists cover for travelling around in numbers, nevertheless, antifascists have been successful in driving it underground.

<sup>19</sup> Two German Nazis were punched on their way to a Blood and Honour event, neither would talk to the police. The whole case was constructed from fixed camera, mobile phone, social media and other circumstantial evidence — beware!



2013 Tower Hamlets mobilisation in which 286 comrades were detained for nothing, having barely got within shouting distance of the fascists. Names, addresses, photographs, fingerprints and DNA were taken, costing the Met dearly in compensation for wrongful arrest and false imprisonment.

Bans and conditions will apply to all political demonstrations, such as anti-cuts actions and even things like Gay Pride marches. For this reason militant antifascists have always opposed bans, but there is another, more important reason. If you express yourself in racist, sexist and homophobic terms, you are most likely breaking the law, technically at least. If you identify as Working Class and are told you are one of these things, by a teacher, a magistrate or a cop, you are probably not going to say: "I'll give it up then". You protest that you are being oppressed, and in your own country. You were only expressing what the tabloids are telling you in their euphemistic language; as they would say it if only they weren't being censored by lefty do-gooders!

You might be an ignorant bastard but being told so by an authority figure with a comfortable salary is not going to make you see the light. You will have been primed by the fascists to expect this, and everything the state does to control (in fact channel) fascism is going to reinforce it. Of course the state knows this, it knows you aren't going anywhere; it can give you a ticking off, reinforce your paranoia, and allow the far right to portray itself as a rebellious countercultural tendency, rather than what it actually is, counter-revolution.

Now if instead you are taken to task by workmates in the canteen, by fans at the home ground of your football club, by drinkers in your local, it might actually sink in that what you are doing is anti-Working Class, that it serves only the oppressor. For those who have been seduced by a 'tough guy' subculture, a smack in the mouth is worth a hundred lectures, this has been proven time and time again; they give it up because it isn't working for them. Honestly, you'd be doing them a favour.

So liberal antifascism is part of the problem, portraying fascists as evil, insane or ignorant, opposing them on legal or moral grounds belies the fact that fascism is a natural outgrowth of the class system, and will recur whenever capitalism is in one of its periodic crises. Worse, liberals will defend the right of fascists to organise, on the grounds of free speech. Giving a platform to those who wish to destroy you is incredibly naïve; "we'll win the argument" — no you won't. Wherever people are excluded from decision making and betrayed by their self-appointed leaders, fascists will exploit their frustration, as has been seen in squabbles over funding for local services and amenities, and single-issue campaigns — not even the animal rights movement is immune. Antifascism must always be at the heart of Working Class politics, and class struggle must be at the heart of antifascism.

Relying on the law to keep the fascists in order postulates the grotesque idea of respectable fascism, the liberals have no answer to this beyond waving placards and voting for someone else. A fascist puts on a suit, drops the threats and racist epithets, and is immediately allowed to play the electoral game, adopting the coded terminology of the tabloids which echoes around the breakfast table and the works canteen. As soon as the fascists have sufficient numbers they will be out to intimidate and shut down the opposition, so it's up to our class to clean up its own mess. Neutrality is not possible; if you're not actively anti-fascist to the extent of your abilities you are sleepwalking to the gas chamber.

Militant antifascism will give you a political education by bringing you into direct conflict with the state, as fascism holds up a mirror to its uglier side; the state needs you to fear fascists, or you will not fear the state. In Bristol in 2011 I saw half a million pounds of the citizens' money

expended in forcing a fascist march into a city that had overwhelmingly rejected it; they struggled to get them out again. Unfortunately in twenty-first century Britain the level of Working Class self-organisation required to resist police cavalry is rare, but it can't go on this way. If we don't have a united Working Class we have nothing to play for, this is a hurdle we must pass if we are to take on our ultimate enemy.

## 22. Patriarchy: A design for oppression.

“I haven’t the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfil, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power.”

—Robin Morgan: ‘Sisterhood is Powerful’.

If, like me you come into that category, your initial reaction to this statement may be one of dismissal, but once you’ve had the thought it never quite goes away. If you’re serious about revolution, it makes sense to regularly question whether you may be one of those holding it back. One of the reasons people glaze over when we speak of revolution is the glaring fact that almost every revolutionary movement has rapidly re-created the power structures it set out to abolish, and frequently ended up killing more of its own side than the enemy. The cure is worse than the disease! There is a reason for this, and it’s staring us in the face. Just as capitalism and state re-create each other, so do patriarchy and hierarchy.

I see patriarchy as the original and fundamental form of oppression; I believe it informs not only how men oppress women, but also how they oppress each other, and how the bourgeois state oppresses us all. The structural character of this oppression makes it virtually impossible, with the best of intentions, not to be complicit on some level, a revelation the enormity of which, takes time to sink in.

“Nothing in nature explains the sexual division of labour, nor such institutions as marriage, conjugality or paternal filiation. All are imposed on women by constraint, all are therefore facts of civilization which must be explained, not used as explanations.”

—Claude Meillassoux: *Maidens, Meat and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community*

We see how ideological hegemony causes the oppressed to reproduce their oppression; patriarchy is a specific hegemony that cuts across economic and cultural lines, but like capitalism and the state it stands as an obstacle to a free society. By patriarchy I mean the structural dominance of males over non-males<sup>1</sup> by, and within, social organisations, which extends from the domestic environment to the workplace, government and legal systems. This is a vast topic and all I’ve done is rattle together a few observations in the hope of stimulating debate and crystallising my own thoughts.

It is impossible to deal with gender and class separately. It would be quite absurd for the conduct of class struggle to be directed through the vision of 50% of the class;<sup>2</sup> it would be equally absurd to promote the liberation of the rest in terms of having more opportunities to

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<sup>1</sup> Gender is complex and I do not construe it in binary terms, but I have to start somewhere.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, given the gendered disparity in income that over a lifetime exacerbates the gap in total wealth, by any socio-economic measure of ‘Working Class’, males will represent less than 50%. Single mothers and single retired women are especially disadvantaged in this respect.

participate in the apparatus of repression. Bourgeois and patriarchal methods can only lead to bourgeois and patriarchal ends.

Anarchists subscribe to the ideal of gender and sexual equality, some can even spout the jargon convincingly, but are we engaged in the struggle or using it to further our own agendas? Paraphrasing Marx: “The emancipation of the oppressed is the task of the oppressed themselves”. Most anarchy-feminist events are now restricted to self-identified women, because they got fed up with their male comrades trying to take over. It’s as if someone offered to help you move house, then turned up with a plan when all you wanted them to do was get on the other end and lift. For the ‘white heterosexual male’, it can be frustrating that everything you say is found contentious. You could always just shut up and listen I suppose, as your sisters, your Mother and your Gran were expected to do for most of their lives. Letting someone else drive means taking a back seat. Until this is widely understood as a revolutionary act, there will be no revolution.

Our enemy is power, whether it be economic, personal or political; to separate struggles on the basis of class, race or gender is to trade one form of inequality for another, and inequality is self-perpetuating. For practical purposes men and women are indispensable to each other; however we may struggle to understand each other’s perceptions and experiences, we can be neither rivals nor enemies. A female activist writes:

“I can confirm that sexism is alive and well in the activist community because I’ve seen it myself; like racism it’s a habit which arises as a result of competition for status within hierarchical structures, the only solution is to abolish those structures, which is what we’re all here for”

“The State is fucking with all of us. We are all brutalised and exploited by the controlling coercive nature of the state and the requirement to work for pay to live. We are raw material in a machine that takes everything from us and rewards us with toys and entertainments. Men and women are exploited in this system to varying degrees and in different ways depending on their class, sexuality, race and ability. Men are brutalised in different ways to women but through patriarchy (which is a necessity for the state to function) Working Class people are *all* brutalised by patriarchy.”

—Scanx, 2011.

Although patriarchy pre-dates capitalism, along with racism it remains one of its most important props. Unpaid domestic labour lowers the reproduction cost of wage labour, a subsidy that goes straight into the pockets of the bourgeoisie.

The origins of patriarchy are obscure, what follows is pure speculation on my part as there is no consensus among the experts anyway. The westward spread of ancient Greek thought seems to have given it a boost, and monotheism cemented it in the European psyche just in time for European culture to dominate the globe. I suppose once you’ve chosen a gender for your deity, it sets the pattern for the rest of your culture. The cult of the Virgin Mary just seems like a clumsy attempt to reconcile the Christian church’s horror of the vagina with the inescapable fact that we all have a mother. Interesting to note that women are being allowed into the clergy in the West now that the church is a political irrelevance, to date there has been no such movement in the more theocratic Islamic world.

Wherever the Moon has been worshipped it was usually female, owing to the analogy between the lunar and menstrual cycles, which by default leaves the sun in the fatherly role — and I think of sun-worship as the precursor to monotheism. Hunter-gatherer societies can be quite

egalitarian; they also use a lunar calendar for obvious reasons. Humans have the worst night-vision of any mammal, so if you venture into the forest on a moonless night, something's apt to eat you. Given the long gestation period in humans, I wonder at what point the concept of fatherhood took root; did our ancestors pair off like birds, or indulge in complex relations like bonobos? To date, matriloca<sup>3</sup> North American tribes:

"... exert little or no control over women's bodies or those of their children, making no fetish of virginity or chastity, and making no demands of women's sexual exclusivity."

—Rosalind Miles: 'The Women's History of the World'. 1986

Bonobos are arguably our closest relatives, closer than chimpanzees; and whereas the latter operate a male-dominated linear hierarchy, exhibiting plenty of aggression and jealousy; bonobo society is structured through a web of relationships between females reinforced by ritualistic sexual activity. The males are physically stronger but take a back seat, having little to compete for, as their status rests entirely on the position of their mother, and the females will exchange sex for food. The latter does not necessarily imply transaction as we understand it. Not so much: "give us a banana and I'll shag you" but: "thanks for the banana, now I feel kindly disposed towards you, fancy a shag?"

"Despite such quid pro quo between the sexes, there are no indications that bonobos form humanlike nuclear families. The burden of raising offspring appears to rest entirely on the female's shoulders. In fact, nuclear families are probably incompatible with the diverse use of sex found in bonobos. If our ancestors started out with a sex life like that of bonobos, the evolution of the family would have required dramatic change."

—Frans B. M. de Waal: 'Bonobo Sex and Society. The behavior of a close relative challenges assumptions about male supremacy in human evolution.'  
Scientific American March 1995.

It's possible to imagine a band of happy-go-lucky hunter-gatherers, devoid of sexual jealousy and discrimination, raising children in common, only aware that some of them have the magical ability to recreate humans whereas the rest tend on average, to run a bit faster or throw further. The group's survival rests on bringing children to healthy adulthood, where would the balance of power lie?

As a rule, pre-agricultural band societies received about 80 percent of their sustenance from gathering and 20 percent from hunting. It was not in the interests of the tribe to let any member weaken and fall behind, so each was entitled to a share of its common resources.

Right, I'm having a laugh now: Here's our primeval tribe, the females are busy gathering, socialising, minding the young and being pregnant. The males go on a hunting trip during which they divide their time between chasing animals around, picking intoxicating herbs and hallucinogenic fungi. Eventually they roll in with half an antelope, or something:

"Where's the rest of it?"

"Ah, we made a sacrifice to the River God ..." (we got a bit peckish on the way home.)

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<sup>3</sup> In matrilocal societies children live with the maternal clan, male children are mentored by their uncles rather than their biological father.

Yeah, I know I've just projected a modern gender stereotype onto a hypothetical prehistoric community, please don't write to me about it. In pre-alienated societies,<sup>4</sup> gender was purely a matter of the division of labour, and since prehistory such societies have invariably recognised that not all members can be fitted into one or other category so made provision for extra genders. These may have been intermediate identities, or fluid ones, whereby an individual could change roles at will, often by simply changing attire.

The transition to agriculture necessitated keeping track of the seasons for which the solar cycle is more convenient. Agriculture also allowed the concentration of wealth and power, fixed settlements and cities. With the supply of food more assured, the day-to-day survival of children is less of an immediate concern, protecting herds of livestock and acquisition of the most productive land puts more of a premium on 'masculine' values of aggression and competition.

Since the establishment of fixed settlements, the primary unit of social organisation has been the family, this is both part of the means of production — the main part in the days of free peasant producers — but also the means of the reproduction of labour-power, and of course of labourers themselves. It's impossible to get away from the language linking male dominance to agriculture: 'husbandry', the 'domestication' of livestock, the numerous sexual metaphors involving ploughing and sowing, fruit and fertility, possession and conquest.

"In Genesis, the Bible's first book, woman is born from the body of man. The Fall from Eden represents the demise of hunter-gatherer life, the expulsion into agriculture and hard labour. It is blamed on Eve, of course, who bears the stigma of the Fall. Quite an irony, in that domestication is the fear and refusal of nature and woman, while the Garden myth blames the chief victim of its scenario, in reality."

—John Zerzan: 'Twilight Of The Machines'

Zerzan contends that the social construct of gender is rooted not in physiology, but in the sexual division of labour, and postulates a society without it. The advent of property, the idea that access to the means of production can be restricted, formalises both hierarchy and division of labour — there's your original sin!

The idea is forcefully expressed in this piece by Monique Wittig:

"By doing this, by admitting that there is a "natural" division between women and men, we naturalize history, we assume that "men" and "women" have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible. For example, instead of seeing giving birth as a forced production, we see it as a "natural," "biological" process, forgetting that in our societies births are planned (demography), forgetting that we ourselves are programmed to produce children, while this is the only social activity "short of war" that presents such a great danger of death. Thus, as long as we will be "unable to abandon by will or impulse a lifelong and centuries-old commitment to childbearing as the female creative act," gaining control of the production of children will mean much more than the mere control of the material means of this production: women will have to abstract themselves from the definition "woman" which is imposed upon them."

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<sup>4</sup> i.e. those that did not seek to regulate human activity through the exchange of tokens, the acquisition of property rights or accumulation of debt. Once both production and reproduction have been alienated, identities must compete on the market, relative to the exchange-values of things.

—Monique Wittig: *One Is Not Born a Woman*. (1981)

With property comes inheritance and the possibility of using marriage contracts to consolidate power. The specialised status of the hunter, the warrior and the sage give way to the all-round chieftain or aristocrat, the prototype statesman, whose martial prowess and wealth come to stand for the success or otherwise of the whole social group. The aggrandisement of these characters then becomes an end in itself; with ‘common’ men, and women of course, provisioning them and their armies, building their palaces, temples and tombs. Even in pre-capitalist gift economies “we bring greetings from our king” replaces “we bring greetings from our people”.

So the political consciousness that construes gender as independent of the body co-exists with the ‘common-sense’ observation that most of us<sup>5</sup> fall into one of two physiological categories, but why is that relevant? Taken out of its political context, the possession of one or another set of reproductive apparatus may not be the defining characteristic of an individual’s identity. It doesn’t become important until it carries with it some material or social disadvantage.

“For most people... anatomical sex (and its physical implications) creates, or at least permits, gender—the technical division of labour. This in turn creates, or at least permits, the domination of one group by another. We believe, however, that it is oppression which creates gender; that logically the hierarchy of the division of labour is prior to the technical division of labour and created the latter, i.e. created sex roles, which we call gender. Gender in its turn created anatomical sex, in the sense that the hierarchical division of humanity into two transforms an anatomical difference (which is in itself devoid of social implications) into a relevant distinction for social practice. Social practice, and social practice alone, transforms a physical fact (which is in itself devoid of meaning, like all physical facts) into a category of thought.”

—Christine Delphy: *Close to Home* 1984.

Is this a chicken-and-egg situation? In my post-Marxist way I would expect changing modes of production to develop the social organisation best suited to them. This includes gender roles and the structure of the family, status, dominance, property and coercion being both the means and the motivation for the subjugation of nature, while Murray Bookchin is quite strident to the contrary:

“all our notions of dominating nature stem from the very real domination of human by human. ... As a historical statement it declares in no uncertain terms, that the domination of human by human preceded the notion of dominating nature. Indeed, human domination of human gave rise to the very idea of dominating nature. In emphasising that human domination precedes the notion of dominating nature, I have carefully avoided the use of a slippery verb that is very much in use today: namely that the domination of nature “involves” the domination of humans by humans. I find the use of this verb particularly repellent because it confuses the order in which domination emerged in the world and hence, the extent to which it must be eliminated if we are to achieve a free society. Men did not think of dominating nature until they had already begun to dominate the young, women and eventually each other.

—Murray Bookchin: ‘Remaking Society’.

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<sup>5</sup> By no means all, and fewer than you might imagine.

Bookchin refers to 'preliterate' societies in which the domestic 'female'<sup>6</sup> and public 'male' spheres were equivalent and suggests the earliest form of hierarchy was based on age. I think the latter is entirely plausible; we're probably dealing with folk who were considered adult at puberty and didn't live much beyond forty so elders would not necessarily be infirm. The idea of 'authority' deriving from knowledge external to the self could only have developed in those who had lived long enough to have observed the patterns and rhythms in nature and the behaviour of their fellow beings. Such knowledge could have been freely shared, or passed to selected individuals. It could be stored and accumulated through ritual, symbolic representation and language. But beyond its use-value to the social group, knowledge could only confer power on an individual once it had an exchange-value relative to the value of things. Once there were things created primarily for exchange. Did literacy always precede agriculture? I don't know, and as for the domination of nature, collectively cutting and burning forest for cultivation, herding wild beasts or damming a stream would only require a functional spoken language.

For Bookchin, hierarchy began with the elders dominating the young, big men dominating smaller ones, until the public sphere in which all that took place eclipsed the domestic one, and that too was pressed into the service of the chiefs. I think I prefer my materialist explanation, but he's no longer with us to debate.

As I was growing up, in the "white heat of technology"<sup>7</sup> era, control of nature was always presented as beneficial, just as the concept of legitimate authority was taken for granted, in a world that was being torn apart by conflicting authoritarian tendencies. Intensive agriculture and the selective breeding of domestic animals would eliminate famine. We looked forward to cloning, the taming of the weather, the conquest of the ocean deeps and outer space, all supervised by a benign technocracy that had only the good of humanity at heart. Freed from domestic labour and the bother of natural childbirth, women could devote themselves to being pretty and interesting — forgetting that their only motivation for doing so was the closure of all other avenues to advancement by the patriarchy.

Women had been in the forefront of the mediaeval villagers' struggle to free themselves from feudal power relations. The burdens of enforced labour, military service, tithes and taxes fell predominately upon the male population. The subsistence tasks of winnowing, reaping and gleaning, spinning and weaving, gardening, gathering and herding on the commons were traditionally performed by women and children, often communally.

There was no single 'peasants' revolt' but rather a steady war of attrition that lasted three hundred years and left the ruling class in crisis. Resistance to manorial power took the form of a systematic withdrawal of labour, and legalistic haggling over the burdens, which had to be written down in ever-more minute detail. There was flight at first to uncultivated areas, and then to the new towns.<sup>8</sup> In response, the landlords would readily accept currency in place of reluctant

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<sup>6</sup> This is too essentialist for my liking, he accepts the premise that males and females had different cultures from the outset, as in my silly example above. Did Cro Magnon man never look after his kids? Were hunting and fighting skills taught only to sons, and domestic ones to daughters, that seems a huge assumption. There are female warrior cultures, especially in South Asia and Oceania. I have it on good authority from Guro Dan Inosanto, who had been a student of the Hawaiian Ed Parker, that the ceremonial *Hula* dance has its origins in a martial system passed down from mother to daughter. Parker's grandmother was a practitioner, he relates that when her drunken husband began abusing her at a wedding she struck him in such a way as to paralyse his jaw muscle for an hour or so, keeping him quiet and giving him time to sober up. To this anecdote Guro Dan added: "Ed didn't B.S."

<sup>7</sup> A phrase made popular by Harold Wilson.

<sup>8</sup> A process that would be repeated in the colonies, as late as the twentieth century.



labour thereby creating a class distinction between those peasants who had surplus to sell and those who did not, and between men and women. Thus the rural male gradually became proletarianised, dependant on the market price of labour and produce. His female relatives, whose work was unpaid, became dependant on him.

It was easier for women to earn money in an urban environment. Single and widowed women, denied access to land, drifted into the towns and cities where they acquired a degree of autonomy, dominating some crafts and trades, and breaking into some male provinces such as secular teaching and medicine. Homosexuality and cross-dressing were widely practiced and tolerated.

The Great Expropriation that freed the labourer to ply (his) trade on the market was characterised by what Federici calls “the disciplining of the body”,<sup>9</sup> which transforms all its abilities into labour-power. It eschews idleness and pleasure, and reaches its zenith in the Protestant work ethic, finding virtue in the exhaustion and denial of the self in pursuit of tokens that represent material success. These are of little use to the pious, who can do no more than accumulate them. Alienation is a hateful thing but you must love it to get your “pie in the sky when you die”. If industry, parsimony, chastity and temperance are Christian virtues, then indolence, licentiousness and inebriation, any efforts to satisfy the appetites of the body may be characterised as ‘heathen’. This distinction was neatly co-opted into the innovation of race.

So the body becomes standardised into a productive unit. It is white, able, god-fearing, deferential and willing to toil for its right to exist. It comes in two models, male and female, which look different and have different functions. You’ll see this if you study a photograph of a crowd from the early twentieth century. They look the same, they are dressed the same, their hair is cut the same. They were ideal fodder for the mechanised slaughter of the two world wars.

One thing I recall from childhood was the obsession with time, in fact the alienation of the body from daylight. Because time-keeping was a virtue, learning to tell the time was more urgent than learning to read. Possession of a wristwatch was a rite of passage, an essential precursor to manhood, the station-master’s pocket watch and the boss’ Rolex were badges of status, he would petulantly tap his magnificent timepiece when you turned up late, a clock was presented on retirement.

Corporal discipline reigns; the ‘privilege’ of raising the next generation of wage labourers must be denied to the feckless or the circumstantially impoverished. We recognise it in the obsession with disguising the odour of the human body and its shape — especially Working Class post-natal, post-menopausal ones. Its latest manifestation may be the reactionary attempt to tie gender to reproductive biology.

All else is heresy, but heresy came first, revolting against the venal, parasitic clergy, and the church as ideological basis for feudalism. It was led by the newly landless peasantry and the free women of the towns. In continental Europe, the vast profits to be made from the expanding textile industry allowed the merchants to tighten their grip on the urban proletariat, who responded with a series of armed insurrections, sometimes in alliance with the peasants. The balance of power tilted back towards the worker following the Black Death, which created a huge labour shortage.

Now control of reproduction became a priority for the state, enforced by the church. Traditional rustic forms of contraception and abortion were considered heretic, as were ‘unnatural’ sexual acts, especially sodomy. To discourage this practice, municipally-funded brothels were

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<sup>9</sup> After Foucault.

established and the gangs of young men who roamed the streets threatening the rich were given licence to rape proletarian women instead. Midwives and 'wise women' were no longer to be trusted, lest their sympathies lie with the mother, to be replaced by male 'experts' who prioritised the life of the foetus. The latter belonged not to its family, but to the productive economy.

"By the late Middle Ages the feudal economy was doomed, faced with an accumulation crisis that stretched for more than a century. We deduce its dimension some basic estimates indicating that between 1350 and 1500 a major shift occurred the power-relation between workers and masters. The real wage increased by 100% prices declined by 33%, rents also declined, the length of the working-day decreased, a tendency appeared toward local self-sufficiency) Evidence of a chronic disaccumulation trend in this period is also found in the pessimism of the contemporary merchants and landowners, and the measures which the European states adopted to protect markets, suppress competition and force people to work at the conditions imposed.

Although influenced by Eastern religions brought to Europe by merchants and crusaders, popular heresy was less a deviation from the orthodox doctrine than a protest movement, aspiring to a radical democratization of social life. Heresy was the equivalent of "liberation theology" for the medieval proletariat. It gave a frame to peoples' demands for spiritual renewal and social justice, challenging both the Church and secular authority by appeal to a higher truth. It denounced social hierarchies, private property and the accumulation of wealth, and it disseminated among the people a new, revolutionary conception of society that, for the first time in the Middle Ages, redefined every aspect of daily life (work, property, sexual reproduction, and the position of women), posing the question of emancipation in truly universal terms."

—Silvia Federici: 'Caliban and the Witch'

Whenever rulers fear losing control they will create a diversion by magnifying a perceived threat or inventing a non-existent one. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period of rampant primitive accumulation and political upheaval, Europe and its colonies were gripped by a moral panic, and the ruling class acquired a new sport: witch-hunting.

The early Christian church dismissed belief in the existence of witchcraft as pagan superstition and treated it as heresy, to discourage any interest in pre-existing cultures. However, the inter-faith wars and power struggles that followed the reformation made the positions of European leaders more precarious, there were now two churches battling for dominance and territory. The myth they concocted placed witchcraft as a rival religion based on devil worship, a heretical cult consisting almost entirely of women organised in opposition to Christianity.

A form of state terrorism was unleashed on the female population; estimates vary between 35,000 and over 100,000 Working Class and peasant women tortured and executed. Unmarried women were especially vulnerable, as were those versed in folklore, herbalism or midwifery, adherents of pagan customs, religious or political dissenters and any woman who failed to conform to the role assigned her by church and state. Whatever the numbers, it will have had a considerable inhibiting effect on the social and cultural life of women, leaving them nowhere to go but indoors, to unpaid labour or domestic service.

We cannot know what proportion of the witch trials were prompted by superstition and religious bigotry, or by personal vendetta, perhaps even sexual jealousy or predation; but they presented opportunities for any petty official to silence, blackmail or eliminate anyone who happened to be female, as well as performing the usual function of moral panics in breaking the

unity of the class by creating division, fear and distrust. As ever, the very people who had been fucking with us suddenly made themselves indispensable, by taking on the role of defending us from manufactured scapegoats. The perennial anti-Semitic blood libels and the present-day Islamophobia are prime examples of this.

“The practical significance of the witch mania therefore was that it shifted responsibility for the crisis of late medieval society from both Church and state to imaginary demons in human form.”

Marvin Harris: ‘Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches’. 1973

The concept of domestic labour as distinct from and subordinate to social labour only arose with the gradual transition to a money economy in the mediaeval world and became concrete with the expropriation of the peasantry and the change from feudal to wage relations.

“It was from this alliance between the crafts and the urban authorities, along with the continuing privatization of land, that a new sexual division of labor or, better, a new “sexual contract,” in Carol Pateman’s words (1988), was forged, defining women in terms — mothers, wives, daughters, widows — that hid their status as workers, while giving men access to women’s bodies, their labor, and the bodies and labor of their children.

According to this new social-sexual contract, proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of reproduction, and a communal good anyone could appropriate and use at will. Echoes of this “primitive appropriation” can be heard in the concept of the “common woman” (Karras 1989) which in the 16<sup>th</sup> century qualified those who prostituted themselves. But in the new organization of work *every woman (other than those privatized by bourgeois men) became a communal good*, for once women’s activities were defined as non-work, women’s labour began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink.

This was for women a historic defeat. With their expulsion from the crafts and the devaluation of reproductive labor, poverty became feminized, and to enforce men’s “primary appropriation” of women’s labor, a new patriarchal order was constructed, reducing women to a double dependence: on employers and on men. The fact that unequal power relations between women and men existed even prior to the advent of capitalism, as did a discriminating sexual division of labor, does not detract from this assessment. For in pre-capitalist Europe women’s subordination to men had been tempered by the fact that they had access to the commons and other communal assets, while in the new capitalist regime *women themselves became the commons*, as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations.”

—Federici: (*op. cit.*)

Federici departs from the orthodox Marxist analysis of capitalism as a step in the evolution of productive relations. Rather the rise of the bourgeoisie, with its strict management of human affairs through the alienation of their productive capacities into the exchange of commodities, was a *reaction* to the flourishing of alternatives to patriarchy that burst out of feudalism.

By the time of the industrial revolution the apparatus of state and commerce was a hundred percent male dominated, and how could it have been otherwise? Industrialisation requires a massive concentration of constant capital, but profit only comes from variable capital, from the unpaid portion of the working day; it follows that the means of reproduction of capital is the means of reproduction of labour. Just as the bourgeoisie stole the land, they had to have the reproductive capacity of the producers for free as well, thus capitalism was born out of patriarchy:

“Congratulations, it’s a boy!”

This separation of production and reproduction is the crowning achievement of bourgeois alienation; neoliberalism contends that a woman who has more children than she can ‘afford’ is irresponsible. The bourgeoisie reproduce themselves on their stolen land, subsidised by the unpaid labour of others, but we are expected to do it at our own expense. So to reification: all the formal and informal structures of patriarchy, the gender stereotypes that are the wallpaper of everyday life, even the persecution of those whose chosen identities do not fit in with the binary division of function are all props in this fantastic confidence trick. I’m not suggesting that it was all planned by some mastermind or conspiracy, rather that it developed organically with the changing mode of production, because power structures are self-perpetuating.

It’s taken two centuries for women to achieve a formal legal equality with men, through tactics devised and organised exclusively by women themselves; the political hierarchies of capital and labour have played very little part, because it was never in their interests to do so. The bourgeoisie will co-opt any form of rebellion, both to render it harmless and turn it into a commodity, conveniently avoiding the fact that legal equality is only ever achieved by breaking existing laws. Sure enough, the word ‘feminism’ is now regularly bandied about by those who are very comfortable with the status quo; its success is framed in bourgeois terms of a theoretical equality of opportunity, counting the number of women in the boardroom or political office.

To complement the fairy-tale explanations of primitive accumulation, the received wisdom on gendered division of labour is that it’s based on the unsuitability of the female physique for the most demanding tasks, or the incompatibility of some work with reproduction and child-care. Nevertheless, in agrarian peasant societies we see women with babies strapped to them put to back-breaking field work.

An exclusively male labour movement was its own worst enemy; in order to command the best wages and conditions it presented its work as skilled and exclusive as possible, restricting access to it, first through trade guilds then craft unions and professional bodies. This tactic reduces our bargaining power, as capitalism is relentless in its drive to de-skill every operation, and the vicious circle which keeps women floating in and out of work, therefore unskilled, ensures they are always available to take any job that’s been knocked off its perch.

War changes everything; with the nation-state under threat, the naked self-interest of the bourgeoisie takes a temporary back seat as they eagerly anticipate the killing to be made after the killing, and the female reserve army of labour is deployed. Since the industrial revolution, the tactic for getting women’s labour on the cheap had been to split up each job into separate tasks and employ them in gangs with a male supervisor, making it harder for the worker to learn the trade on the job. The Sheffield syndicalist Jack Murphy, writing during the First World War, noted that increasing mechanisation, automation and specialisation had made the long apprenticeships required as a condition of entry to the craft unions irrelevant in many trades. By 1917, of seven million women in industry, more than a million had entered since the start of the war, and were performing precisely the same tasks as their much better paid male counterparts:

“In particular the Bristol exhibition was remarkable for the many hundreds of specimens of work wholly or mainly done by women. ...

... aircraft engines, motor car engines, magnetos and other accessories of internal combustion engines, locomotive and stationary engines, guns and gun components, small arms, gauges, cutters and allied work, drawing dies and punches, welded and other aircraft fittings, aircraft

framing and structural parts, projectiles, miscellaneous engineering, and optical and glass work.  
...

—The Times Engineering Supplement June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

Murphy lamented the prejudice of the skilled tradesmen and argued for rank and file control through workshop committees of stewards elected by groups of no more than fifteen workers, organising all trades and grades together, male and female, across industry.

“Apprenticeship in thousands of cases is a farce, for even they are kept on repetition work and have become a species of cheap labour. ... So also enter the women workers, and thus ensues a struggle between craft, trade, and sex prejudices. ...

... As a matter of fact in some places there has been no attempt to make [female workers] a success. They are consequently tolerated with amused contempt as passengers for the war. This position makes a grievous state of affairs for any post war schemes. It makes possible sham restoration schemes to which we all stand to lose by the magnitude of the unemployed market. Thousands of women may be turned into the streets, or become encumbrances on the men who may be at work or who also may be unemployed. Domestic service cannot absorb all women, as some suggest, nor is it possible, as others remark, for them to go back to what they were doing before the war. To put back the clock of history is impossible, and other solutions will have to be found. It is true that woman labour is usually cheap labour; it is true that women generally are more servile than men (and they are bad enough); it is also true that they are most difficult to organise because of these defects, thinking less about such matters than men. For these reasons they are more the victims of the employing class. The blame is not altogether theirs. *We men and women of today have now to pay the price of man’s economic dominance over women which has existed for centuries.* Content to treat women as subjects instead of equals, men are now faced with problems not to their liking.

Yet everyone of the wage earning class, whether man or woman, is in the same fix. ... The only way the mutual interests of the wage earners can be secured, therefore, is by united effort on the part of all independent workers, whether men or women.”

—J.T. Murphy: ‘The Workers’ Committee: An Outline of its Principles and Structure’.  
Sheffield Workers’ Committee, 1917.

My italics; Murphy was ahead of his time,<sup>10</sup> but the unions bottled it and with the acquiescence of the bosses and the state did indeed “put back the clock of history”, for another hundred years.

The nuclear family is often seen as a microcosm of society. In fact it’s not uncommon for politicians simpering about economics to their electorate to allude to balancing the household budget, well aware that such analogy is facile and inappropriate. Nevertheless our first experience of power relations and hierarchy occurs within the family, it is here we learn to look up and look down, to oppress and be oppressed. Working Class households of the 1960’s and 70’s resembled

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<sup>10</sup> Sadly, like many revolutionary syndicalists of his generation, Murphy was seduced by Bolshevism and became a founder member of the British Communist Party; he sat on the executive of the Comintern where he moved the expulsion of Trotsky. He resigned in 1932 but remained an admirer of Stalin until the end of WW2, eventually he realised his terrible mistake and abandoned all politics in favour of pacifism. This little pamphlet though, is a passionate argument for bottom-up democracy and total class solidarity.

nothing so much as a microcosm of a Stalinist dictatorship, with the sole breadwinner, invariably male, paying the piper and calling the tune; any dissent or dissatisfaction was dismissed as ingratitude. This perfectly prepared you for a life of wage labour.

In those days it was perfectly feasible for a skilled tradesman to support a family on a single industrial wage, to the extent of paying a mortgage, running a second-hand car and having the occasional holiday. Part of the social democratic settlement was the 'family wage', the outcome of collusion between the unions and government to extract women from the workplace after the second wartime emergency.<sup>11</sup> A Faustian bargain was struck; he earned just enough to support his family and received free domestic labour; at work he was a cog in the machine but at home he was the *guy*'nor. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie got their wage labourers raised for nothing, and there were half as many unionised workers as there could have been.

From a purely class perspective the family wage was often seen as a victory, especially by Marxists, insofar as it raised standards of living by ensuring the non-alienated care of dependants, and restricting the labour supply to the market preventing the depression of wages, the fight to maintain these restrictive practices was said to foster a healthy class solidarity. These arguments are flawed; arguably winning any fight with the bosses is healthy, but without the sovereignty of the individual, solidarity is meaningless and likely to be short-lived anyway. The family wage is simply a market price within privileged sub-sections of the class; it's not predicated on the family's outgoings. It does nothing for single or retired women, unless they happen to be part of an extended family group, and the non-working woman remains dependant on the goodwill of a boss, albeit at one remove. Being dependant at home is no more liberating than being dependant at work. Sex work should be considered against the backdrop of the general commodification of sex and relationships<sup>12</sup> under capitalism, for some it is a valid choice, given that all choice is limited by the money economy.

The division of labour established in the Palaeolithic is alive and well, it's both horizontal and vertical. The phrase 'women's work' is used pejoratively, implying unskilled, menial and low-paid, so the presence of women in a privileged occupation could undermine its pretensions; at times, desperation sets in:

"Sexual harassment acts both to control women with work and to exclude women from certain types of work. The exclusionary effect is possibly the most dramatic. This is when sexual harassment is used by men to prevent women from entering a field of employment which has previously been all male. A survey in Leeds found that 96 per cent of women in non-traditional areas of employment had experienced forms of sexual harassment at work (Leeds, 1983). The most publicized recent event of this order was in the London Fire Brigade in the mid-1980s, when women, testing their new rights of entry under the equal opportunity legislation, were subject to gross physical and sexual attacks to discourage them."

—Sylvia Walby: 'Theorizing Patriarchy'.

A perfect illustration of how the bourgeoisie buys off class conflict. A system that relies on a male-dominated society for its very existence bribes the male workforce individually and collectively to perpetuate that system in microcosm. What better way to divide and rule than to

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<sup>11</sup> The Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act 1942.

<sup>12</sup> Take Valentines Day, when loving couples demonstrate their devotion but spunking hard-earned, or ill-gotten on a load of crap, what's that all about?

cut the class in two? Never mind the 1980s, in 2011 a female former fire-fighter told me she'd abandoned the profession for precisely this reason.

Looking back now I realise that I was brought up to regard men and women as separate species, this was reinforced at home, at school, at work. I got used to my father interrupting my mother in mid sentence so I did it too; as I grew in size and confidence I did it to blokes as well — ah, that makes it all right then. Well no, it doesn't; what has happened is that a form of oppression learned in one sphere has transferred to another and the fact that I only did it once I felt I could get away with it shows that it developed as a mechanism for establishing dominance. More obvious behaviour like browbeating, patronising, and all the other tactics we adopt to get our way when we're not winning the argument are acquired by the same process.

How are we going to create an equal society unless we listen to each other's opinions? It's a good discipline to comment only once on any topic in a meeting, that not only gives everyone time to put their five eggs in, it lends itself to more concise and coherent contributions than simply running off at the mouth. It's necessary to consciously crush the idea that the thought that's just popped into your head is more interesting or relevant than the narrative of the person speaking. Often someone else will articulate that idea for you, from their own perspective. You may find that people who are used to having their opinions ridiculed or ignored will put more thought into what they say, or you may need to be patient whilst they get used to addressing a group.

If the labour theory of gender is valid we would expect our understanding of it to become ever more complex with increasingly specialised and alienated modes of production, especially as all personal identities are to some extent commodified under capitalism.<sup>13</sup> The efforts of transgender people and others to break free from socially constructed boundaries and define themselves are courageous and deserving of solidarity, their success leaves everyone just a little freer. Feminists have long drawn a distinction between sex and gender, with increasing numbers of people now identifying themselves as 'genderqueer' or gender fluid the cat is out of the bag and will not be put back, so maybe gender itself is obsolescent, but so long as we're saddled with the concept, it must be self-defined.

It is with heavy heart that I need to refer here to the debate that has erupted in what passes for radical politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century U.K. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that there are state assets at work on both sides, much of the static on twitter could easily be computer generated. Transgender people have always been welcome in anarchist spaces and have been the backbone of LGBTQ and feminist resistance going back to Stonewall, now they are the subject of a crude moral panic. Incredibly, this stems from a proposed relaxation of the British state's repression, making it simpler to be 'legally' recognised<sup>14</sup> in the gender that fits their own perceptions, which has already happened in Portugal, Ireland, Malta, Belgium, Norway and Denmark. This is regarded by some feminists as an attack on their own rights to exclude transwomen from women-only facilities

The idea of safety in single-sex spaces rests on the very old-fashioned assumption that everyone is heterosexual. If you were safe around anyone who shared your genital configuration there would be no sexual violence in prisons, the military, the church, sports clubs, boarding schools

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<sup>13</sup> The ghost of my old Marxist inevitablism whispers to me that of course, capitalism must destroy all the bases of its power relations.

<sup>14</sup> The state's only real interest in your gender is which prison they put you in.

or anything run by nuns. Male violence is a problem but this is an odd place to look for it, it's one of those gendered roles. Men do not need to transition to rape women, the chief culprit for male violence against women and children is the nation-state, followed closely by the nuclear family.

Styling themselves "Gender critical" they ride the wave of reactionary populism, eagerly aided and abetted by religious fanatics, far-right politicians, tabloids and media outlets. Further they maintain that the concept of woman is debased if people are 'allowed' to define themselves, as a few years ago some Christians claimed gay marriage would devalue their own unions. I am sorry for anyone who cannot celebrate what they are without reference to what someone else is, but it must remain their problem.

"There is frequently a sense of a "scarcity of liberation" within reformist social movements, the feeling that the possibilities for freedom are so limited that we must fight against other marginalized groups for a piece of the pie."

—'Strengthening Anarchism's Gender Analysis. Lessons from the Transfeminist Movement.'  
By Rogue, Common Action/W.S.A. available from Zabalaza Books

It's as if they had a theory of sex and gender that made some sort of sense forty years ago, but events have left them stranded, like fish up a tree. They were able to contain trans people as long as they were few and far between, and could be patronised as 'freaks of nature'. Some unlucky people were 'born in the wrong body', and provided they jumped through enough hoops, and didn't demand equality, they could be accommodated. In the last ten years or so, probably thanks to the Internet, trans people have become more visible and confident<sup>15</sup> and reactionary elements around the world are coming together to drive them underground again. This has led some of the more combative members of the community to take the fight to the enemy, as you might expect.

After an unseemly fracas at the 2017 London Anarchist Bookfair I wrote a lengthy article on the subject, in polemic against a piece of "gender critical" writing. A little of it appears here, I won't go through their arguments again because they are nothing to do with anarchy as I conceive it. It is my fervent hope that by the time you read this it will be no more than a footnote in the history of our movement, like Bakunin's opportunist antisemitism, Proudhon's weird sexual hang-ups or Kropotkin's support for the First World War. Nevertheless, whenever a group of people is targeted for oppression, and the overwhelming bulk of them are Working Class, they become the frontline in the Class War we all fight. This applies to trans people now, just as much as to prisoners, asylum seekers or the homeless, and of course, these categories overlap.

"A 2015 EU report found that trans people in the EU were more likely than their cis peers to be in the bottom 25% of earners and that around a third of trans people reported experiencing workplace discrimination in the year leading up to the survey and a similar proportion had experienced discrimination while looking for housing. Unsurprisingly, given high levels of workplace discrimination and general social stigma, trans people are disproportionately more likely to experience unemployment.. Emma Rundall carried out a survey of trans people as part of her 2010 PhD thesis and found that 14% of respondents were unemployed, around two and a half times

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<sup>15</sup> Whether actually more numerous we cannot say; people mostly only perceive what they can conceive. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was devoted to industrialised slaughter and primitive accumulation, and any cognitive dissonance was likely to be greeted with an instruction to "pull yourself together".



the then national unemployment rate (pp 139 of thesis), this is consistent with a general trend in the literature for higher rates of unemployment amongst trans people.”

—Anarchasteminist blog

<https://anarchasteminist.wordpress.com/2017/12/17/transphobia-is-a-class-issue>

A disproportionate number of trans people are engaged in sex work, you can’t get much more Working Class than that.

Human rationalisations are often perceived as objective categories and distinctions between them reinforced by logical fallacy — the process of reification. A materialist view of gender would have to root its internal cognition in biology, as much as any other aspect of personality. To assert that “woman means adult female” only begs a definition of female. Male and female are ‘scientific’ terms only insofar as they relate to sexual reproduction.<sup>16</sup> In all other contexts they are perceptions, indeed human cultures have often ascribed sexual characteristics to natural phenomena.

The word ‘woman’ is a derivation of the old English ‘wifman’ or ‘wife’ which clearly denoted a social relation rather than a physical state. The ‘man’ part, meaning person, like the German ‘*mensch*’, came from ‘*mannen*’ meaning to crew or staff, and although the dictionaries don’t say so, appears to be related to the Latin ‘*manus*’ or hand, crewmen and staff have always been called ‘hands’. This survives as ‘*mano*’, ‘*main*’ etc., the old English ‘*main*’ meaning right hand. Since English doesn’t have separate words for male/female adults comparable to ‘*homme*’, ‘*hom-bre*’, ‘*herr*’, ‘*uomo*’, ‘*femme*’, *femmina*, ‘*frau*’, ‘*mujer*’ and so on, the use of man and woman this way is probably accidental. Constructions like ‘chairman’, ‘spokesman’ and ‘Wichita lineman’, commonly assumed to be gendered do not have to be.

Prior to the disastrous experiments of John Money, gender was only a grammatical term. It’s now used to refer to socially and internally constructed roles, preferences and behaviour patterns, colloquially described as masculine or feminine. Sex is reserved for reproductive physiology.<sup>17</sup>

A cursory inspection of the science reveals that sex is also socially constructed. Sexual dimorphism is the condition where two sexes of one species exhibit different characteristics unrelated to their sexual organs. This is believed to result from sex-selection and reproductive advantage. In humans these depend as much on intellectual and social characteristics as on size and appearance, and of course only affect the reproductive advantage of heterosexual subjects. Humans are only slightly dimorphic, with much overlapping. The present controversy has led not only to trans people being maliciously ‘outed’ but inevitably to cis-gendered people being challenged in public conveniences for their appearance.

In everyday experience, however you define physical characteristics as male or female you can see a continuum in each one, and this includes the external genitalia. We know that some time in the third month of foetal development a hormonal battle commences, instigated by X and Y chromosomes, over two initially neutral structures, the Wolffian and Mullerian ducts. That contest is completed at puberty — at least as far as the medical profession is concerned. Usually,

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<sup>16</sup> Defined as the process in which two gametes, each containing one set of chromosomes, combine into a zygote, with two sets, that develops into an organism bearing characteristics of both parents.

<sup>17</sup> In industry, catalogues of plugs and sockets, pneumatics and pipe fittings, still classify by gender, possibly because it sounds more polite than sex, or maybe it’s because the masculinity or femininity of a D-connector, like that of a French noun, *is entirely unrelated to reproduction*.

for administrative reasons children are assigned their sex at birth based on their appearance and some 1% are sufficiently unusual to call for a second opinion.

The moment of birth is certainly a milestone in the development of an organism but there are many others, biological sciences accord it no special significance over meiosis, fertilisation, puberty or death. It is fetishised by gender critical feminists (GCFs)<sup>18</sup> also by nationalists and god-botherers who like to claim anyone who pops out on their manor.

In the 1950s, psychologist John Money at Johns Hopkins University proposed that intersex children should be surgically altered soon after birth to fit their nearest match, called the “optimum gender of rearing” and raised conventionally to be “believable and straight” girls or boys. The practice became widespread, with tragic results. Money’s clumsy attempt to impose female gender on David Reimer, a male identical twin whose penis was destroyed in a botched circumcision demonstrates if anything that (something we may call) gender resides in consciousness, not in physicality or conditioning – and we still struggle to define consciousness.

Alongside those persons with visually ambiguous genitalia there are numerous other conditions that can be called intersex. It’s possible to have XY chromosomes and lack testosterone receptors so you develop a functioning womb and all the rest, and it’s possible for an XX person to have testes. You also can have XXY, XYY or a mix of XX and XY in different cells. Sex and gender are no more than human rationalisations for complex and ill-understood phenomena, and we’re reduced to quibbling over semantics. Ideology, or dogma, relies on widespread acceptance of definitions of things we all experience differently. I regard this as part of the catastrophic philosophical legacy of Bolshevism – which the right have drawn on just as much as the left – and its reliance on half-digested science.

As an anarchist I accept no authority beyond my own conscience and I recommend you don’t either. Logically I’ve got three choices:

- I allow everyone to define their own gender according to their perceptions and belief systems.
- I try and do it for them according to my perceptions and belief systems, or yours even.
- I sub-contract the task to state-sponsored psychiatry, which no one I know has a shred of faith in. Meanwhile they are shoved around from pillar to post by every petty bureaucrat and jobsworth with an axe to grind.

“The demand that trans people conform to gender stereotypes in order to be considered ‘healthy’ or ‘a good treatment prospect’ is something that cis-women also experience in their dealings with the psychiatric profession. It is standard practice for women in some inpatient treatment facilities to be pressured to wear makeup and dresses as a sign of ‘psychological improvement’. The institutional misogyny of the global psychiatric establishment is something that radical feminists and trans activists can usefully oppose together.”

—Laurie Penny: Moving towards solidarity 2009.

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<sup>18</sup> The original expression, Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) is now disdained by those who align themselves with this tendency.

My conversations with transgender adults and the parents of trans and gender-curious children have led me to the conclusion that no one would go through such tribulations unless it was mandatory. I read of Sarah Jane Baker who removed her own testicles in prison, because no-one was listening. I don't need to understand why an individual follows a given path, or maybe selects it as their least worst option, only accept it as an exercise of free will. I'll fight for a world in which people do not need to apologise for or explain themselves.

We must not pander to artificial scarcity by competing for access to healthcare or public spaces; let's push the economy until it breaks. Accept no less than common usufruct of all resources and the total product of social labour, according to need. We're building the new world in the shell of the old, but we won't be keeping the shell! We must destroy everything and start from first principles, the most noble of which is the absolute sovereignty of the individual, in the company of equals.

"To be free collectively means to live among free people and to be free by virtue of their freedom."

—Mikhail Bakunin 1871.

What we should be having the sensible debate about is how group identity is socially constructed when it relies not on personal affinity but perceived similarity, and what purpose it serves. A competitive society depends for its survival on every member being at odds with every other. Individuals are encouraged to compete for status within a group or for identity with their group, by narrowing the criteria for entry to the group, they have fewer members to compete with.

I've tried to examine this issue from a utilitarian, materialist, class struggle anarchist perspective. Some in the movement regard it as a distraction, and having fallen behind the wider population, accuse us of liberalism, of flirting with single-issue 'identity politics' with all its potential for cross-class contamination. It could be this masks actual prejudice; there are fellow-travellers with anarchist leanings who have never quite let go of the idea of external authority, perhaps a subliminal hangover from religion. I'll finish with a passage from one of our least liberal commentators, Alfredo Bonanno:

"Anarchism is not a political movement and never has been. It is a social movement, a carrier of social ideas, and so has always, right from its birth, dealt with the entirety of social problems. If one looks at anarchist papers of the last century, one can find not only the question of ecology addressed but also any other problem that concerns man. The anarchists were the first to talk about free love, eroticism, homosexuality, about all the aspects that concern daily life. This is one of the strengths of anarchism, and has led to the anarchist movement being considered, today as in the past, a great reservoir of ideas into which everyone can dip, and from which Capital itself has derived many concepts. But anarchists are aware of this. They have always put their ideas at the disposal of others, because, as Proudhon said, the worst kind of property is intellectual property. Anarchists have never been afraid that Capital might steal their ideas, because they have always known that they are capable of moving beyond them."

—Alfredo M. Bonanno: 'The Insurrectional Project'.

## 23. The fear of violence.

“Tis not only the mischief of diseases and the villainy of poisons that make an end of us; we vainly accuse the fury of guns, and the new inventions of death — it is in the power of every hand to destroy us, and we are beholden unto everyone we meet, who doth not kill us.”

—Thomas Browne: ‘Religio Medici’ 1643.

He wasn’t wrong; in 1662 Browne gave evidence as a physician at the trial of two blameless elderly women, Rose Cullender and Amy Denny, in Bury St. Edmunds and managed to get them both hanged for witchcraft.

The most common justification for government is ‘public safety’ or some such, the idea that without the exercise of power from above, a free-for-all will develop in which the strong and the unscrupulous will prevail. Leaving aside the argument that this is what we have already, we should start by examining the causes of violence.

Where humans are under pressure to compete, they do so either for status within a group, most easily achieved by lowering someone else, or for identity with the group, usually by being miserable to outsiders. The pressure comes from above: the intolerable loss of personal sovereignty; the lack of dignity resulting from having no control over one’s work and one’s purpose; the brain-numbing stupidity of authoritarian interventions in everyday activity; the distortion of human relationships and subjugation of the rhythms of life to the endless reproduction of this abstract quantity (capital); the colossal waste of time and effort that consumes our lives.

“So authority rules your whole life, the authority of the past and the present, of the dead and the living, and your existence is a continuous invasion and violation of yourself, a constant subjection to the thoughts and the will of someone else. And as you are invaded and violated, so you subconsciously revenge yourself by invading and violating others over whom you have authority or can exercise compulsion, physical or moral. In this way all life has become a crazy quilt of authority, of domination and submission, of command and obedience, of coercion, and subjection, of rulers and ruled, of violence and force in a thousand and one forms.”

—Alexander Berkman: ABC of Anarchism.

In our tribal past, status was a measure of your usefulness to your social group: the hunter, the warrior, the pathfinder, the healer; the mysterious fellow who had the knack of predicting the weather, the wise old woman who delivered children. As wealth congealed into centres of power, status became a measure of your usefulness to the rulers, and would have been in their gift.

In the modern world, money is a fetishised form of status that accrues to the socially useless. Group identity is mediated by fashions for acquiring manufactured goods. One must compete for these by playing the complex and rigged game of indebting others, the more debt-tokens you

acquire the greater your freedom from the rules that bind the rest. Alternatively just resort to deceit, treachery, theft and violence, as do your masters; crime, unlike wealth, trickles down.

The answer is always more laws, tougher law enforcement, stiffer penalties, more powers of surveillance and detention, sometimes the liberal mind reduces itself to the absurd, as in the concept of ‘gun control’, basically asking for men with guns to protect us from men with guns, and men they invariably are.

(C.W.)

Violence is gendered by the way, the vast majority of violent criminals are men, and women are disproportionately likely to be victims of the most serious violence.<sup>1</sup> The statistics make grim reading: 35% of women alive today either have or will experience some kind of serious sexual or other violent assault; in the U.K. one in four murders is a woman at the hands of a present or former partner; one in three reported crimes is domestic, all these things are already illegal, so how does the law prevent violence?

The threat of rape is not a common preoccupation if you’re male, unless you inhabit certain oppressive all-male environments, and the occurrence of sexual violence in those circumstances points to sexual predation as being inextricably linked to formal and informal hierarchy. But as brothers, partners and fathers, under the guise of caring concern for our womenfolk men unthinkingly reinforce the threat from day to day: “shall I pick you up / walk you home?” “Get a cab”, “don’t go through the park”, “give us a ring to let us know you’re safe” etc. In other words: “if you’re going to walk down the road packing a vagina, you may as well paint a target on your back”. Rape has been a weapon of war since ancient times and has often been officially sanctioned and organised. As warfare becomes more complicated and expensive to wage, sexual violence against chiefly, but not exclusively women and children remains a cheap and effective means of terrorising a civilian population.

Law enforcement — devised by the ruling class to enforce their privilege with the threat of violence — can do little to protect Working Class women as it doesn’t touch the patriarchal hegemony that exposes them to far greater risk. Although the safety of women and children may be used to justify surveillance, most violence against these categories will take place behind closed doors, and a woman reporting domestic abuse is far more likely to have her immigration status checked than to be offered a safe place to live. If she is being prostituted, she is more liable to prosecution than her abuser.

Punishment is the deliberate infliction of harm: physical, mental, material, or a combination of the three that may be more or less permanent. Juridical discussions of punishment invariably steer clear of examining the need for it, in favour of retrospectively justifying and explaining something that is taken for granted as a fact of life. Most of us experienced physical chastisement in childhood, along with what may be considered as psychological violence, in the withdrawal of loving kindness. Perhaps this makes it difficult to imagine a world without it.

“Crucifixion?” ... “Best thing the Romans ever did for us.” ... “Oh, yeah. If we didn’t have crucifixion, this country’d be in a right bloody mess.” ... “Nail ‘em up I say!” ... “Nail some sense into ‘em!”

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<sup>1</sup> In the U.K. we’re told that young males are most at risk of violent crime; however I personally know more women who recall being raped or assaulted than men who’ve been mugged, by about a factor of ten. This is anecdotal of course, most of these incidents will not have been reported and some will have taken place within established relationships or the family. It isn’t credible to suppose they’re all making it up, especially when the events related are historic.

The view of punishment as the retribution of the state is meaningless, since the state doesn't represent any people, but rather some relations between people, those that reside in production and exchange. The state reserves violence to itself, so it must substitute for any aggrieved party that may be disposed to revenge. For the most notorious crimes, especially the killing of innocents, there is a collective desire to see, or at least be given opportunities to imagine, the guilty suffer, and any evidence or description of such suffering is a valuable commodity. The function of punishment then, apart from continually reaffirming the state's violent monopoly, is the creation and maintenance of belief in a 'Just World' against all evidence to the contrary. Because states rely so heavily on violence for their survival, they have an interest in persuading us that violence can be just.

The most sophisticated states keep their judiciary nominally separate from the executive to lend it an air of impartiality. In the U.K. it's laden with weird anachronistic pantomime that belies the seriousness of the proceedings but contributes to the sense of aloofness. Either side of the courtroom, policing and punishment are closely managed by politicians, some of whom have come from the legal profession, and are mostly drawn from the same social stratum. The judiciary are devoted to the status quo, as they are very hard to get rid of, they can be even more reactionary than the executive.

A prime example of the type was Alfred 'Lord' Denning who rejoiced in the title Master of the Rolls, now compost. In his unguarded dotage, he revealed himself to be a religious zealot, a racist and a homophobe. Denning granted the neo-fascist Freedom Association an injunction against a workers' boycott of postal services to and from apartheid South Africa, later referring to the "bad workers" who refused to handle the racist state's mail. In 1977, Denning upheld the deportation of the journalist Mark Hosenball, for mentioning G.C.H.Q., the existence of which, was at the time considered a state secret, his judgement read:

"There is a conflict here between the interests of national security on the one hand and the freedom of the individual on the other. The balance between these two is not for a court of law. It is for the Home Secretary. He (*sic*) is the person entrusted by Parliament with the task. In some parts of the world national security has on occasions been used as an excuse for all sorts of infringements of individual liberty. But not in England."

The Birmingham Six had been framed for conspiracy and murder by the notoriously corrupt West Midlands Serious Crime Squad. Lacking any clues to the planting of three bombs, they extracted confessions from some of the suspects at gunpoint with torture and mock executions. Their ill-treatment was clearly visible in court; fourteen prison officers were found not guilty of assault. In 1980 Denning gave his reasons for rejecting their claim for damages against the police:

"... If they won, it would mean that the police were guilty of perjury; that they were guilty of violence and threats; that the confessions were involuntary and improperly admitted in evidence; and that the convictions were erroneous. That would mean that the Home Secretary would have either to recommend that they be pardoned or to remit the case to the Court of Appeal. That was such an appalling vista that every sensible person would say: *It cannot be right that these actions should go any further.*"

So much for the law preventing violence. Denning was forced to retire in 1982 after writing 'What Next in the Law' in which he claimed that black and minority ethnic people had different

moral standards to “native Englishmen” and should not be allowed to serve on juries. The status quo had left him behind, in 1988, he added:

“... We shouldn’t have all these campaigns to get the Birmingham Six released if they’d been hanged. They’d have been forgotten, and the whole community would be satisfied ... It is better that some innocent men remain in jail than that the integrity of the English judicial system be impugned.”

I refer you to his first quote.

The case became a massive embarrassment to the British state as the forensic evidence against the Six was discredited and the identity of the actual perpetrators became widely known, they were eventually acquitted.

Closely allied to punishment is the weird concept of deterrence, which also flies in the face of our everyday experience. People you are afraid of are not afraid of you, a fact we all learn the hard way early in life, so the idea they might be deterred by fear of punishment smacks of desperation. Nevertheless this entirely bogus idea is trotted out regularly to reassure the taxpayers and justify everything from insanitary and overcrowded prisons to doomsday weapons. The politicians themselves are apparently not deterred from fiddling their expenses, soliciting bribes and slaughtering innocents by remote control.

Without repeating the arguments of earlier chapters, bourgeois society creates conflict through exclusion, then seeks to manage this volatile situation by channelling that conflict away from open violence into permitted transaction and economic coercion. When violence occurs, it seeks to trump it. I can’t promise that its overthrow will grant heavenly peace, but if we can do away with material need and envy, and coercive hierarchy, we can get to work on odder things such as sexual jealousy, predation and the errors of essentialism. I am optimistic that cultural norms can change swiftly under the glare of popular scrutiny, as behaviour that was tolerated a generation ago is now confidently challenged,<sup>2</sup> despite the ravages of neoliberalism and neofascism. Likely there will always be the odd flare up, and a few sociopathic personalities. Individuals and groups must always be able to exert force in their own or others’ defence. Provided such force is proportional, and those who employ it are accountable to their community, it need not perpetuate itself.

“Nothing short of a complete reconstruction of society will deliver mankind from the cancer of crime.”

—Emma Goldman: ‘Prisons: A Social Crime and Failure’ 1917

Capitalism rests on violence thanks to the military Keynesianism that keeps the economy afloat and stimulates technical progress, and as Blair and Hitler knew only too well, you have to have a war every so often to destroy surplus production. When Billy Bragg sang ‘Between the Wars’ thirty-odd years ago, Britain actually was — if you didn’t count Ireland, and the proxy wars going on in Palestine, Iran — Iraq, Timor etc., in which British capital was invested. We are now in a permanent state of war and it will end when capitalism ends.

So violence pervades every aspect of the culture. Children are taught to admire and simulate the taking of life as soon as they are able to grasp the concept of death. There are few computer games related to saving the planet, I tried a Google search and the latest entry was from 2011. On Radio Four’s Question Time recently a panel of liberals and worthies had a solemn debate on

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<sup>2</sup> As it bit Denning in the arse.

whether it was reasonable to lock away a fifteen year-old for the rest of their life, for fantasising on the internet about killing strangers in a distant land.<sup>3</sup> They agreed they didn't have enough information to make that judgement and would leave it to others — a pretty sorry admission from would-be opinion formers. This was followed immediately by a discussion on whether it was irresponsible for a seventy-year old man<sup>4</sup> to say he would never kill strangers in distant lands. The grown up common sense view is that not having a vessel under the sea, carrying more explosive than has ever been detonated, anywhere,<sup>5</sup> would put 'us' at risk.

The only thing that prevents violence is personal responsibility for one's actions and the consequences thereof. Every time you make a new law you make new criminals, so build more and stronger prisons until everyone is a prisoner in mind or body. Might it not be easier just to string the razor wire around the coastline?

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<sup>3</sup> A teenager from Blackburn sentenced to detention for life in 2015. At the age of fourteen he posed as an adult jihadi and tried to incite a Melbourne man to attack police in Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Corbyn, British Leader of the Opposition, who took the Healey position (see 'Extremism'.)

<sup>5</sup> The new Trident submarine nuclear weapon system.



## 24. The state is prison.

Klaus: "It's a fair cop, but society's to blame."

Detective: "Agreed, we'll be charging them too."

—From Monty Python's 'Matching tie and handkerchief'

"Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?"

—Michel Foucault: 'Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison'.

What is the state but a vast prison? Any independent path followed to its ultimate conclusion leads to jail, and it doesn't matter whether you live under an absolute monarchy, a capitalist plutocracy maintained by a minimal 'security state' or the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Commit some minor transgression, use a television without a licence or carry a little marijuana, you will be fined; if you fail to pay the fine you will be arrested and bound, as you resist, batons, chemicals, electric shocks will be used to restrain you. If you persist in your resistance you will be imprisoned, then defy your captors and you will be beaten, confined, denied all comforts and necessities. If you escape you will be considered a danger to the public (the state) and a much higher level of violence will be justified to apprehend you. When you defend yourself against such brutality, eventually you will be shot.

In practice, under modern liberal democracy you can get yourself shot by the state without doing any of that, though your relatives may eventually get an apology. If you've ever been locked up, even briefly, subject to the whims of guards and warders, part of you remains incarcerated; for as long as there are locks and turnkeys, your agency is on loan to you. Once you've looked down the barrel of a gun you understand viscerally that the state stands always ready to kill, that the gun is at your head from the day you are born.

The condition of the citizen, whether under the right or the left boot, is of a prisoner trying to claw their way up the pecking order, but wherever they fall within that hierarchy they remain incarcerated, there will always be locks, barbed wire, and a remote governing entity with the power of life and death. Experience teaches us that brute force works better in such an environment than reason or goodwill. For the overwhelming majority of prisoners the section of the ladder available for them to climb is so short that throughout their lifetime they will look up and see always the same machine-gun tower monitoring their every move.

There are still a few remote or inhospitable parts of the world where it's feasible to be beyond the state's reach, but if you make sufficient nuisance of yourself, the state will come to you, sometimes as part of a coalition of states that adhere to this principle. It is the state which teaches that might is right, that escalating violence is the solution to all problems, that people are safest when threatened with annihilation. Only the state could propose to maintain peace

through mutually assured destruction, protect freedom using detention or end a civil war by aerial bombardment, no human acting on their own initiative could be that stupid.

Justifications for prison fall into four categories, in no particular order: Deterrence, Rehabilitation, Punishment or Removal for public safety. However, there is no consensus among prison advocates/apologists on the validity of any of these concepts or their relative importance.

- Deterrence is a preposterous idea that flies in the face of everyday experience, most of us learn early in life that the people you're afraid of aren't afraid of you. If crucifixion and scaphism didn't put them off, prison isn't going to do it either.
- Rehabilitation is demonstrably ineffective, wishful thinking.
- Punishment is a metaphysical concept, a sort of abstract revenge; the law actually calls it 'retribution'. However, the state can't take revenge because it doesn't represent any people, only a mode of production. Crimes against the person are merely breaches of the state's monopoly on violence so the victim is not a protagonist but a witness and/or a piece of physical evidence. Retribution is reserved for the ruling class, unless you're a member of that class it offers you nothing but a pathetic *schadenfreude*.
- The last one applies in a vanishingly small number of cases and only defers the problem.

It's a weird kind of argument to say "one or more of these propositions must be true but we're not sure which ones"

The abolition of wage labour and the abolition of incarceration are inseparable. Transaction and coercion are two sides of the same coin. Coercion is a negative transaction; it makes no sense to do away with one and keep the other. Where free people associate voluntarily to their mutual benefit, they will agree codes of conduct and remedies for transgression. They will reserve the right of self-defence against predation, but such actions will be mandated by the entire community, not by a select cadre of bureaucrats or professional thugs.

It will be an issue for the autonomous community how it arranges these matters, but I have not the slightest doubt that a free association of liberated, self-confident individuals, will come up with better solutions than the bourgeoisie. Especially to problems created by the residue of bourgeois values. The left may love their gulags, but there will be no prisons in a real communist society, for none may be free until all are free.

All capitalist states, within which I include the fascist and the Bolshevik, postulate what they call 'work' — i.e. alienated wage labour on behalf of an elite — as the only legitimate means of obtaining the necessities of life, and the function of justice systems, ever since the Great Expropriation, has been to enforce this. So the state views prison as part of the infrastructure, like the rest a burden upon the labouring class, but ripe for capital investment and the extraction of surplus-value. Factories and prisons developed in parallel for the same purpose, to use our bodies for the augmentation of capital. Look at a Victorian prison, workhouse or factory and spot the difference. Workers who had hitherto been disciplined only by the sun and the seasons were chained to the clock and the machine, forbidden to speak or associate freely, housed in overcrowded, unhealthy slums.

There were no prisons in late mediaeval society. There were dungeons for political prisoners and captured soldiers. There were local lock-ups for unruly characters, those awaiting trial or

held hostage pending payment of a debt or fine. By far the most common reason for incarceration was debt, and this was a simple extortion racket. The first state prison was Millbank, built in 1816, in the white heat of the Great Expropriation, three years after the Luddite insurrection. The land enclosures were a *fait accompli* but there were revolutions on the continent. Across the Atlantic there were slave uprisings in the Caribbean and the plantation states. This innovation was contemporary with that of professional law enforcement, to which I've devoted a later chapter.

When the United States government 'abolished' slavery in response to the Civil War, it left itself a loophole. The Thirteenth Amendment allows for the enslavement of prisoners "*as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*". All that was necessary then, to retain people as slaves was to get them duly convicted. The remainder would be proletarianised with incarceration as a penalty for refusal. The US plantation to prison-industrial system evolved smoothly from the Louisiana Purchase to the present day — we all know the Parchman Farm blues. Even the Civil War was barely a shudder. Modern US prisons are full of black and brown bodies generating surplus-value at maximum efficiency.

Proletarianisation is incarceration, simply because it makes the survival of our bodies dependent on their availability to augment capital and reproduce capitalist power relations. The indignity of wage labour, of submission to command, of maintaining a pretence of deference and servility in return for not much more than the reproduction cost of your labour-power, is a gross violation. It sits on a sliding scale that leads logically to prostitution and enslavement. It forces you into complicity, not only with the maintenance of capitalist power relations, but with racial, gender and class roles written for you by the hegemonic group.

The money economy is not concerned, as economists often claim, with allocation of scarce resources, but with the regulation of human activity by limiting access. We are all, for practical purposes incarcerated; there are no exceptions. In the latest phase of capitalism, as technology makes wage labour ever less profitable and more futile, bourgeois society relies increasingly on fictitious capital, that which augments itself without the medium of commodity exchange, threatening to force us all into precarity, pauperage and prison. Capitalism returns inevitably to primitive accumulation, as wealth inequality reaches Pharonic proportions, slavery is back with a vengeance.

The convergence between prison regimes and the society they service is striking. If you are Working Class, unskilled<sup>1</sup> — and especially if you are mentally ill, have a disability, racialised characteristics, a minority ethnicity or gender your treatment on either side of the bars will follow the same pattern.

In the modern prison-industrial system you are either a cog in the machine or the grease. We are ceasing to be productive forces and becoming raw materials to an industry that profits from managing our incapacity or unwillingness to fit the roles they create for us. Under the present U.K. regime, those who, for whatever reason cannot 'find' paid employment sufficient to reproduce their labour-power will be pressed into occupations characterised as 'training', 'job search', 'work experience', 'work-related activity', or 'treatment'. As long as some bourgeois is getting paid to maintain this state of affairs it is in no one's interests for you to improve your lot, and to this end you will be robbed of all agency. Perversely, one of their techniques for doing so

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<sup>1</sup> By which I mean only that you appear to the bourgeoisie to have no skills capable of adding value to their capital.

is to continually blame you for your inability to escape your circumstances, the better to destroy any residue of confidence or initiative.

The fees accruing to corporate contractors from this holding pattern are likely to greatly exceed both the reproduction cost of your labour-power and the amount of surplus-value that could realistically be extracted from it. You may find yourself compelled to perform some menial tasks in exchange for the meagre benefits, whilst the assessors, administrators and executives of the scheme are handsomely rewarded for arranging your placement and monitoring your (lack of) progress. The work you do for a corporation or charity yields a small amount of surplus-value, but its main use-value to those entities is to devalue the task and increase the precarity of their regular workforce, whose cry is no longer “higher pay!” but “more hours!”. Compliance is obtained by the sanction of withdrawing access to the necessities of life; the result is homelessness, starvation and, of course, crime.

The cost of all this — far greater than the cost of simply supporting everyone — is borne by the taxpayer, the overwhelming majority of whom are Working Class themselves, and are encouraged to resent the unemployed rather than the parasites who live off them. Yet another industry is dedicated to making us fear one another, creating suspicion and hostility among our Class, and feeding off the resulting misery. Now the media make us complicit in our own oppression. The rich slaughter us in droves but the prisons are full of poor people.

Within their walls we find workers compelled to activities any advanced society would have automated generations ago, for a few pence an hour. Compulsion here can include health-defeating isolation and longer incarceration. Inside or outside, the raw material need never be fully consumed. The cohorts of petty managers, the DWP, cops, courts and probation, security firms and private mental hospitals that charge a grand a day, all have a vested interest in keeping you on their books.

Either side of the prison walls the engine runs on material inequality and imbalance of power, white supremacy, ableism and patriarchy. The violence bred by poverty and exclusion, and the fear of it, the jealousy and hate that are the inevitable companions of status and hierarchy give rise to every malevolent act, legal or illegal. Without these aberrations, the only cause of ‘crime’ would be a malfunction of the brain, a grave misapprehension, a temporary loss of control. No law or penal system ever stood a chance of preventing or remedying such an event.

In the last century some 260 million people<sup>2</sup> were killed by their own governments; that’s not counting those who were killed by other people’s governments. Governments have created famine in times of abundance, poisoned the air, the water and the soil, displaced populations and waged total war on civilians; all in the name of an institution that exists solely to maintain a hierarchy of indebtedness.

This behaviour is by no means limited to totalitarian and rogue states; government is toxic by itself. The kindest, most pious and well-intentioned head of state will have been responsible for more killings, rapes and child suffering than the worst criminal you’ve ever heard of; it goes with the job.

The most commonly accepted definition of the state is that proposed by sociologist Max Weber in ‘Politics as a Vocation’:<sup>3</sup> a compulsory association that successfully, in Weber’s words: “upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of

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<sup>2</sup> — R.J. Rummel: ‘Statistics of Democide: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900’.

<sup>3</sup> The text of a lecture given in 1920, during the German revolution; a classic liberal, Weber sketched out the

its order.” In modern terms, a ‘failed state’ would be one which cannot maintain its monopoly, and a ‘rogue state’, one whose violence is not contained within its borders, or whose legitimacy to rule is not widely recognised. Weber goes on to define politics as the pursuit of power over the state and identifies three sources of legitimate rule: Traditional, Gift of grace/charisma and Statutes.

Departing from Weber’s credulous view of legitimacy I might group regimes ancient and modern alike as deriving from:

1. Historical interpretation and ideological absolutism — the Ayatollahs of Iran, ethnicity-based regimes like Israel, apartheid South Africa, or any hereditary autocracy such as North Korea or Saudi Arabia.

2. Fame and conquest — Mussolini, Lenin, Franco, Saddam and all military juntas.<sup>4</sup>

Within the ‘statutes’ group we could identify two sub-categories:

3. The successful manipulation of electoral mechanisms — Hitler, Kennedy and Thatcher for example.

4. The successful manipulation of bureaucratic structures, to cover any Soviet bloc leader after Lenin, and present-day China.

Traditional symbols or ideological palliatives can be used internally to mask the true character of any regime; for example Britain’s constitutional monarchy (group 3) and the preposterous dictatorship of the proletariat (group 4), draw on the justifications of group one. Robert Mugabe’s rule straddled all four. The internal perception of legitimacy must be matched by an external legitimacy resting on intersecting hegemonies which support the prevailing modes of production; such as the guarantee of property, cross-border commerce and the validation of debt-tokens as a measure of status. Throughout the twentieth century the single most important consideration governing states’ external legitimacy has been maintenance of the supply of raw materials, especially petroleum.

Neither morality nor even law feature strongly in any of these schemes. States reserve the right to break their own laws and devolve violence to others when its legitimacy is too controversial. Their sales pitch, that they guarantee public safety and civil rights, allows that some members of the public feel unsafe and have their rights violated to uphold the rule of law. But if everyone knew where the goal-posts were, we could all play the game. The most oppressive states make a point of breaking their own laws regularly, and are careful to punish a few loyal subjects along with the rebels, so no one ever feels safe. So do the most liberal, to pre-empt a riot they make peaceful protest seem more radical than it is by having the cops crack the heads of a few innocent bystanders. When cops kill in error, out of panic or exuberance, they are excused, because their job is so difficult. Well yeah, it’s hard work defending the indefensible. From the point of view of the individual, the only source of authority I recognise, the legitimacy of state violence depends largely on whether it is being perpetrated on oneself or someone else. In the latter case the fallacies of victim-blaming, system justification and just-world come into play.

Behind the state’s claims of legitimacy lies the uncomfortable truth that many legally constituted modern states came into being as a result of armed struggle by non-state actors. Russia, France and the United States all underwent insurrections initiated by radicals championing the

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combination of personal characteristics required for the benign exercise of power. Conditions which, so far as I can see, have never been met. Perhaps the most absurd is an absence of vanity! Consider the modern political class who employ stylists and marketing consultants and take ‘selfies’.

<sup>4</sup> Or perhaps the self-styled Islamic State (daesh), should it ever be granted belligerent rights, which I think is

‘common man’. When order was restored the clamour for democracy was tempered with sufficient repression to perpetuate a property-owning class. A liberal-bourgeois order supplanted the feudal one,<sup>5</sup> allowing the development of the now hegemonic capitalist mode of production. So however we define the state, it isn’t as it claims, the sum of its citizens, it isn’t a community of purpose or values.

As a footnote to the above chapter written four years ago, two new words entered the English language in 2020, both of which appear to have been borrowed from the U.S. prison system.

‘*Lockdown*’ is a measure taken by prison governors to facilitate searching of inmates for contraband, apprehending a fugitive or putting down disorder. Doors are all locked forcing each prisoner to remain wherever they find themselves. It is predicated on the idea that prisoners have no agency, they do not ‘own’ their flesh, their time or their productive and creative abilities. Incarceration in the United States is an extension of chattel slavery as permitted by the thirteenth amendment; in Britain it originates from the custom of holding a person hostage pending payment of a debt. Other cultures find their own justifications.

‘*Furlough*’ is temporary release. As most prisoners in the U.S. are no threat to anybody but themselves, should they become logistically inconvenient, or if there is no work for them to do, they can be put out to save the state the expense of feeding and housing them.

The context in which these terms have been bandied about in respect of the corona virus epidemic will by now be familiar to the reader. The first use was in China, which is of course nothing but a giant gulag.

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entirely plausible. For all its unaccountable brigandage it fits Weber’s definition more closely than either Iraq or Syria at present (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Britain’s landed aristocracy bought off the bourgeois revolution by allowing the nascent bourgeoisie to expand into its colonies. There is still a weird stench of feudalism in the cult of the monarchy. China and Russia may not be liberal but they are certainly bourgeois, their feudalism was attacked at an earlier stage; they didn’t have a proper bourgeoisie so had to create one.

## 25. The Iva Valley Colliers.

**On the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1949, 21 striking miners and a bystander were shot dead at a British government-owned coal mine at Enugu, Nigeria; 51 were injured.**

The miners were fighting for back-pay owed to them for a period of casualisation known as 'rostering', later declared illegal, and had been sacked following a work to rule. They occupied the mine to prevent a repeat of the lock-out they had suffered during the 1945 general strike. Because Enugu was home to the Zikist independence movement, which included Marxists and other radicals; police were sent to remove the mine's explosives, accompanied by Hausa troops drafted in from the North of the country; whose language and even their uniforms were unfamiliar to the Igbo miners.

Local Igbo constables fraternised with the workers, they were sure the government would pay them what they were due; in return the miners assured them they did not want to fight. They would not obstruct the police from removing the explosives, but refused to help because it wasn't their job. They had strict work demarcation imposed by the British, these were hewers and tubmen: "This job is for timbermen, some special labourers, he should call them."

Nigerian Coal had been of strategic importance during the war, and continued to be vital in the re-building of infrastructure by the post-war Labour government, who sought to maximise output in the Sterling zone to pay off its debt to the U.S. Many of the men had served in the British armed forces, veterans of guerrilla warfare in Southeast Asia. In 1943 with inflation raging they had been called on to make up the shortfall in the British coalfields caused by the war. They were acutely aware they had saved Britain's arse and been led to believe their sacrifices would create a better world, whilst their bosses were planning for a future that didn't exist.

They used their regular income to develop their communities, establishing the self-help mechanisms once familiar to mining villages in Britain, which were the inspiration for the welfare state, with free hospitals and relief funds for injured workers and their dependants. The Enugu Colliers supported maternity clinics, road building and clean water supplies. Rejecting the British government's mass literacy programme, designed to prepare their children for a life of menial labour, they created permanent, stone-built primary and secondary schools. These commitments were undermined by the economic uncertainty of rostering.

The aspirations of these workers collided with Labour's reconstructive ambitions and its cold war paranoia, plus the racism of the colonial management, desperate to maintain their privileges. As they had done at home Labour wanted to integrate trade unions into the state, using them to contain and defuse class struggle. The Colonial Office recruited hundreds of T.U.C. bureaucrats and despatched them around the empire to institute modern industrial relations practices. In this they were thwarted by the colonial officials, who considered African workers unworthy of political representation. The Igbo themselves had no use for the concept, their culture of open assemblies and mass meetings lent itself to Syndicalism; judging union leaders simply on their ability to execute the will of the workforce. Their Zikist General Secretary, Okwudili (Isaiah) Ojiyi, used his detailed knowledge of colonial labour law and thorough understanding of its

political context to run rings around the bosses. Because striking was illegal he imported the Durham miners' 'ca canny' go-slow tactic, translated to 'welu nwayo' in Igbo and spent many days in the mines teaching it.

A T.U.C. advisor named Curry tried to insert a layer of bureaucracy between Ojiyi and the rank and file by splitting the union into five occupational branches, in violation of Igbo organisational principles. They therefore interpreted this as the creation of five autonomous unions, rendering the negotiating structure redundant. The hewers began a wildcat go-slow, were sacked and occupied the mine, followed by the tubmen.

The violence was initiated by a British policeman called Captain F.S. Phillip; terrified of Africans and fearful of communist subversion, he spoke neither Igbo nor Hausa. The miners had tied strips of red cloth to their helmets and clothing to show their solidarity; to Phillip these were paramilitary insignia. As was their custom, facing the mass of armed troops they began to dance and chant to keep up their spirits. Philip panicked and shot dead a young hewer named Sunday Anyasado who had recently married and moved to the area. He then killed a machine man, Livinus Okechukwuma. Hearing the noise, tubman Okafor Ageni ventured out of the mine asking "Anything wrong?" and was killed on the spot. The firing continued for several minutes, some miners were shot in the back. Blacksmith Emmanuel Okafor was shot six times while tending to the dying electrician Felix Nnaji. Dead and wounded alike were left where they lay. Okafor told Philip: "I surrender, take me to hospital", Philip answered: "I don't care" and walked away.

Those eighty-seven rounds sounded the doom of the British Empire; Labour's strategies of using intermediaries to buffer class anger, and separating industrial disputes from their political context had blown up in its face. The ethnic, regional and even class divisions in Nigerian society were temporarily set aside, replaced by a collective momentum to do away with British rule.

*"The radicals and the moderates, the revolutionaries and the stooges, the bourgeoisie and the workers, sank their differences, remembered the word Nigeria and rose in revolt against evil and inhumanity."*

—Nduka Eze

The following workers died at the scene or of their injuries, but many more were wounded:



Livinus Okechukwuma, Machine Man  
Ngwu Nwafor, Tubman  
Agu Ede, Machine Man  
Okafor Ageni, Tubman  
Thomas Chukwu, Machine Man  
Jonathon Ezeani, Railman  
Ani Amu, Hower  
Onoh Onyia, Tubman  
Nnaji Nwachukwu, Screen Labourer  
Simeon Nwachukwu, Machine Man  
James Ekeowa, Clip Operator  
Sunday Anyasado, Hower  
Felix Nnaji, Apprentice Electrician  
Andrew Okonkwo, Hower  
William Nwehu, Engine Driver  
Augustina Aniwoke, Hower  
Ogbonnia Chime, Machine Man  
Moses Ikegbu, Machine Man  
Nwachukwu Ugwu, Machine Man  
Nduaguba Eze, Tubman  
Ani, Hower.

Taken from: 'We Were All Slaves: African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery, Nigeria.'

—Carolyn Brown Phd.

## 26. Britain's gulags.

Rather than generalise, let's focus on the behaviour of the British state, whose advocates have, without apparent irony described it as the originator of parliamentary democracy and the bringer of civilisation to many lands.

*(C.W. racism, torture, sexual violence)*

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, European holdings in Africa increased from ten to over ninety percent. Such rapid imperialist expansion, 'the scramble for Africa' was one of the dynamics that led to the First World War. The 1885 Berlin conference reached agreement between the jostling states of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain that they could make economic use of any territory over which they had 'effective occupation' by custom, treaty or military force. The present-day map of Africa, all straight lines and right angles, that has wrought so much sorrow, is the legacy of this carve-up. Germany subsequently swapped Uganda for the little island of Heligoland in the North Sea. Effective occupation was supposed to include a responsibility to maintain a civil administration and keep order, but practically amounted to a licence to pillage. Colonial governments were set up to serve the settler minority, differences between indigenous peoples were exploited and disputes exacerbated by elevating those who were prepared to collaborate with the regime, whilst unproductive areas were left ungoverned.

The newly formed Imperial British East Africa Company leased a big stretch of coast from the Sultan of Zanzibar, its royal charter granted it rights of plunder and immunity from prosecution to British subjects in the execution thereof. It had bitten off more than it could chew however, so to protect its interests and missionaries in Uganda, and rather than bail out the I.B.E.A.C. financially, the state took over the entire territory as the East Africa Protectorate which gave the Crown allodial title to the land.

In 1896 they started building a railway from Mombasa across what is now Kenya to Lake Victoria using mainly Indian labourers and troops, pitting these against the locals. The initial cautious welcome to European traders evaporated as the latter turned to cattle rustling and other misbehaviour. Maasai herders, who used the land lightly but were not renowned for suffering fools gladly, killed five hundred railway workers at Kedong in retaliation for the rape of two women.

It would be wrong to regard these areas as unclaimed or undisputed, though an epidemic of rinderpest (cattle-pox) imported from India in meat and draught beasts during the 1887 Italian invasion of Abyssinia, had depleted the human population by up to a third. The rails passed through the territory of the Nandi, who having defeated an Arab incursion fifty years earlier, had kept their land to themselves ever since, using tactics they developed for countering ranks of muzzle loaders with the traditional shield and spear. The British conducted a large military operation against them in 1895 and another in 1900; Nandi resistance was only ended in 1905

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<sup>1</sup> Spiritual leader and military commander, the Nandi civil administration was directly democratic and kept separate. Koitalel's son Barsirian Arap Manyei was Orkoiyot from 1919–1922 and spent forty-two years in a British prison, only to be released on independence.

with an act of abject treachery by a British officer Richard Meinertzhagen. He offered to meet the Orkoiyot<sup>1</sup> Koitalel Arap Samoei to negotiate a truce, and it was agreed that he would bring five companions. Meinertzhagen stationed seventy-five troops out of sight and shot Koitalel with a pistol whilst shaking hands, whereupon his men massacred twenty-three Nandi with machine gun fire, comprising the entire military leadership.

Meinertzhagen had a long career as an officer — during which he presided over several massacres — a spy and a con-artist, worked for the Zionists in Palestine, murdered a servant and his second wife. He also made a name for himself as a ‘naturalist’ which in those days amounted to shooting things and stuffing them, though most of his specimens were stolen from museums (some of his ‘new species’ were faked) and his writings plagiarised. We would probably describe him as a psychopathic personality, but such characters flourished in the colonial service.

The railway was completed in 1901 and British settlers began arriving in 1903, following its path inland, with a big surge after the First World War. Colonial capital conducted primitive accumulation on the familiar model. Self-sufficient Kikuyu farmers were expropriated from their land and forced into wage labour in exactly the same manner as their European counterparts had been a century earlier.<sup>2</sup>

“[In 1923] the maximum amount that could be considered to have been spent on services provided exclusively for the benefit of the native population was slightly over one-quarter of the taxes paid by them”

“If we left that district to-morrow the only permanent evidence of our occupation would be the buildings we have erected for the use of our tax-collecting staff.”

—William Ormsby-Gore et al:  
Report of the East Africa Commission 1925

The Crown Ordinance Acts of 1902 and 1915 were explicitly racist, providing different terms for occupation of land by persons of European, Asian or African heritage. White farmers were granted leasehold in perpetuity of up to six hundred and forty acres, everyone else was required to renew annually and limited to five acres. Where a lease enclosed an African settlement, this was excluded so long as it remained occupied, but if abandoned for any reason — such as disease or coercion — it reverted to the Crown and became available for lease. Thus the incoming Europeans achieved a monopoly on the means of production, the African peasantry was proletarianised, and the Asian settlers cast in the role of a petty bourgeois, merchant class.

Indigenous resistance built over decades, after World War Two the Kenya Land Freedom Army (K.L.F.A.) popularly called Mau Mau launched a ferocious armed insurrection against foreign rule. In suppressing that revolt, the British state abandoned any pretence of civilised conduct or the rules of war, and it would be half a century before a few survivors were given recourse to law. It suited the state to present the conflict as a civil war between Africans. Many Kikuyu workers had become dependent for their livelihood on the colonial administration and its settlers, and so were deemed ‘loyalists’, along with the Maasai people, who historically occupied bare grazing

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<sup>2</sup> “Through a series of expropriations, the colony’s government seized about 7,000,000 acres (28,000 km<sup>2</sup>; 11,000 sq mi) of land, some of it in the especially fertile hilly regions of Central and Rift Valley Provinces, areas later known as the White Highlands due to the exclusively European-owned farmland there.”

—Tabitha Kanogo:

Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905–63

land unsuitable for cultivation and seldom came into conflict with the regime. The colonial government declared a state of emergency in October 1952 and in 1954 embarked on a programme of mass internment of Kikuyu citizens.

“Cut to essentials it amounted to the rounding up of the entire African population of Nairobi — slightly over 100,000 — followed by the sorting out of the 70,000 Kikuyu. These men would then have to be screened to see which ones were known to be bad so that those identified could be segregated and despatched to specially prepared detention camps: their families would also have to be collected and sent back to their relations in the Native Reserve. As the Government expected to detain in the region of 10,000 Kikuyu this part of the job alone would be a huge undertaking”

—Major Frank Kitson: ‘Gangs and Counter Gangs’ 1960.

The author was sent to Kenya in July 1953 to assist the police Special Branch in gathering intelligence, just prior to the start of the ‘screening’ project, which was later extended across the territory. ‘Gangs and Counter Gangs’ relates the development of counter-insurgency strategy and tactics during the period he describes as “*the two best years of my army service*”.<sup>3</sup> It’s primarily autobiographical and in the style of the adventure yarns of its day, violence can be graphic but bodily functions and reproductive anatomy are referred to so obliquely you wonder what he’s going on about.

Kitson established a network of informers and turncoats, leading to the formation of “pseudo-gangs” from loyalist Africans and captured guerrillas posing as Mau Mau, sent among them to fish for information or lead them into ambush. Screening made use of hooded informers to identify suspects among the general population. The gangs also carried out assassinations and took prisoners, who they guarded and interrogated. Insurgents caught in action faced a bleak future, once Kitson’s men had finished with them they were invariably convicted of terrorism and hanged, so the less politically-motivated<sup>4</sup> could be induced to switch sides. As Kitson himself points out, the pseudo-gangs could not afford to let go of anyone who might identify them to their former comrades.

When I first picked up the book<sup>5</sup> my interest was purely in the ‘false flag’ tactics associated with Kitson, — knowing that he developed them further in Malaya, Cyprus and Ireland — that are now a staple of political policing. I didn’t want to be bothered with his psychology, but the first-person narrative draws you under his skin and he did end up as head of the army, so here goes:

Here’s a bloke from a military family who joins the army by default, “... *there was no alternative short of breaking a father-to-son tradition which has lasted for over two hundred years*”,<sup>6</sup> for the start of the cold war and the arse end of the period when killing dark-skinned people at little risk to yourself was seen in those circles as an honest occupation. Kitson’s received racism pervades the story, and gives an insight into how that ideology is constructed and transmitted under imperialism. I don’t care to labour it but one phrase stuck out: “*Luckily Africans don’t feel*

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<sup>3</sup> (*ibid*)

<sup>4</sup> The rebels made a rod for their own back by trying to forcibly recruit everybody, regardless of affiliation.

<sup>5</sup> No, I didn’t pay for it — just as well, it had some pages missing.

<sup>6</sup> (*ibid*)

very strongly about losing their friends”.<sup>7</sup> He claims the insurgents were ambivalent about their own lives as well, when applied to Europeans this is called ‘courage’.

Although he speaks neither Kikuyu nor Swahili, Kitson attempts a brief analysis of the origin and motivation of the uprising, in the entitled, condescending tone of the British officer class. He puts the ‘land question’ down to the expansion of the Kikuyu population, thanks to the British shielding the natives from disease and tribal warfare, and resents the existence of Western-educated Africans with aspirations to be other than peasants, labourers or mercenaries. He characterises his opponents as fearful and superstitious, though he doesn’t come across as especially brave himself and keeps a Bible by his bed.

“From the beginning of the century the government had encouraged British people to settle in those parts of the country which were not at the time inhabited by African tribes, and most of the land so occupied had been totally uninhabited. Unfortunately the British had also settled in one tiny area which had previously been occupied by the Kikuyu but which was vacant at the time because the Africans had abandoned it after a serious smallpox and rinderpest epidemic. Although the Kikuyu had received disproportionately large compensation in other ways, they still nursed a grievance over this matter. By the start of the Emergency there were about 40,000 Europeans in Kenya, some of whom were living on farms near the Kikuyu lands.”

(*ibid.*)

A prime example of political ‘spin’,<sup>8</sup> the British state had opportunistically taken advantage of the pestilence introduced by the Italian one, designated any land without houses or ploughed fields on it as ‘uninhabited’ and half a century later, forty thousand European immigrants operated an effective political hegemony over six and a half million Africans. At no time in Britain’s sixty-eight year tenure did any African representatives participate in the legislature — and the ungrateful blighters “nursed a grievance” over it!

Kitson makes a couple of points early on. He flatly denies any wrong-doing by his own side and laments having to abide by the letter of the law, any excesses are blamed on over-enthusiastic African personnel who “*didn’t understand about British justice*”.<sup>9</sup> The rumours of abuse which were already circulating at the time must have been fabricated by those pesky “*Western-educated Africans*”,<sup>10</sup> or as his former boss puts it in the foreword:

“It was only in the prohibited area, i.e. the forest, where the Security Forces could operate in an unrestricted manner. [...] In spite of the disadvantages I insisted we must play the rules and I was most loyally supported by the Security Forces. Unfortunately this did not prevent a number of people who should have known better from lending their support to a smear campaign against the Security Forces.”

—General George Erskine: (*op.cit*)

There’s another sentence opened with “*Unfortunately ...*” the pre-emptive apologism and expressions of wounded pride have a whiff of desperation about them. In view of the scale of atrocities revealed subsequently, it would be inconceivable for anyone to occupy Kitson’s position

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<sup>7</sup> (*ibid*)

<sup>8</sup> In his later writings Kitson stresses the importance of what he calls ‘psychological operations’ to counter-insurgency. It’s essential for the government to control the narrative, countering rebel propaganda with its own; what is significant is that he sees this as part of the army’s role.

<sup>9</sup> (*ibid*)

<sup>10</sup> (*ibid*)

without being thoroughly complicit. The other point that struck me is the degree of operational autonomy he claims:

“John Holmes was quite open about the fact that no one knew what the job would entail. It would depend on what we made of it. One last point: if we could not be of any use could we please not be a nuisance?”

(*ibid.*)

This adds to the ‘ripping yarns’ feel of the tale but isn’t credible either, the commander in chief, George Erskine, had been fighting the empire’s rearguard action all his life, is it likely he would have plucked a bunch of young officers out of Germany, dumped them in the field and given them no instructions? As the British establishment closed ranks, could it be that Kitson’s meteoric rise was partly because he knew where the bodies were buried and needed to be locked into the conspiracy of silence? Kitson takes much of the credit for defeating Mau Mau and Erskine is happy to let him.<sup>11</sup> Was he also groomed as a potential fall-guy for the Kikuyu holocaust over which Erskine presided?

Kitson was the perfect choice as his ethics are pure system-justification. His slavish dedication to the status quo would have made him an excellent Bolshevik. The following passage relating to the (very rare) killing of two white youths gives him away:

“Naturally the terrorists attacked to get hold of the weapon which, not realizing it was an airgun, they thought to be valuable. Having done this they dared not let the boys go in case they gave information to the police. The gang leader finished up by asking me whether our troops in the forest would have let two armed terrorists go even if they had been young. I had seen too many bodies of Mau Mau aged fifteen or so to pursue the argument any further. *I had already decided in my own mind that it was rebellion which was wrong.* It is no use trying to be critical of the individual incidents which civil war brings in its wake. What is foul murder from one point of view may be an unavoidable unpleasantness from another and even a triumph from a third.”

(*ibid.*)

My italics.

The book is written some years after the events described, while he’s in Malaya. He either has a remarkable memory for detail<sup>12</sup> or just makes it up. Tales of white policemen and settlers capering about the bush in blackface makeup, hob-nobbing with Mau Mau defy credulity, as does the readiness of prisoners to betray the cause for which they took up arms, without the slightest physical coercion.

By now he’s on a rapid career path and needs to account for a couple of years in which he did himself a lot of good, but that are tainted by allegations of war crimes, So he puts together a highly fictionalised whitewash with a bit of history and geography thrown in, pads it out with amusing anecdotes and guff about wildlife and fly-fishing.

Research by Professor Caroline Elkins, author of ‘Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya’. 2005<sup>13</sup> indicated that systematic repression in the colony was in fact directed from London, and that records removed from Kenya prior to independence were unaccounted for. In fact

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<sup>11</sup> The pseudo-gangs took out some prominent individuals, but it was the destruction of the organisation that prevented them being replaced, that was clearly down to the mass internment, forced displacement and the waging of total war on a lightly armed civil insurrection.

<sup>12</sup> In his evidence to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry he couldn’t recall where he was, who he met or what may have been said, but was pretty sure no-one had read any of his books.

<sup>13</sup> Published in the U.S. as ‘Imperial Reckoning’.

the documents were 'migrated' to the U.K. in 1963; the Kenyan government had asked for them back in 1967 but was declined. In 1994 they were moved to Hanslope Park in Buckinghamshire, a secure government communications research facility.

The papers reveal that Eric Griffith-Jones, the Attorney General of the colony, described its regime as "*distressingly reminiscent of conditions in Nazi Germany or Communist Russia*". In June 1957, in a memo to the governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, he gave detailed instructions for beating suspects, warning: "*If we are going to sin, we must sin quietly*." By then the K.L.F.A. had been militarily defeated, though the entire Kikuyu population remained in detention or locked down under martial law.

One and a half million Kenyans had been interned in concentration camps or corralled at gun-point into fortified 'prison villages',<sup>14</sup> where they were subject to forced labour and deliberate starvation. Torture by electrocution, flogging, rape, castration and other mutilations were standard practice, and the insertion of objects including live animals into orifices is a recurring theme of the reports. In addition to 1,090 prisoners who were formally executed by hanging, thousands more were shot, butchered, clubbed or burned to death. Most of these atrocities were collective punishment in response to insurgent activity, being inflicted on entire communities including children. Many Kikuyu escaped the farms and reservations to live freely in the forest regions – the common land in effect. But these areas were prohibited to Africans so all were presumed to be terrorists and could be summarily executed. The government conducted indiscriminate bombing and strafing raids, or used artillery to flush them to waiting guns after the fashion of a hunting party.

At independence a deal was struck with the new administration that Mau Mau remained illegal, preventing any veterans of the war from coming forward. That proscription was not lifted until 2003, and four elderly Kenyans were selected to file a test case from six thousand survivors who submitted depositions reporting abuse.

In 2006 lawyers representing the four submitted a disclosure request to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and were told all relevant documentation was in the public domain. During the course of litigation, David Anderson, professor of politics at Oxford, made a statement to the effect that the archive removed in 1963 was still missing. Eventually a tenacious F.C.O. employee, Edward Inglett located the fifteen hundred files, whose existence had been repeatedly denied, in three hundred boxes taking up a hundred linear feet.

"The domestic records of colonial administrations did not form part of British public (i.e. official) records and they were kept by the individual states created at independence. It was however the general practice for the colonial Administration to transfer to the United Kingdom, in accordance with Colonial Office instructions, shortly before independence, selected documents held by the Governor which were not appropriate to hand on to the successor Government."

—Hansard 5 Apr 2011: Column WS145

The foreign Secretary was compelled to acknowledge possession of "*around 8,800 files from 37 former British Administrations*"<sup>15</sup> that under the Public Records Acts, ought to have been released after thirty years. When these were received at the National Archives at Kew, the total was closer to twenty thousand, but there was more to come. There are fifteen miles of shelving at Hanslope

<sup>14</sup> Alluding to this, Kitson insists it's for their own safety.

<sup>15</sup> (*ibid.*)

Park. To date, the F.C.O. has admitted it holds 1.2 million files dating back to 1662, and that one such item alone may contain 2.9 million documents.

Probably the most incriminating records never made it back to blighty but were disposed of at source. In 1961 secretary of state Iain Macleod decreed that material left for incoming governments should not include anything that “*might embarrass Her Majesty’s government, ... members of the police, military forces, public servants or others eg police informers*”, might compromise intelligence sources, or “*be used unethically by ministers in the successor government*”<sup>16</sup> (the bounders!)

Macleod’s instructions were to separate papers called ‘Legacy files’ to be left behind, from the embarrassing ‘watch files’ stamped with a red ‘W’. Back in Kenya, a “thorough purge”, was overseen by Kitson’s Special Branch colleagues.

“3. It is a corollary of this segregation that “WATCH” material can only be seen by “authorised” officers. An “authorised” officer is defined in the draft (para.9) as a servant of the Kenya Government who is a British subject *of European descent* and who has been security cleared to see classified documents.”

(*ibid.*)

My italics: Watch material was destroyed or migrated to the U.K.:

“... emphasis is placed upon destruction” ... “The waste should be reduced to ash and the ashes broken up” ... “It is permissible, as an alternative to destruction by fire, for documents to be packed in weighted crates and dumped in very deep and current-free water at maximum practicable distance from the coast.”

(*ibid.*)

Conspicuously absent files were replaced by fakes:

“The legacy files must leave no reference to watch material. Indeed, the very existence of the watch series, though it may be guessed at, should never be revealed.”

(*ibid.*)

The K.L.F.A. certainly committed war crimes, mostly against loyalist Kikuyu, but as the state’s policy was to sow confusion and division among the enemy with its ‘pseudo-gangs’, it’s hard to apportion blame for any specific incident. Countless Africans lost their lives, thirty thousand actual or presumed guerrillas were killed in action,<sup>17</sup> estimates of civilian casualties vary from tens to hundreds of thousands, of whom thirty-two were of European heritage, and twenty-six Asian.

“But one commitment will inevitably remain which is the obligation for maintaining law and order within the United Kingdom. Recent events in Northern Ireland serve as a timely reminder that this can not be taken for granted and in the historical context it may be of interest to recall that when the regular army was first raised *in the seventeenth century*, ‘Suppression of the Irish’ was coupled with ‘Defence of the Protestant Religion’ as one of the two main reasons for its existence. In practice the fact that the army is so heavily engaged in Ireland now makes it unlikely that it will be involved in exactly this task between 1975 and 1980 because it is reasonable to hope that *the present emergency will be resolved within five years.*”

—Frank Kitson: ‘Low Intensity Operations. Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping’ 1971.

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<sup>16</sup> Circular now in National Archives

<sup>17</sup> Nigel West: ‘Historical Dictionary of British Intelligence’ 2014



My italics.

That's a defining mission statement for twentieth century politics. The spoils of four hundred years' worth of primitive accumulation will be retained by hook or by crook, any aspirations to redress from expropriated peoples must be defeated — and be quick about it. The context of this book is of course the cold war, during which the two Leninist blocs were presented as an existential threat to Western civilisation, whose values Kitson expresses so eloquently. After all, the nuclear holocaust had been only narrowly averted (by the U.S.S.R.) less than a decade earlier. It takes for granted that subversion and insurrection in capitalist countries will be inspired, facilitated or at least exploited by external powers. Once Bolshevism had run itself into the ground, and its empires assimilated into capitalism, that mission reigned unchallenged.

All British governing parties have chosen to portray their military occupation in the North-East<sup>18</sup> of Ireland as a policing operation, using troops to keep the peace and stabilise the social and economic life of the region. Nothing could be further from the truth, in fact the most lethal incidents of the 'Irish troubles' were all facilitated or perpetrated by representatives of the British state.

The struggle had three poles: Irish Republican separatists of left and right, Britain as colonial power, wishing to retain its territorial possession, and loyalist paramilitary organisations whose primary motivation was hatred of the Roman Catholic religion and its adherents.

Collusion between the last two was entirely to be expected, as they shared a common goal, and the loyalists, through their churches and Orange Lodges, were deeply embedded in the civic administration of the province, its home-grown Ulster Regiment and Constabulary. They maintained control of local government, even in majority nationalist areas, through a combination of gerrymandering, ballot-rigging and selective employment practices. It would be normal for representatives of the state: elected officials, military and law enforcement professionals, to come into contact with paramilitaries or their proxies drinking in the same clubs, and through their business activities. Thus there was a natural conduit for intelligence gathered by paramilitaries to be fed to the state, and vice versa.

The group of loyalist paramilitaries that began to meet at Glenanne farm in 1971 included serving members of both the Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Ulster Constabulary,<sup>19</sup> from which weapons and ammunition were diverted and stashed at the farm. The farmer James Mitchell was an R.U.C reserve Constable. The 'Glenanne gang' was responsible for a number of atrocities against civilians of Catholic heritage, their agenda being specifically to foil any attempts at a truce that might result in a political settlement, and they were in regular contact with British intelligence.

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<sup>18</sup> The Northernmost point on the island, Malin Head, is in the Republic. The border is long, winding, and pretty arbitrary, becoming more significant with each cycle of conflict. The British state's reaction to the 1916 Easter rising had been to create two territories with separate parliaments, one of which achieved full independence in 1948. By then, most republicans were of Catholic heritage, but by no means all. The six electoral counties were selected for having a voting majority of pro-union Protestants, leaving out three counties of the historic province of Ulster: Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan. Within the six counties are two electoral boroughs, Belfast and Derry, which had slight Catholic majorities.

<sup>19</sup> British army and police personnel, nominally under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State, initially the Home Office, but arguably the armed wing of the Orange Lodges.

The book *Lethal Allies*, based on research by the Pat Finucane Centre and *Justice for the Forgotten* identifies twenty-four members of state forces involved in over a hundred killings.<sup>20</sup> The book gives official sources for the facts which remain unchallenged.

In 1969 a civil rights movement developed to campaign for universal adult suffrage and an end to discrimination against Catholics. It was met by extreme violence from the dominant community, and significantly loyalist special constables<sup>21</sup> of the R.U.C. who, on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> of January invaded the Bogside district of Derry and ran amok. This event led to the establishment of ‘Free Derry’ a nationalist enclave patrolled by volunteers from which police and loyalists were excluded.

Óglaigh na h Éireann – the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) which refused to accept the partition of Ireland and declined to participate in the political institutions had de-militarised a few years earlier and was beginning to lean towards political representation. Its elders disdained ethnic conflict in favour of abstract class struggle and had no real answer to the loyalist onslaught. At the end of 1969 it underwent a tactical and ideological split into a Marxist-Leninist Official (OIRA) wing, and a cross-class nationalist Provisional wing (PIRA) with a corresponding split in Sinn Féin. PIRA was more wedded to armed struggle but both groups waged it during this period whilst feuding between the two claimed a number of lives. An offshoot of the OIRA, the Irish National Liberation Army opposed to its 1972 ceasefire feuded with both wings, leading to further assassinations, then itself split giving birth to the Irish People’s Liberation Organisation, which tried to annihilate its parent before being militarily defeated by over a hundred members of the PIRA. We could put all that down to the tendency of vanguardist groups to attract sociopathic personalities with large fragile egos, but the role of the state is a topic for further exploration.

Lethal hostilities got underway in the summer of 1970 with a curfew and the deployment of three thousand troops in violent house-to-house searches in the Lower Falls district of Belfast. Fire was exchanged and there are reports of looting and extortion; four civilians died. In July a soldier shot dead a Catholic teenager in north Belfast.

On 27<sup>th</sup> June rioting broke out across Belfast following a parade by the Orange Order, and a gun battle started in the Ardoyne area.

“Three loyalists were shot dead and fifteen wounded. There were three or four nationalists wounded. No one was killed. [After the shooting] every door in Ardoyne was opened. The IRA had proved beyond a shadow of a doubt what they said they were going to do, they had done. The date – 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1970 – is more significant for that than anything else. As a result, the whole broad spectrum of the nationalist people actually supported what the IRA was doing. Everybody, man, woman and child came out and supported us in any way possible. I never saw support like it in my life. It was unbelievable.”

—Martin Meehan, quoted in:  
“Provos, The IRA & Sinn Féin” by Peter Taylor.

Enter Frank now Brigadier Kitson, who had just completed the seminal ‘Low Intensity Operations’, his counter-insurgency manual. Kitson was given charge of the 39<sup>th</sup> Airborne (Infantry) brigade in Belfast, plus its reserve force 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, based at Palace Barracks, Holywood, just outside the city, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Derek Wilford,

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<sup>20</sup> “Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland” by Anne Cadwallader 2013 Mercier Press. Appendix A. pp 374–376

<sup>21</sup> ‘B-Specials’

who like Kitson had been in Malaya and Aden. The state's actions over the following year were going to seriously endanger its 'propaganda narrative' and give a massive boost to the insurgents. It converted the simple demand for equal rights for Catholics into a full-scale war of independence, forcing the state into bed with the loyalist paramilitaries.

The strategy of the British state was to play down the political aspect of the conflict and exacerbate the religious and cultural divisions between the communities. The army created an 'Information Policy Unit' at its headquarters in Lisburn for psychological operations and propaganda. From the onset of its war with the I.R.A. the state used military personnel acting undercover as *agents provocateurs* to intensify sectarian violence. This cast the paramilitary groups in the role of defending each community against the other, shifting the battle away from a straightforward independence struggle towards a conflict between two cultures.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1971 the government introduced internment without trial<sup>22</sup> and banned marches and processions, making the position of 'constitutional' nationalists untenable. Ten people — four soldiers, four civilians and two Republicans — had been killed in the four months leading up to internment. One hundred and twenty-eight perished in the next four, of whom sixty-nine were civilians, and fifty-nine combatants: thirteen Republicans and forty-six British army, R.U.C., U.D.R. and Loyalist paramilitary). House searches in the nationalist enclaves were vigorously resisted and most of the violence stemmed from these.

Northern Ireland's Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner, had decreed a (secret) "*Arrest Policy for Protestants*"<sup>23</sup> which laid out criteria for Interim Custody Orders (Internment without Trial) that meant no loyalists would be interned until 1973 by which time they had killed well over a hundred people.

Commencing on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> November 1971 a major insurgency broke out with numerous explosions and shooting incidents, causing the state to swamp all major urban areas with troops. This was followed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December by the escape from Crumlin jail of three republican prisoners, and a cordon of roadblocks was placed around North Belfast.

"In a massive clamp-down operation, hundreds of troops today saturated Belfast's city centre... in an effort to prevent a repetition of last Saturday's IRA terror campaign... More than 4000 men in nine regiments are stationed in and around Belfast, and today each regiment was told to keep a lookout for trouble in its own area... All this was in addition to the massive search which has been mounted for the three IRA jail breakers. Road blocks on all roads leading into and out of the city are being manned round the clock."

—Belfast Telegraph 4<sup>th</sup> December 1971

At 20:40 on 4<sup>th</sup> December a fifty pound gelignite bomb destroyed the Tramore Bar in North Belfast, known locally as McGurk's bar after the family that had run it for decades. Fifteen civilians were killed including two children.

Somehow, a loyalist group had passed through all the army and police checks, planted the bomb and escaped. The authorities didn't bother to recover the car they abandoned a few hundred

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<sup>22</sup> Especially onerous to Republicans as it had been used against them by the pro-treaty Free State during the Irish Civil War.

<sup>23</sup> There was one internee of Protestant heritage: the anarchist writer John McGuffin was interned in August 1971, though he was of course an atheist.

yards away.<sup>24</sup> As was later revealed by the one convicted bomber, Robert James Campbell of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the initial target had been the Gem bar, frequented by OIRA. The intention being to spark a feud with PIRA, since it would be inconceivable the device had come from outside the area. They had hung around the Gem for an hour, but it was well guarded. In the end they decided any 'Catholic bar' would do. After the explosion their getaway driver passed by without picking them up and fled,<sup>25</sup> so they walked with impunity past the troops and police that swarmed the area, to their second pickup location, then were driven through the roadblocks back to the Shankill Road where they ended the evening drinking in the Orange Lodge.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of Royal Regiment of Fusiliers headquartered at Glenravel, close to McGurk's bar, had a covert "ambush OP" (ambush observation post) in York Street which intersected the target area and escape route of the bombers. The "LOG SHEET 2 RRF" for 4<sup>th</sup> December 1971 shows: "1645 From C [Company] Accidental discharge in the York St ambush OP. 1 x 9mm no cas – [redacted]". The Gem bar was under surveillance as an important meeting place for OIRA; it had been raided and searched two days earlier,<sup>26</sup> with six suspects taken to Girdwood Barracks for questioning.

It has been consistently denied by the police and military that any army unit was in the area the night of the explosion. Log sheets for 2 RRF and HQ 39 AIRPTBL BDE dated 3<sup>rd</sup> December contain entries "From MRF" relating to the search for the fugitives. According to the 2 RRF log they withdrew at 22:00. It was customary when conducting covert operations to issue a 'temporary operational out of bounds order' to exclude other personnel.

*"TEMPORARY OPERATIONAL OUT OF BOUNDS AREAS*

*1. Permanent out of bounds areas are in Section 51. Areas are put temporarily out of bounds for several reasons, the most important being:-*

- a. Sus IED.*
- b. Covert Ops.*

*2. It is therefore important that all ranks are aware of their existence and loc, and that clashes between friendly forces and covert tps are avoided."*

—British Army Out of Bounds Order. PART II SECTION 18.

On the day of the bombing Kitson outlined his mission:

"Operations In Belfast since 9 August have been carried out on the basis of so weakening the IRA that a future political initiative can be launched under favourable circumstances.

... As you know we are taking steps to do this in terms of building up and developing the MRF<sup>27</sup> and improving the capability of Special Branch by setting up cells in each Division manned by MIO/FINCOs<sup>28</sup> and by building up Special Branch's records with Int Corps Sections."

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<sup>24</sup> Although a handwritten police fingerprint ledger has the entry: "2 [from] car used in explosion gt george st" Fragment shown in: 'McGurk's Bar Bombing Post-Script' by Ciarán MacAirt. Published by Paper Trail, available online.

<sup>25</sup> No U.V.F. member was ever disciplined for this, so the driver either belonged to, or had the protection of, the military or police.

<sup>26</sup> Entry in: "LOG SHEET HQ 39 AIRPTBL BDE Date 3 DEC 71 Serial 26 [time] 0210 From 2 RRF".

<sup>27</sup> Military Reaction Force

<sup>28</sup> Military Intelligence officers, Field Intelligence Non Commissioned Officers.

—Frank Kitson: ‘Future Developments in Belfast:  
By Commander 39 Airportable Brigade’ 4<sup>th</sup> December 1971.  
Photograph of item in National archives, found at mcgurksbar.com

The report is attached to a ‘PERSONAL AND SECRET’ letter from Howard Smith, Office of the United Kingdom Representative in Northern Ireland, Holywood, Co. Down to Philip Woodfield CBE, at the Home Office. The structure he refers to is set out in ‘Low Intensity Operations’.

The Information Policy Unit went into action straight away with the story that the explosion was an accidental detonation of a republican device. Families of victims, none of whom had paramilitary connections, have spent fifty years trying to establish exactly how and why that happened. After lengthy legal wrangles, Freedom of Information requests by Ciarán MacAirt, grandson of two of the casualties, revealed twenty heavily redacted contemporary military logs. See mcgurksbar.com.

The army’s Ammunition Technical Officer who attended minutes after the explosion believed the bomb had been planted outside the pub. The R.U.C. duty officers’ report, written shortly afterwards, claimed it had exploded inside:

“At 8.45 p.m. on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1971 an explosion occurred at McGurk’s licenced premises, 83 Great George’s Street. The charge estimated at 50 lbs. completely demolished the two-storey building. Just before the explosion a man entered the licenced premises and left down (*sic*) a suitcase, presumably to be picked up by a known member of the Provisional I.R.A. The bomb was intended for use on other premises. Before the ‘pick-up’ was made the bomb exploded, 15 persons were killed and thirteen injured, 12 of whom were taken to hospital:-”

—Chief Superintendent Liggett, Inspectors Weatherall, Mills, Atkins: Duty Officers’ Report for  
24 hours ending 8 a.m. on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1971.

This fantasy was written after the Ammunition Technical Officer’s visit. At 1 a.m. Kitson recorded it in his log:

“RUC have a line that the bomb in the pub was a bomb designed to be used elsewhere, left in the pub to be picked up by Provisional IRA. Bomb went off and was a mistake. RUC press office have a line on it – NI should deal with them. Action HQNI Info’d”

LOG SHEET HQ 39 AIRPTBL BDE date 5 DEC 71 Serial 12 [time] 0100 From Bde Cmd [Brigade Commander Kitson]

At 8 a.m. the following morning, as the duty officers were filing their report, Lieutenant General Harry Tuzo, General Officer Commanding and Director of Operations, Northern Ireland, received the following confidential briefing, only uncovered by victims’ families in 2009:

“Explosion. At 2045hrs 2 RRF reported that an explosion had occurred at McGURKS BAR, 81–83 NORTH QUEEN ST. A bomb believed to have been planted outside the pub was estimated by the ATO to be between 30/50 lbs of HE. The building was structurally demolished and surrounding buildings badly damaged. There were fatalities and thirteen injuries. The following are named dead, when possible to identify.”

—DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS BRIEF  
04–05 DECEMBER 1971 NORTHERN IRELAND

The same report appears in Kitson's log that morning:

"As far as can be assessed from the damage and crater caused by the expl at Gt Georges St / Nth Queens St the bomb was placed in the ground floor entrance on the corner of the building that faces the junction. Guess size to be 40 — 50 lbs."

—"LOG SHEET HQ 39 AIRPTBL BDE date 5 DEC 71 serial 58 [time] 1105 From ATO"

And five minutes later it was relayed to Headquarters, Northern Ireland, marked *Not for public release*:

"ATO is convinced bomb was placed in the entrance way on ground floor. The area is cratered and clearly was the seat of the explosion. Size of bomb likely to be 40-50 lbs Action NOT FOR PR"

—"LOG SHEET HQ NI date 5 DEC 71 Serial 24 From 39 Bde [time] 1110"

Instead it was the R.U.C. press office version that was passed to Times journalist John Chartres, who was a territorial army Colonel and close associate of Hugh Mooney, information adviser to General Tuzo. Chartres wrote a lurid piece for that paper on the 5<sup>th</sup> December, which was repeated on B.B.C. radio.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> December Faulkner rushed to London to meet with the British Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling. Faulkner could not allow the massacre to be blamed on loyalists, as this would undermine the policy of interning Catholics only, dictated by his party and the R.U.C. His administration's assertion that loyalists were "no serious threat" would look ridiculous. Taking into account the enormous rise in violence since internment was introduced the minister would have to conclude it had been a disastrous mistake.

Suspicion was placed on the victims, their character was besmirched, and the British state's two senior representatives in Ireland, Faulkner and Tuzo, were in on it. Technically, Tuzo was Kitson's boss, the R.U.C. worked for Faulkner, and they were all responsible to Maudling, but who was calling the shots?

A Head Quarters Northern Ireland Intelligence Summary (HQNI INTSUM) dated 9<sup>th</sup> December 1971 stated: *"Forensic and EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) reports tend to indicate that the explosion was caused accidentally inside the public house by premature detonation amongst a group which contained an identified IRA victim"*. HQNI INTSUMs were prepared in Lisburn Headquarters by a team under the Director of Intelligence. Evidence from the Bloody Sunday Inquiry reveals this was an MI5 operative holding the equivalent military rank of Major General. The daily business of this department was briefing R.U.C. Special Branch and feeding propaganda to the media, and the army, up the chain to Whitehall. MI5 were prepared to deceive their bosses so they could wage the war in Ireland to their own ends.

"Forensic scientists" were frequently referred to in reports. The Guardian on 24<sup>th</sup> December erroneously claimed they had finished their investigation and: *"They claim to have established that five men were standing round the bomb when it went off inside the crowded bar in North Queen Street. All five were blown to pieces. The scientists have been able to identify one of them as a senior IRA man who was an expert on explosives and was on the government's wanted list. Of all the conflicting theories about the explosion, the security men are now convinced that the bar was a transfer point in the IRA chain between the makers and the planters of the bomb. Something went wrong and the bomb exploded."*

In fact Dr. Robert Alan Hall, the forensic scientist in charge of the case did not report until 11<sup>th</sup> February 1972. He concluded that the findings, including the pathology reports, did not support the theory that a group of men were standing near the bomb. No debris from, or parts of an explosive device were found on any of the victims' clothing. In fact those nearest to the site of the blast had splinter injuries which indicated that furniture, probably a door, was in between them and the bomb when it exploded. Dr. Hall concluded that the explosion "*had occurred at or about the entrance door from the porch leading off Great Georges Street*". The British government were still peddling Chief Superintendent Liggett's fabrications to the Irish Parliament and European Commission in 1976.

On 6<sup>th</sup> December the R.U.C. took a witness statement from 8-year-old Joseph McClory who had been on an evening paper round. He said that a black car with four men in it and "*a wee Union Jack stuck in the back window*" had stopped outside the pub in Great George's Street. One occupant placed a package in the porch and ran back to the car, which drove off at speed. Joseph shouted to a man who was about to enter: "*Mister, don't go into that bar, there's a bomb there*". Two other witnesses confirmed seeing the car, one of which was recorded in an army log:

"A person came up to an NCO with info re explosion was by pub for half an hour, saw large dark car with white patch on left front side, noticed before explosion. Thinks bomb placed in off licence entrance. Informant reckoned bomb was intended for Hanagans<sup>29</sup> (sic) Bar which is on the corner of North Queen St. [Redacted] thinks maybe Brennans Bar junc North Queen St/Frederick St) Informant would not give name and left."

—“LOG SHEET 2 RRF Date 5 DEC 71 [time] 1020 From 959”

The log for the night of the explosion has a missing sheet. On the next one it's possible to read the carbon imprint of "*Serial 52 [time] 2056 From 49 Black car with headlights on went into city centre with 3 [overwritten]*".

In his secret briefing to London Kitson had proposed two alternatives: Integrating and de-militarising the two communities, orienting local politics more on a conventional "left-right" axis than ethnic or religion, with a view to early disengagement and re-unification; or alternatively segregation, with separate police forces and devolved administration, as in Cyprus. Both solutions depended on OIRA and PIRA being quickly defeated militarily and isolated from the Catholic population, which would continue to be heavily spied upon, it would also need the Civil Rights movement to tone down its demands.

This shows extraordinary naivety, his comment that "*both wings of the IRA were also clumsy and indeed much too big for the purpose for which they were designed to fulfill (sic)*" betrays his lack of understanding about where insurrections come from, and anti-oppression politics in general — he had learned nothing. In fact within a year the peace-keeping expert had so aggravated the Catholic community that the government kicked him sideways to run the Infantry School on the mainland.

"6. I have been asked whether I provided input into the formulation of military policy for Northern Ireland as a whole while I was commanding 39 Brigade. Formulating policy was the function of the GOC as Director of Operations and a member of the Joint Security Committee. The GOC exercised command of military forces through the CLF, the three brigade commanders being his subordinates. Obviously in advising the GOC the CLF would take into account the

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<sup>29</sup> The Gem Bar was known locally as Hannigan's.

situation in each of the brigade areas which the CLF would assess in the light of information provided by the relevant brigade commanders. The GOC himself did not hold meetings with the three brigade commanders at which policy for the whole of Northern Ireland was discussed. I was never asked for my views on security policy outside my own brigade area. I knew nothing about the political decisions which governed security policy and very little about the situation elsewhere in the Province.”

—General Sir Frank Edward Kitson:  
Submission to Savile Inquiry 18<sup>th</sup> February 2000

Logs for 39 Brigade initially refer to Kitson’s counter-gang as “Bomb Squad” he appointed Captain Arthur Watchus of 1 PARA at Palace Barracks, Holywood, to run the outfit. Actual bomb disposal reports are credited to “ATO”, indicating that this designation was a cover. These references end in the summer of 1971. Watchus appears towards the end of the year reporting for “MRF”, the first known reference to these initials is in a Brigade log dated 22<sup>nd</sup> October. In June 1972 he hands over to Captain later Brigadier James “Hamish” Alistair McGregor, who with Kitson had been attached to police Special Branch in Aden.

British soldiers, acting with all the resources at the state’s disposal, appeared to be loyalists striking with impunity in nationalist territory, mainly against civilians who were either unconnected with the politics, or on the periphery. This worked to isolate the Republican movement from the population at large by undermining their confidence in its ability to protect them. Lastly, tit-for-tat violence transformed the organisations themselves into singularly unattractive gangster networks, thereby vindicating the state’s narrative.

“The Law should be used as just another weapon in the government’s arsenal, and in this case it becomes little more than propaganda cover for the disposal of unwanted members of the public. For this to happen efficiently, the activities of the legal service have to be tied into the war effort in as discreet a way as possible ...”

—Kitson: ‘Low Intensity Operations’.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1972 shortly after midday, McGregor and Royal Military Police Sergeant Clive Graham Williams opened fire with a Thompson sub-machine gun on a bus terminus on Glen Road, outside St. Oliver Plunkett’s Primary School. Four men were shot and seriously wounded, including one that had been indoors in bed. The two men were arrested, McGregor charged with possession of the Thompson and ammunition, which he claimed “*belongs to the police at Castlereagh and was issued by the Special Branch*”<sup>30</sup> and Williams with attempted murder. The army claimed they were returning fire, but no evidence was ever produced to this effect. Williams was acquitted and charges against McGregor dropped.

The Military Reaction Force received no special training, being drawn from different regiments of the army, and their operations were shambolic. Sometimes the ‘terrorists’ were spotted conversing with uniformed soldiers immediately after a shooting and escorted from the scene. There were near-misses and cases of mistaken identity. On occasions plain-clothes soldiers would come under fire from their colleagues or get arrested by the R.U.C. forcing the army to come up with cock-and-bull explanations of their behaviour. They are highly reminiscent of the motley crew

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<sup>30</sup> Urwin, (*op. cit.*)



of burnt-cork racists Kitson celebrates in his first book. It could be that personnel were selected especially for their fecklessness and amorality, and that their amateurish style was a deliberate attempt to replicate the work of terrorists.

To complete Kitson's *pseudo-gang*:

"Ten proven IRA activists, including one who was a recently demobilised soldier of the Royal Irish Rangers, were arrested and given the choice between long terms of imprisonment or undercover work for the British Army. They opted to join the British. Commanded by a Parachute Regiment captain they were known as the Special Detachment of the MRF (or more colloquially as "Freds"). Their guard were ten volunteers for plainclothes duty from the British Army. The "Freds" lived in one half of a semi-detached married quarters in the heavily-guarded Holywood [palace] Barracks, while their British guard occupied the other half".

—Roger Faligot: 'Britain's Military Strategy in Ireland' 1983.

The Freds were used for screening in republican districts, being driven around in armoured cars to point out suspects. The Four Square laundry dropped its collected linen off at the Lisburn H.Q. for forensic testing before having it cleaned by a genuine laundry. The Gemini massage parlour was a brothel that created opportunities for blackmail, as did the Kincora boys' home, which prostituted orphans to establishment paedophiles from both islands. At that time even consensual homosexuality was banned in Northern Ireland.

"There is of course an element of truth in the idea that an effective domestic intelligence system could be used to jeopardize the freedom of the individual if it fell into the wrong hands, but the danger posed by subversion unchecked by good intelligence is far greater. The right answer in a free country is to have an efficient intelligence organization in the hands of people who are responsible to, and supervised by, the elected government"

—Kitson: (*op. cit.*).

After six months in the palace barracks Séamus Wright "*an IRA informer used by the MRF*"<sup>31</sup> returned hoping to re-join PIRA as a double-agent, he fingered another Fred, Kevin McKee, who revealed the undercover operation at the laundry and massage parlour. Eventually in October 1972 the PIRA Belfast Brigade attacked both sites killing six operatives and subsequently shot the two Freds.

At the end of 1971 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association decided to organise public demonstrations against internment, in defiance of the ban. At Christmas a march from the Falls Rd to Long Kesh prison was foiled by army barricades and ended in a peaceful sit-down protest that included two members of the Westminster parliament. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1972 several marches in West Belfast were hindered by the state forces but regrouped around the barriers and converged on their rally point. The ban was defeated and a huge demonstration was planned for Derry on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

This was the background to the events of Bloody Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972 when the British Army's Parachute Regiment opened fire on civil rights marchers and passers-by in the Bogside,

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<sup>31</sup> National Archives DEFE 24/969.

Information Policy brief with accompanying letter to Lt. Co. F.M.K. Tuck, MoD (MO4), Whitehall, London from Col. G.W. Hutton for GOC, HQ, Northern Ireland, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1973.

killing thirteen civilians. A hasty public inquiry was held at the time, during which soldiers claimed to have come under fire from the Rossville flats and other locations. The character of the victims was again besmirched. This remained the official and media line for nearly forty years, before the truth was prised out of the military by the Savile Inquiry. Savile failed to criticise any of the senior figures however, taking their justifications at face value and putting the blame on the soldiers themselves.

“... we do not criticise General Ford for deciding to deploy soldiers to arrest rioters, though in our view his decision to use 1 PARA as the arrest force is open to criticism, on the ground that 1 PARA was a force with a reputation for using excessive physical violence ...”

—Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry  
Volume I (B.S.I. V1): HMSO

Some young men had been brainwashed to kill without compunction and to regard civilians with contempt — especially Irish ones. Under Kitson in Belfast they had killed several already and developed a culture of impunity.

In quoting from the British state’s second inquiry into the massacre, I’ve removed references to maps and diagrams; you can find the street map easily enough on line.

Robert Ford was commander of land forces — number two in the occupation hierarchy but seems to have made most of the decisions. At the request of Prime Minister (N.I.) Brian Faulkner, he was dispatched by his boss Harry Tuzo to meet with the Strand traders association, loyalist petty bourgeois whose premises bordered on the Bogside. On the 7<sup>th</sup> January he duly arrived in Derry, conferred with assorted senior military and police then met the traders accompanied by the assistant chief constable. The traders wanted “*as a minimum*”<sup>32</sup> the five thousand residents of Rossville flats evicted, plus curfews and “*shooting on sight*”.<sup>33</sup>

“General Ford, in his evidence to this Inquiry, was unable to recall this visit to Londonderry. However, we had available a memorandum which General Ford produced following his visit. The memorandum was addressed to the GOC and was headed “Personal and Confidential”. It was written on or about 10<sup>th</sup> January 1972. In it, General Ford reported to General Tuzo the impression that he had gained of the security situation in Londonderry.”

(*ibid.*)

Robert Ferris had been Secretary of the Strand Road Traders’ Association in 1972, and suffered amnesia as profound as Ford’s and Kitson’s. He couldn’t remember making these demands and Ford couldn’t remember meeting him but notes in Ford’s handwriting came to light referring to the conversation with the words, “*Said this was impossible*”.<sup>34</sup>

The establishment of Free Derry, prompted by the B-Specials’ 1969 atrocity, provided an operational base for republican paramilitaries and teenage rioters. A community under siege, perhaps like Barcelona in the 1920s in which everyone was on the same side. The army was unwilling to enter the Creggan district, according to Ford, with fewer than four or five companies of troops.<sup>35</sup> As confirmed by Martin McGuinness, Adjutant of the Derry Brigade in 1972, the tactic was to extend the no-go area into the shopping district and stretch the state’s resources. Ford’s memo

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<sup>32</sup> (*ibid.*)

<sup>33</sup> (*ibid.*)

<sup>34</sup> (*ibid.*)

<sup>35</sup> (*ibid.*)

offers a lurid description of snipers, bombers and ‘Derry Young Hooligans’ operating in concert “backed and protected by the vast majority of the population”.<sup>36</sup> He proposes:

“I am coming to the conclusion that the minimum force necessary to achieve a restoration of law and order is to shoot selected ring leaders amongst the DYH, after clear warnings have been issued. I believe we would be justified in using 7.62mm but *in view of the devastating effects of this weapon and the danger of rounds killing more than the person aimed at*, I believe we must consider issuing rifles adapted to fire HV .22 inch ammunition to sufficient members of the unit dealing with this problem, to enable ring leaders to be engaged with this less lethal ammunition. Thirty of these weapons have already been sent to 8 Infantry Brigade this weekend for zeroing and familiarization training.”

(*ibid.*)

My italics: The idea of shooting to maim but not kill sounds pretty far-fetched in view of how well they subsequently performed with the highly accurate service rifle.

The army’s rules of engagement were laid out on the Yellow Card issued to each soldier, entitled “*Instructions by the Director of Operations for Opening Fire in Northern Ireland*”, its fourth revision was published in November 1971. The instructions were to use minimum force, to always “*first try to handle the situation by means other than opening fire*”. Weapons were to be carried loaded in the magazine, but with the breach closed on an empty chamber. Live fire was to be preceded by a verbal warning. A round could be chambered only after the first warning, (or on instructions of the commanding officer, with the safety catch on). Only aimed shots were permitted, and no more than necessary to accomplish the task in hand. Paragraph 13 said that a soldier could open fire without warning:

“... either when hostile firing is taking place in your area and a warning is impractical, or when any delay could lead to death or serious injury to people whom it is your duty to protect or to yourself, and then only

(a) against a person using a firearm against members of the security forces or people whom it is your duty to protect,

or

(b) against a person carrying a firearm if you have reason to think he is about to use it for offensive purposes.”

—Army Code No. 70771

The Yellow Card defined grenades, nail and other bombs as ‘firearms’. Notwithstanding all that, Faulkner announced in Stormont in May 1971 that “*any soldier seeing any person with a weapon or seeing any person acting suspiciously may fire either to warn or may fire with effect, depending on the circumstances and without waiting for orders from anyone*”.<sup>37</sup>

The Civil Rights movement got another boost with the opening of a new Internment Camp at Magilligan Strand. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1972 fifteen hundred protesters marched down a private lane and along the beach. They weren’t on the road so the ban didn’t apply. At low tide they were able to pass the barbed wire fence, at which point they were charged by members of the Parachute Regiment with batons and rubber bullets.

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<sup>36</sup> (*ibid.*)

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1971, widely quoted.

There is television footage of soldiers wielding rifles as clubs, kicking civilians on the ground and firing the baton guns into demonstrators' chests at close range. In the fracas, officers of other regiments, and their own N.C.O.s can be seen beating paratroopers with riot sticks to get them to desist. It was a propaganda failure for the regime, the army on the one hand being seen to use extreme violence against unarmed men and women, on the other, completely failing to stop them reaching their objective. The deployment of 'Kitson's private army' as the paratroopers became known, in what was supposed to be the simple enforcement of a public ordinance contradicted the state's narrative and put all the republican communities on a war footing. Several other marches were foiled by the army over that weekend, ending in exchanges of stones for CS and baton rounds.

January the 30<sup>th</sup> in Derry was set to be the return match. The problem for the army was that twelve thousand republicans were going to march out of Creggan and around the Bogside, get at least as far as William Street before they could be stopped, and be seen to have done so by the invited television channels, who would broadcast around the world. Another march would start at Shantallow with the intention of joining the main one at Guildhall.

The state's priority was to placate the loyalist organisations, for whom marching was central to their culture. These had threatened a much bigger march in Belfast the following Saturday. The Joint Security Committee met at Stormont on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1972, the minutes record:

"It is planned to stifle the Shantallow March at source but it would be pointless to attempt the same tactics in the Creggan area. The basic plan here will be to block all routes into William Street and stop the March there. The operation might well develop into rioting and even a shooting war."

—(B.S.I. V1)

In the minutes of a meeting with the Chief of Defence Staff on 24<sup>th</sup> January, Tuzo reported: "15 IRA gunmen have been seen to fall in Londonderry since 1 Jan 72. The interesting thing is that there is always an instant reaction to our patrolling but none to the casualties we inflict by our own sniper fire."

(*ibid.*)

Interesting: in fact none of these casualties ever appeared in the Republican movement's commemorations of their fallen. Evidently a culture of wishful thinking had developed within the army that whenever they fired a shot, it hit a terrorist.

The march organisers sought and received assurances from both OIRA and PIRA that no firearms would be carried on the march. Following representations from nationalist politicians and clergy, PIRA collected up such firearms and explosives as they held in Derry and stashed them in locations known only to the quartermaster and Adjutant. They retained four armed patrol vehicles in Bogside and Creggan, volunteers were forbidden to carry arms on the march, which some attended as stewards.

The army's operation order required each battalion to deploy a still photographer on the containment line to record events — ten in all. Cine film would be shot from a helicopter, and the police were also ordered to take still and moving images throughout. The intention was to provide evidence for prosecution and the arrest operation would be of particular interest. The film stock would be collected up, developed and sent to headquarters for 18:00 hours that day. None of these images were provided to either inquiry and no-one knows what happened to them. Savile declined to draw any conclusions from this. Maybe they're at Hanslope Park.

Thousands of marchers left the Creggan estate and made their way around the nationalist part of the city, heading for a rally at Guildhall Square. The army had erected barriers on William Street to prevent them reaching their advertised destination, and anticipating this would lead to rioting, brought Kitson's paratroopers from Belfast to arrest the 'ringleaders'. At the last moment, the organisers decided that when the march reached the junction of William Street and Rossville Street,<sup>38</sup> it would divert down Rossville Street and have the speeches at Free Derry Corner instead. It would thus remain entirely within Republican territory.

When the rioting commenced, Wilford radioed Brigade Headquarters requesting permission to carry out his arrest operation.

"At about the same time as Colonel Wilford sent this message, two soldiers of Machine Gun Platoon fired between them five shots from the derelict building on William Street, ... Their target was Damien Donaghey (aged 15), who was on the other side of William Street and who was wounded in the thigh. Unknown to the soldiers John Johnston (aged 55), who was a little distance behind Damien Donaghey, was also hit and injured by fragments from this gunfire"

(*ibid.*)

A member of the Official I.R.A. then fired a shot at soldiers which missed and hit a drainpipe. Wilford was given the go-ahead to pass army barrier number 14 to apprehend rioters in William Street, but not to "*conduct a running battle down Rossville Street*".<sup>39</sup>

"Colonel Wilford did not comply with Brigadier's order. He deployed one company through Barrier 14 as he was authorised to do, but in addition and without authority he deployed Support Company in vehicles through Barrier 12 in Little James Street. ... the vehicles travelled along Rossville Street and into the Bogside, where the soldiers disembarked."

(*ibid.*)

Marchers entering the Bogside were in effect withdrawing from the conflict or simply going home. People don't tend to riot on their own territory. The inquiry gives Wilford the benefit of the doubt, but it's possible he was trying to make a point to MacLellan, they didn't have no-go areas in Belfast.

"Many civilians were in the area of the Eden Place waste ground and the car park of the Rossville Flats when the vehicles of Support Company drove into the Bogside. On seeing the Army vehicles these people started to run away. Shortly before it stopped in the car park of the Rossville Flats the vehicle under the command of Sergeant O struck two people, Alana Burke and Thomas Harkin. This was not done deliberately.

Shortly after arriving at the entrance to the alleyway, Lieutenant N fired two rounds from his rifle over the heads of people who were in the alleyway or in Chamberlain Street at the end of the alleyway and soon afterwards fired a third round in the same direction. These people had come from the area around Barrier 14 in William Street. Some of them had been attempting to rescue a man who had been arrested by one of the soldiers with Lieutenant N and some were throwing stones and similar missiles at the soldiers."

(*ibid.*)

The rifles in use by the British army in 1971 were not the modern low-powered assault rifles but chambered for 7.62 NATO (.308 Winchester), a cartridge commonly used in precision competition

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<sup>38</sup> A popular rioting location known locally as "Aggro Corner".

<sup>39</sup> (*ibid.*)

to 1000 yards<sup>40</sup> — at which range it's only just subsonic and capable of carrying a lot further. You hear a sonic boom as the bullet passes you, ahead of the report from the muzzle; in a built up area like the Bogside you get echoes and ricochets as well. Once they started firing it would have sounded like a war zone. In contemporary footage of the incident one soldier can be seen discharging his rifle without aiming or even bringing it to his shoulder.

“Soon after Lieutenant N had fired his shots up the alleyway, soldiers of Mortar Platoon opened fire with their rifles in the area of the car park of the Rossville Flats. In that car park Jackie Duddy (aged 17) was shot and mortally wounded, while Margaret Deery (aged 38), Michael Bridge (aged 25) and Michael Bradley (aged 22) were wounded, all by Army rifle fire. In addition Pius McCarron (aged about 30) and Patrick McDaid (aged 24) suffered injuries from flying debris caused by Army rifle fire. Patrick Brolly (aged 40) was in one of the Rossville Flats and was probably injured by or as the result of Army rifle fire.

A short time after disembarking, and while events were unfolding in the car park of the Rossville Flats, soldiers of Anti-Tank Platoon reached the low walls of a ramp at the southern end of a block of flats named Kells Walk, on the western side of Rossville Street. Soldiers at that ramp then opened fire with their rifles. One of these shots hit and mortally wounded Michael Kelly (aged 17) who was some 80 yards further south behind a rubble barricade that had been erected by civilians across Rossville Street before Bloody Sunday.

Soon after civilians had carried Michael Kelly away from the rubble barricade, soldiers in Rossville Street fired at and mortally wounded five more people at or in the vicinity of that barricade. They were Hugh Gilmour (aged 17), William Nash (aged 19), John Young (aged 17), Michael McDaid (aged 20) and Kevin McElhinney (aged 17). In addition Alexander Nash (aged 52) was hit and injured by Army gunfire after he had gone to the rubble barricade to tend his son William Nash.

In Glenfada Park North were a number of civilians, many fleeing and seeking refuge from the soldiers.

Within a few seconds after arriving, the four soldiers who had gone into Glenfada Park North between them shot and mortally wounded William McKinney (aged 26) and Jim Wray (aged 22); and shot and injured Joe Friel (aged 20), Michael Quinn (aged 17), Joe Mahon (aged 16) and Patrick O'Donnell (aged 41). Jim Wray was shot twice, *the second time probably as he lay mortally wounded on the ground.*”

(*ibid.*)

My italics: Bogside residents stated this many times over the years.

“A civilian, Daniel Gillespie (aged 32), may also have been slightly injured by or as the result of Army rifle fire in Glenfada Park North, but this is far from certain.

One of these soldiers then went from Glenfada Park North to Abbey Park ... In Abbey Park this soldier shot and mortally wounded Gerard McKinney (aged 35). His shot passed through this casualty and also mortally wounded Gerald Donaghey (aged 17).

Soon after the shootings in Rossville Street, Glenfada Park North and Abbey Park, some of the soldiers who had been in Glenfada Park North went to its south-east corner ... From this position and again over a very short period of time there was Army gunfire across Rossville Street. This gunfire hit Bernard McGuigan (aged 41) and Patrick Doherty (aged 32), instantly

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<sup>40</sup> In fact a sport version of this round is the standard chambering for the International ‘Target Rifle’ discipline.

killing the former and mortally wounding the latter. In addition Patrick Campbell (aged 53) and Daniel McGowan (aged 37) were wounded. ...

Although there was later firing by soldiers in Rossville Street, the people shot on the front (southern) side of the Rossville Flats were the last civilians to be shot by the soldiers who had gone into the Bogside.

Only some ten minutes elapsed between the time soldiers moved in vehicles into the Bogside and the time the last of the civilians was shot.

[...] What happened on Bloody Sunday strengthened the Provisional IRA, increased nationalist resentment and hostility towards the Army and exacerbated the violent conflict of the years that followed. ...”

(*ibid.*)

It’s a sobering thought that had the Republicans retained their weapons and actually engaged the Parachute Regiment in the densely-populated Bogside, it would have left a bloodbath with hundreds of civilian casualties.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1972 an hour-long gun battle between uniformed and plain clothes soldiers took place in the New Lodge district of Belfast. Two men were killed, Royal Marine Robert Cutting, and a man in civilian clothes who witnesses claimed spoke with a Belfast accent. The latter’s body was taken away in a Saracen; no civilian in the area was missed that day, and the army reported only the death of Mr Cutting and the wounding of another uniformed Englishman.

The Military Reaction Force having been a public relations disaster, the response of government was to re-group. The new *pseudo-gang* would be more efficient, and three times the size, the S.A.S. would be responsible for training, but its involvement, like every other aspect, would be a secret. It was re-named the Special Reconnaissance Unit, but that was a secret too. Subsequently it became Force Research Unit, then 14<sup>th</sup> Intelligence Company, latterly Special Reconnaissance Regiment. Such murk surrounds the group it’s hard to be sure precisely what terminology the army were using at any given time. Never mind, the tactics remained the same, with soldiers in plain clothes shooting civilians and occasionally falling foul of the local police.

When media interest forced the Ministry of Defence to comment, they — and the media — stuck to the line that the M.R.F. had been a short-lived, experimental outfit with a high degree of operational autonomy that had got out of hand owing to a few ‘loose cannons’, and the project had been abandoned. A familiar story:

- a) “we didn’t do it”
- b) “we don’t do it any more”
- c) “we didn’t know about it”
- d) “we’re investigating it”
- e) “we’ve sacked the person/s responsible”
- f) “it couldn’t happen now”
- g) “etc ...”

However, a briefing to Harold Wilson prior to his meeting with the Taoiseach dated Friday 5<sup>th</sup> April 1974 now de-classified confirms the opposite:

“Plain clothes teams, initially joint RUC/Army patrols, have operated in Northern Ireland since the IRA bombing campaign in Easter 1971.<sup>41</sup> Later in 1971 the teams were reformed and expanded as Military Reaction Forces (MRFs) without RUC participation. In 1972 *the operations of the*

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<sup>41</sup> The ‘Bomb Squad’.

*MRF were brought under more centralised control and a higher standard of training achieved by establishing a Special Reconnaissance Unit (SRU) of 130 all ranks under the direct command of HQNI.*

2. *The term “Special Reconnaissance Unit” and the details of its organisation and mode of operations have been kept secret.* The SRU operates in Northern Ireland at present under the cover name “Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Teams (Northern Ireland)” – NITAT (NI) – ostensibly the equivalent of genuine NITAT teams in UK Land Forces and British Army on the Rhine (BAOR).

3. The prime task of the SRU is to conduct covert surveillance of terrorists as a preliminary to an arrest carried out by security forces in uniform. The SRU may also be used to contact and handle agents or informers and for the surveillance and protection of persons or property under terrorist threat. The SRU works to a great extent on Special Branch information and the Special Branch have a high regard for it.

4. Men who have served with the SAS are serving in the SRU but no SAS units are operating in Northern Ireland. *One officer and 30 soldiers serving with the SRU since early January are due to resume service with 22 SAS by 7 April.* Their presence with the SRU went undetected until the Robert Fisk article in “The Times” on 19<sup>th</sup> March.”

—National Archives PREM16/154

‘Defensive Brief D. Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach 5 April 1974

Army Plain Clothes Patrols in Northern Ireland’.

My italics: The Special Reconnaissance Unit was initially created and operated under close supervision of the British government’s Secretary of State for Defence, Lord Carrington, who was especially keen to involve the S.A.S. but agreed that every attempt would be made to conceal this.

The British army’s Special Air Service, created during World War two originally as a propaganda weapon to strike fear into Italian troops in the African desert, had become a victim of its own success. It was devised as an airborne assault force, practiced in escape and evasion, to be deployed behind enemy lines against high-value military or political targets — in a declared war. The subject of romantic fiction, some written by its former members, and constant media hyperbole, it acquired a ‘cloak and dagger’ reputation in the popular imagination.

Such tactics would appear utterly inappropriate to policing and peace-keeping operations where the stated aim was to apprehend terrorists and prosecute them as civilian miscreants. Nevertheless the experience of forward reconnaissance gained in warfare proved highly applicable to counter-insurgency, so the British state was unable to resist using the S.A.S. in Ireland, but desperate to keep this from the public. In 1976, perhaps because its involvement had become impossible to conceal, politicians took advantage of a spike in sectarian violence to deploy it officially in Armagh, for the usual propaganda effect.

The term ‘special forces’ is in itself a fantastic propaganda device. Governments reserve the right to refuse to comment on their deployment “to protect their identities”, and to keep their numerical strength and operational tactics secret, so can always retrospectively justify any lies. A government need only hint at their use, perhaps by briefing the press that they are on standby, to reassure its supporters that a situation is being taken seriously, and if it’s serious enough to send in the strong-arm team, maybe a few breaches of the rules are to be expected.

Nowadays the designation is entirely arbitrary and can be applied to any unit before or after an operation that doesn’t bear close inspection, and if their identities are protected, we’ll never



know precisely who was and who wasn't, at least until their book comes out. Neither confirm nor deny, no patriot would expect to be told the truth.

All S.A.S. soldiers were volunteers from other regiments, and the army's policy was to return them to their original unit before posting to the S.R.U. There were several detachments with uninteresting-sounding names such as Four Field Survey Troop, Royal Engineers, based at Castledillon, County Armagh and 216 Signals Unit based at Ballykelly. Another unit, of twelve soldiers, was based in Dublin.

"Detailed information on this unit, which is not now deployed in the Province, is no longer available. The role of a Royal Engineer field survey is to provide or process aerial photographs, ground surveys and mapping for the Army as required. The strength of such a unit at that time varied between about 30 and 40, depending upon its specific task, and usually included two officers."

—Roger Freeman, secretary of state for defence.  
HANSARD Written Answers (Commons) DEFENCE  
Royal Engineers Survey Troop, Castledillon  
HC Deb 28 March 1988 vol 130 cc361-2W

"It [the government] must also promote its own cause and undermine that of the enemy by disseminating its view of the situation, and this involves a carefully planned and co-ordinated campaign of what for want of a better word must regrettably be called psychological operations. Finally in some circumstances it may be necessary for the government to try and organize the population along lines similar to those employed by the enemy."

—Kitson: (*op. cit.*)

That was by no means a new idea; during the Swing insurrection, contemporary with the genesis of a 'civil' police force,<sup>42</sup> and prior to its widespread establishment, loyalist workers were recruited as special constables and put among the aggrieved population, supervised by army officers.

"He [the Duke of Richmond] enrolled a constabulary force of shopkeepers, yeomen and "respectable" labourers, organised them in sections and districts under local commanders, and sent them out as mobile units to occupy villages, whether already rebellious or likely to become so. The "Sussex plan" was quickly adopted by Lord Gordon Lennox at Chichester, and it became a model for other counties to follow"

—Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé: 'Captain Swing' 1969.

Since loyalist organisations presented no threat to the status quo they were used as proxy assassins, funded and protected, provided with intelligence and logistics and the criminal justice system manipulated to their advantage. This was an echo of Italy during the insurrections of 1920–21 and Catalunya's '*pistolerismo*' era.

Within weeks of Wilson's visit, on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1974, The Glenanne gang detonated three bombs at Dublin and another at Monahan in the Irish Republic killing thirty-three civilians and an

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<sup>42</sup> The origins and continuity of purpose of which I shall explore in a later chapter.

unborn child. This was the single largest loss of life during the conflict. The escalation of violence on the loyalist side was a desperate attempt to undermine the Labour government's attempts to negotiate a ceasefire. Allegations of collusion follow the theory that MI5 wanted both to discredit the Loyalist leadership, and at the same time encourage the Irish government to take firmer action against republicans. Meanwhile MI6 were in talks with PIRA, still following Kitson's 1971 plan *"that a future political initiative can be launched under favourable circumstances"*.

This took place on the third day of the Ulster Workers' Council strike which ended the power-sharing executive. Working Class loyalists, who enjoyed a privileged position in the shipyards and infrastructure were controlled by a de-facto government of paramilitaries and political demagogues that issued passes and permits for specific activities, while shutting down industry and commerce. The state capitulated, its counter-insurgency strategy having blown up in its face, as it had entirely lost control of its loyalist allies, many of whom favoured a unilateral declaration of independence, while the PIRA shifted its terrorism to the mainland, further undermining its narrative.<sup>43</sup>

At the end of 1974 an uneasy truce was concluded between the Wilson government and PIRA to allow for talks. Compensation was offered to the Bloody Sunday relatives and in return PIRA announced a "Christmas cease-fire". When this expired on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1975 evidence of war-weariness in the nationalist community led the leadership to cut a deal. Attacks on state assets and personnel would cease, the army would desist from house searches, and crucially, incident centres in nationalist area staffed by Sinn Féin members would liaise with the Northern Ireland office to defuse trouble and prevent breaches of the truce.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand this gave British intelligence breathing space to infiltrate the republican paramilitaries, whilst the latter established control of 'policing' in their enclaves. Both ideas had been broached by Kitson in his 1971 briefing. The truce weakened the hand of the Southern "abstentionist" tendency in favour of Northern aspiring politicians such as Gerry Adams. When Adams became Adjutant General in 1978 he established Sinn Féin's Civil Administration as his power base.

Loyalists were not happy with these developments and nor were the senior commanders of the British army who wanted a definitive military victory under their belt. Sectarian violence increased sharply during the ceasefire, especially against Catholics in the border region.

Collusion between Four Field Survey Troop and the Glenanne gang is now well documented but never mentioned by politicians keen to distinguish between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' combatants in the Irish theatre. Between 1972 and 1977 they were responsible for over a hundred and twenty killings, including the Miami Showband murders, the Dundalk bombing of December 1975, and the Castleblayney bombing of March 1976.

Former British soldier and MI6 operative Captain Fred Holroyd gave the following evidence to the Barron inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan Bombings: *"the bombings were part of a pattern of collusion between elements of the security forces in Northern Ireland and loyalist paramilitaries."*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Imagine the wave of sympathy for Irish republicanism had the assassination attempt on Thatcher succeeded.

<sup>44</sup> Loyalists acting on their own remained fair game however, OIRA and INLA did not consider themselves bound by it, and the Provisional Army Council found it difficult to enforce.

<sup>45</sup> Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan Bombings, [Barron report] December 2003, p. 179

Typically, efforts were made by R.U.C. and Gardaí<sup>46</sup> sources to undermine Holroyd's credibility — as was noted by Judge Barron in his report. He was declared 'unfit for duty' and involuntarily spent a month in a mental hospital, from which he received a clean bill of health.

"There is good evidence the Dublin bombings in May last year were a reprisal for the Irish government's role in bringing about the Executive. According to one of Craig's people [Craig Smellie, MI6], some of those involved, the Youngs, the Jacksons, Mulholland, Hanna, Kerr and McConnell were working closely with SB and Int at that time. Craig's people believe the sectarian assassinations were designed to destroy Rees' attempts to negotiate a ceasefire, and the targets were identified for both sides by Int/SB. They also believe some very senior RUC officers were involved with this group. In short, it would appear that loyalist paramilitaries and Int/SB members have formed some sort of pseudo-gangs in an attempt to fight a war of attrition by getting paramilitaries on both sides to kill each other and, at the same time, prevent any future political initiative such as Sunningdale."

—Letter from Colin Wallace, Senior Information Officer  
of the Army Information Service at Lisburn,  
to Tony Stoughton, Chief Information Officer  
dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 1975. Submitted to Barron Enquiry.

Great mystery surrounds the role of Grenadier Guards Captain Robert Nairac, who was abducted and killed by PIRA in May 1977. He is variously described (by the British military) as: "*a member of Four Field Survey Troop*";<sup>47</sup> "*a member of the permanent cadre of SAS Det. [Detachment] NI acting as an SAS LO [Liaison officer]*";<sup>48</sup> "*a liaison officer between RUC Special Branch and the Army, primarily SAS but not a member of SAS*".<sup>49</sup>

On the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1975, five members of the Dublin-based Miami Showband<sup>50</sup> were flagged down by uniformed soldiers at what they presumed to be a routine British army checkpoint. It had in fact been set up by the Ulster Volunteer Force Mid-Ulster Brigade (The Glenanne gang), although its personnel were serving members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. One of them carried a Luger pistol, a weapon that had never been issued to the British army. They were preceded by the equipment van driven by road manager Brian Maguire, who noted a blue Triumph 2000 pulling out from a lay-by and following the second van.

Initially polite, the soldiers asked the occupants to leave the van so it could be searched. They placed a bomb under the front seat, set to explode on or about the border so that like the McGurk's bar incident, the band would be presumed to have been carrying explosives for some strand of the republican movement. A car drew up and another man got out in a different uniform and beret, speaking with an English accent, he appeared to take charge. This development prompted

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<sup>46</sup> Their investigation was widely criticised on both sides of the border.

<sup>47</sup> Fred Holroyd, MI6: letter to The Guardian.

<sup>48</sup> Major A.P.A. Jones: DEFE24/1670, Initial report on the disappearance of Captain Robert Nairac, Grenadier Guards, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1977. National Archives.

<sup>49</sup> J. Dromgoole, Assistant Under Secretary, General Staff: DEFE13/1403, Abduction of Captain Nairac, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1977. National Archives.

<sup>50</sup> The band was of varied heritage from both sides of the border and had no involvement in sectarian politics. The Irish show bands were all-round entertainers, playing a variety of music to diverse audiences. They were popular in poor Catholic communities and especially unpopular with loyalist paramilitaries, because of the ethnic mixing they engendered.

their Protestant trumpeter Brian McCoy, to reassure his friends that the “British army” would deal fairly with them.

Shoddy soldering caused the bomb to explode, killing U.D.R./U.V.F. members Harris Boyle and Wesley Somerville, the remaining terrorists opened fire on the band members, of whom three died. The Luger pistol turned up in an arms cache of another Ulster policeman Edward Sinclair, it had a home-made silencer which bore the fingerprints of former U.D.R. member Robin Jackson who had recently taken over the U.V.F. mid-Ulster Brigade after assassinating its founder, Billy Hanna. Jackson was charged with possession of the silencer and acquitted.

Holroyd had often worked with Four Field Survey Troop, which he understood to be part of the Special Air Service, controlled by MI5, and believed that senior members of those organisations had an interest in discrediting the Wilson Government. Colin Wallace referred to this operation as “Clockwork Orange”. In 1990, the Government admitted that Ministers had “inadvertently misled” Parliament over Wallace’s role and confirmed that he had been involved in disinformation activities on behalf of the security forces and that he had been authorised to supply, on occasions, classified information to journalists. Junior Defence Minister, Archie Hamilton, also confirmed the existence of a project called “Clockwork Orange” but denied that there was any evidence that it involved briefings against elected Irish or British politicians.

As related by British M.P. Ken Livingstone in his maiden speech to the House of Commons, Nairac reported to Holroyd on an operation with the Glenanne gang into the Republic to assassinate PIRA member John Francis Green. Ballistic evidence showed Green had been shot with Sinclair’s Luger.

“It begins to emerge that Captain Robert Nairac is quite likely the person who organised the killing of the three Miami showband musicians. The evidence for that allegation is forensic and members of the UVF are prepared to say that they were members of the UVF gang who actually undertook the murder of the Miami showband musicians. The evidence is quite clear. The same gun that was used by Captain Nairac on his cross-border trip to assassinate John Francis Green was used in the Miami showband massacre.”

—Ken Livingstone M.P. Hansard Parliamentary Debates,  
vol 118, 7 July 1987.

Intelligence leading to Green’s killing had been provided by John Weir, a Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Patrol Group Sergeant. In 1999 he signed an affidavit for Sean McPhilemy, who was being sued for libel; it was published in the Barron Report.

“3. I recall that in 1970 or 1971, while I was serving as a young constable, aged 20, in Strandtown there was an arms amnesty in which members of the public handed in substantial quantities of guns and ammunition of different types. Many of these guns were then given out by RUC officers to local members of a Loyalist paramilitary organization, the Ulster Defence Association, with the knowledge of the senior officers in my station. On one occasion I was ordered by Inspector Don Milligan to remove a number of rifles which had been handed in under the amnesty, and place them in the boot of his car. I do not know where he took them but it was common knowledge among my colleagues that such weapons were being given to Loyalists whom my colleagues supported.”

—John Weir: Affidavit, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1999“

Recruited by police colleagues to Glenanne in 1976 he was well aware what they were up to: “[R.U.C. officers] McClure and Armstrong had explained to me in detail the past activities of their group, so that I would have a proper understanding of the character of the organization I was joining.”

*(ibid)*

Weir identified Jackson and Hanna as perpetrators of the Dublin bombing. Stewart Young, of Portadown U.V.F. had told Weir he led the team that planted the Monaghan car bomb that killed another seven people 90 minutes later. Hanna put Young in charge of the operation, while he went to Dublin. Weir stated that U.D.R. intelligence officer Captain John Irwin had supplied the explosives, and the bombs had been constructed and stored at Mitchell’s farm.

“Although those two bombings were amongst the worst atrocities of the Irish Troubles, those responsible for them were never even questioned by the RUC, even though both the RUC and Army Intelligence knew within days of the bombings the identities of the culprits. Indeed, since Irwin belonged to Army Intelligence it is possible that both Army Intelligence and the RUC were aware of the impending bomb attacks before they took place.”

*(ibid)*

Weir named other colleagues as perpetrators of several actions between 1974 and 1976 for which no one was ever charged. A bomb and gun attack on two pubs in Crossmaglen, carried out by Laurence McClure and Robert McConnell, with the getaway car provided by James Mitchell and his housekeeper Lily Shields. A local man, Thomas McNamee, died from his injuries a year later. The murder of two Gaelic football supporters at Tullyvallen, by McClure, McConnell and others. A gun and bomb attack on Donnelly’s bar in Silverbridge, in which Mr. Donnelly’s 14 year old son was shot dead; Weir named officers Young, McCoo, Silcock, McConnell, the car provided by McClure and Shields. The same night Jackson planted a bomb in Dundalk, killing two men. After another meeting at Mitchell’s farmhouse, Young, McCoo and Armstrong bombed a Catholic pub in Keady, South Armagh, killing a man and a woman.

Weir had been told Nairac was present when Green was shot.

“The men who did that shooting were Robert McConnell, Robin Jackson, and I would be almost certain, Harris Boyle who was killed in the Miami attack. What I am absolutely certain of is that Robert McConnell, Robert McConnell knew that area really, really well. Robin Jackson was with him. I was later told that Nairac was with them. I was told by...a UVF man, he was very close to Jackson and operated with him. Jackson told [him] that Nairac was with them.”

—[John Weir: Quoted in] The Barron Report 2003, p. 206.

On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1976 in County Armagh, three brothers of the Reavey family were shot by the Glenanne gang; they had no involvement with the conflict. Constable William McCaughey admitted taking part, and Weir named three other policemen: McConnell, McClure, Johnny Mitchell and one of McClure’s brothers, a civilian. The same night Jackson, accompanied by a British soldier and another man<sup>51</sup> shot four members of the O’Dowd family who belonged to the Social Democratic and Labour Party, one survived.

The retaliation of South Armagh’s Republicans was equally senseless and fascistic. Eleven textile workers travelling home in a minibus from Glenanne to Bessbrook were shot dead the following day. The victims were selected solely for their Protestant heritage, the only Catholic

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<sup>51</sup> Weir: *(op.cit)*

was released. Four were members of the Orange Order, Kenneth Worton was a former soldier of the Ulster Defence Regiment while Joseph Lemmon had been an Ulster Special Constabulary officer. Again, one of the gunmen spoke with a clear English accent — was this Nairac? One of the first police officers on the scene was William McCaughey. The army's propaganda unit laid suspicion on the Reavey family, who suffered much harassment as a result, the accusation later being taken up by the preposterous Ian Paisley M.P. in the British parliament.

The Kingsmill massacre gave the Wilson government its excuse to drop the pretence and officially deploy the Special Air Service. It declared County Armagh a "Special Emergency Area" and swamped it with extra troops and police including the rapid-response "Spearhead Battalion". Although already involved in terrorism, the attitude of Weir, McCaughey and their ilk hardened towards their Catholic neighbours.

The bomb and firearm attack on The Rock Bar in County Armagh was mounted exclusively by serving policemen, in a police car, at least one of whom was on duty. McCaughey was charged with eighteen attempted murders but only convicted for shooting and injuring Michael McGrath, miraculously the sole casualty. The same weapons were used in sixteen murders including the Reavey brothers, Denis Mullen, Peter and Jane McKearney, Trevor Brecknell, Patsy and Michael Donnelly, Fred McLoughlin and Patsy McNeice. None of the six fatal attacks in which these occurred were investigated as a result of this evidence. Charges of attempted murder against five other police officers were also dropped. McGrath was never called as a witness and only heard of the trial after it had ended.

Weir supplied arms to Glenanne from a group called Down Orange Welfare which manufactured knock-off Sterling sub-machine guns. It was almost entirely composed of serving or ex-soldiers and policemen led by retired Lt. Colonel Edward Brush. Weir's boss, Chief Inspector (later Chief Superintendent) Harry Breen was also a member.

PIRA denied responsibility for Kingsmill, however ballistics linked some of the firearms to the South Armagh Brigade; ironically one was later used to kill Harry Breen. At the preliminary hearing of a new inquest in 2014, sole survivor Alan Black who had been shot eighteen times, claimed South Armagh PIRA harboured double agents working for the British state. On 25<sup>th</sup> June 1976 British paratroopers opened fire on four of them on the Newry-Newtownhamilton Road. Three were captured along with a couple of firearms that had been used in the Kingsmill shootings, another escaped after being shot in the leg, arm and chest and was taken across the border. A Royal Military Police document dated 19<sup>th</sup> August reveals that both the R.U.C. and British army knew he was being treated at Louth hospital but failed to contact Gardaí to have him arrested.

Esther McConville, whose son John was one of the dead, subsequently worked in the kitchen at Bessbrook army barracks. Belfast Coroner's Court heard that a few years after the event an officer told her they were ordered not to patrol on the day of the killings. However, a senior officer with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Ulster Scots, referred to as MOD 2 (who had to sit behind a screen) said *"I can categorically say this is not the case."* [...] *"I am not aware of any areas out of bounds."* We know this isn't true, in view of the 'temporary operational out of bounds order' in force at the time of the McGurk's bar bombing.

Alibis have been offered for Nairac regarding all sightings and soundings of the 'mysterious Englishman' nevertheless he was at the centre of this web of intrigue. One of Weir's informers, the haulier Packy Reel, also worked for Nairac. Weir claims that Nairac used Reel's house to move explosives across the border for the I.R.A. Raised a Catholic, Nairac was driven around

South Armagh pubs by a future British M.P. Patrick Mercer, posing as a mechanic and OIRA member called Danny McErlaine, “pretending to be” drunk and singing republican songs. It’s likely this posturing as a ‘cartoon Irishman’ that got him killed. In 1977 Nairac was abducted from The Three Steps in County Armagh, beaten and interrogated but refused to reveal his identity. Nairac’s last words according to Terry McCormick, one of his abductors who impersonated a priest in the hope of eliciting a confession, were: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned”.

“A Republican informant, the late Packy Reel, from Dorsey, South Armagh told me he had been aware the role Nairac had played in infiltrating both Republican and Loyalist terrorist groups, the IRA and the UVF. He told me that Nairac had supplied explosives to the IRA and I knew from my Loyalist contacts in Portadown that Nairac was involved with Robin Jackson. Reel told me that Nairac had informed him and, therefore, the IRA that police and security forces were responsible for the attack on Donnelly’s Bar and that he (Nairac) had given Reel the names of those responsible. Reel also told me that the IRA, after learning this information had killed UDR soldier Robert McConnell. Reel explained that the IRA had, for a time, believed Nairac to be sympathetic to their cause, which was the reason he had been allowed to participate in IRA meetings; but that Nairac’s cover had been blown when he was recognised at the Army shooting of IRA activist Peter Cleary in South Armagh.”

*(ibid)*

Nairac “*was briefed at SAS HQ, Bessbrook at 2135 hours and departed at 2158 hours.*”<sup>52</sup>

He got a posthumous George Cross but the Special Air Service disowned him:

“Had he been an SAS member, he would not have been allowed to operate in the way he did. Before his death, we had been very concerned at the lack of checks on his activities. No one seemed to know who his boss was, and he appeared to have been allowed to get out of control, deciding himself what tasks he would do.”

—Ken Connor: ‘Ghost Force the Secret History of the SAS’.  
Cassell Military 1998.

Another loose cannon then — where do they find them all?

Connor ought to know; he served in the Special Air Service from 1963 to 1986, he discloses that he was one of a three-man assessment team sent to evaluate the Military Reaction Force in the aftermath of the Four Square Laundry shootings.<sup>53</sup> The result was Special Reconnaissance Unit / Force Research Unit / 14<sup>th</sup> Intelligence Company / Four Field Survey Troop, or what-have-you.

Having declined Jackson and McCaughey’s proposal to kill a Catholic RUC Sergeant, Weir agreed to participate in an operation against an unknown target. His role was to pick up McCaughey from his house to bring a ‘clean’ pistol he had stolen from Lurgan police station. He then drove McCaughey, Jackson and Robert Kerr to and from the scene. McCaughey and Weir were eventually convicted of the murder of William Strathearn, a Catholic pharmacist, erroneously believed to be a member of PIRA. Weir claimed Strathearn was shot on his doorstep by Jackson and Kerr, while they waited in the car.<sup>54</sup> Both Weir and Holroyd believed that Jackson was a

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<sup>52</sup> Major A.P.A. Jones, *(op.cit)*

<sup>53</sup> *(ibid)*

<sup>54</sup> The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland, by Sean McPhilemy. Roberts Rinehart, 1998, p. 308.

Special Branch agent controlled by Nairac, which made him “untouchable”. Neither he nor Kerr were ever interviewed regarding Strathearn.

Weir and McCaughey are both on record that the Glenanne gang discussed an attack on the St Lawrence O’Toole primary school in Belleeks to kill thirty or so ‘Catholic’ children and their teacher. The plan was vetoed by the U.V.F. Brigade Staff<sup>55</sup> in Belfast, who suspected that the U.D.R. Colonel that suggested the attack had been put up to it by MI5 who were trying to provoke an all-out civil war. In fact the cessation of sectarian violence in the region seems to have been the result of a local truce between loyalist and republican elements not working for the state.

Weir maintains he had the tacit approval of his seniors, naming Chief Inspectors Harry Breen and Brian Fitzsimmons and Assistant Chief Constable Charlie Rodgers. However none of these people ever got their own hands dirty and having been posted hither and thither for his own safety, he began to feel he had bitten off more than he could chew. An informant told him that McConnell had been set up for assassination by Nairac, and that he might be next. He therefore turned down a suspicious request to plant weapons on a suspect and to perform a cross-border attack.

“34. During my time in Newtownhamilton I became increasingly aware that there was an internal struggle within the security forces over the best way to fight the IRA and that there was fierce rivalry between Army Intelligence and RUC Special Branch. I did my best to sidestep this rivalry but I found myself pulled in different directions by both sides. For example, I recall one occasion when I returned to my office in Newtownhamilton to find two Englishmen, who introduced themselves as belonging to the Special Air Services (SAS) waiting for me. They indicated that they knew about my past and admired my skills in fighting the IRA but the main purpose of their visit was to warn me not to trust RUC Special Branch. In contrast, I remember receiving similar advice from RUC Special Branch about the danger of getting too involved with Army Intelligence. I recall that I was approached by a Major Robertson of the Royal Green Jackets and asked to use my connections with Loyalist paramilitaries to have an IRA family, the Murphys, murdered. After discussing the matter with RUC Special Branch officers Begley and Hamilton I choose to not get involved. I decided at this point in my career that I would no longer participate in any Loyalist activity directed against either the IRA or the general Catholic population, even if I was encouraged to do so by one or other faction within the security forces.”

*(ibid)*

In February 1980 a Catholic civilian, Brendan McLaughlin was shot dead with a Sterling sub-machine gun that had been used against the Miami Showband, Gertie and Jim Devlin, and the O’Dowd family. This was the only murder attributed to the Glenanne Gang after the death of Nairac.

Two Freds run by the S.R.U., Vincent Heatherington and Myles McGrogan, were remanded to Crumlin Road prison charged with the murder of policemen. On arrival at A-wing they were interviewed by the PIRA commander Brendan Hughes, who quickly established they were not members and had no involvement with the shootings. Heatherington at first claimed they had been fitted up and had requested to be accepted to A-wing because they feared loyalist reprisals. He subsequently ‘confessed’ that he had been sent by British intelligence to poison Hughes and two others and offered to name his co-conspirators. Heatherington identified a number of republicans and others as British agents — who almost certainly weren’t. He even fingered a U.D.A.

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<sup>55</sup> Their equivalent of the Army Council.



member as such knowing the story would find its way across the prison. All these people were subsequently shot, as were Heatherington and McGrogan.

For more than ten years, the PIRAs internal security department, set up to root out spooks and informers, was itself run by an agent of the British Force Research Unit, successor to the S.R.U. During this period Freddie Scappaticci, who they referred to as agent 6126 or 'Stakeknife' was able to kill republicans and non-combatants with impunity, and also ran Sinn Féin's Civil Administration on behalf of Gerry Adams, dispensing summary punishments to troublesome Belfast residents. He had joined PIRA after being interned during Kitson's time, and switched sides to escape prosecution for tax fraud.

During Scap's brutal interrogation of the British spy Sandy Lynch, Sinn Féin's publicity director Danny Morrison, widely believed to be a member of PIRA Army Council, was lured into a police trap. He was convicted with others of false imprisonment and conspiracy to murder Lynch. Thirteen years later, when journalist Greg Harkin outed Scappaticci, his conviction was overturned on appeal, together with charges faced by his fellow defendants. Morrison claimed the convictions collapsed because of the role of security forces in his arrest. The prosecution petitioned against an open judgment explaining the reasons for the court's decision, based on files it did not want disclosed.

By the time it became obvious to everyone that Scap was a double agent, the leading lights of Sinn Féin were engaged in the political settlement, being wined and dined by the likes of Bill Clinton having supposedly fought the British state to an honourable draw. He simply called their bluff, by pointing out that unmasking him would make them look stupid, and escaped with his life. Arguably one of the factors that brought them to the table was the realisation that their war of independence had turned into a proxy war between different wings of the British Secret Service. In December 2005, Sinn Féin stalwart and former volunteer Denis Donaldson confessed to having worked for MI5 and Special Branch since the early 1980s.

The story would not be complete without mention of the August 1998 Omagh bomb that killed twenty-nine people, one of whom was pregnant with twins. Ex-PIRA quartermaster Michael McKevitt and a few associates had split to form the Real I.R.A. (RIRA) in opposition to the Belfast Good Friday agreement, signed four months earlier. Their attempt to frustrate this deal backfired spectacularly to the extent of getting Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley into the same church together. Unsurprisingly there are allegations of collusion; the atrocity did the British state no harm whatsoever. The 'dissident Republicans' had hit their own constituency, most of the dead being of Catholic heritage, including eleven children, three of whom were from Donegal, and two Spanish students who had been staying there. RIRA were forced into ceasefire by threats from their erstwhile comrades.

RIRA, like its parent, was heavily infiltrated by British Military Intelligence. Former Irish Ranger Peter Keeley, known as Kevin Fulton was recruited by Force Research Unit and sent to join PIRA as a Fred. Keeley was involved in a number of killings in the 1980s but escaped prosecution; his ex-wife sued both Scappaticci and the Chief Constable for wrongful arrest and false imprisonment after being held for four days at Castlereagh detention centre in 1994 then handed over to 'Stakeknife'.

Keeley passed intelligence to the R.U.C. in the 1990s, and in July/August 1998 prior to the Omagh bombing, had several meetings with a senior RIRA member, possibly Patrick Blair, in

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<sup>56</sup> Fertiliser bombs require passing the material through a coffee grinder, or similar, to break it up.

Dundalk who told him: *"There's something big on"*. On each occasion the man was covered in fertiliser dust,<sup>56</sup> *"he had definitely been making a bomb"* Keeley informed his R.U.C. handler and understood that his report was put into the computer system. Several anonymous phone calls to Omagh police station in the preceding weeks warned of a likely attack.

American police informer David Rupert raised funds for PIRA in the U.S.A. In 1994, he came to the attention of the Irish Gardaí, who contacted the Federal Bureau of Investigation with a view to recruiting him as a spy. From February 1997, Rupert was formally employed by the F.B.I. on a salary of \$2,500 per month plus expenses, handled by agent Patrick Buckley. Rupert also became a paid informant of MI5; his evidence was used in the trial of Michael McKevitt. Buckley introduced Rupert to Detective Chief Superintendent Dermot Jennings of the Gardaí Crime and Security Branch, who worked with both MI5 and R.U.C. Special Branch. On 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998 David Rupert sent an e-mail to MI5 to the effect that RIRA was planning a car bomb attack in either Derry or Omagh.<sup>57</sup>

The red Vauxhaull Cavalier that carried the bomb was stolen to order by a Gardaí informer, Paddy Dixon, who reported to Detective Sergeant John White that a major bomb run into the North was imminent. On the day of the explosion, the car with the bomb was bugged and the UK Government Communications Headquarters (G.C.H.Q.) was monitoring the mobile phone conversations of the bombers as they crossed the border. John White understood that Dermot Jennings had decided *"I think we will let this one go through"* (across the border) rather than blow the cover of the informants.<sup>58</sup>

The only conviction in relation to this incident was Colm Murphy who was later retried and acquitted when it was found that Detectives Liam Donnelly and John Fahy had falsified records and committed perjury.

Mainstream republicanism followed the familiar course from mass movement to revolutionary vanguard to parliamentary participation. Sinn Féin became just another neoliberal bourgeois party. Martin McGuinness progressed from street hooligan to statesman, trading wisecracks with the odious Ian Paisley. The two of them clearly couldn't believe their luck, sitting in government having spent their lives fucking it up for everyone else. Leading Republican figures such as Thomas 'Slab' Murphy, former PIRA Chief of Staff, amassed vast personal fortunes from smuggling, tax fraud, diesel and money laundering, while OIRA Adjutant-General and K.G.B. confidante Seán Garland imported counterfeit hundred-dollar bills from North Korea. In 2014 the Belfast Telegraph reported that RIRA had entered the Forbes richest terrorists' list at number nine with an annual income of thirty-two million pounds Sterling.

Some loyalist paramilitaries have expressed bitterness at having killed faithful comrades on false intelligence emanating from the Information Policy Unit. There are also accusations that members of the Gardaí colluded with republican gangs.<sup>59</sup> I have to say I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

How to balance the testimony of self-confessed gangsters with that of state agents who are paid to lie? What is beyond dispute is that the bosses on all sides were playing a silly game in which Irish civilians, and their own personnel, were the pawns.

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<sup>57</sup> Rights Watch U.K. REPORT INTO THE OMAGH BOMBING, 15 AUGUST 1998.

<sup>58</sup> (*ibid.*)

<sup>59</sup> Peter Keeley / Kevin Fulton gave evidence in this regard to the Smithwick tribunal into the shooting of Harry Breen.

## 27. Extremism.

I find it hard to imagine anything more extreme than liberal democracy, which brought us the atomic bomb, global warming and universal surveillance amongst other things. I suppose it's the fraudulent moral justifications offered for contravening every principle of humanity that make this position especially untenable.

Throughout my formative years, the guardians of the 'free world' were actively plotting the destruction of half the human race in defence of their alleged moral superiority. In the 1970s and 80s, support for unilateral nuclear disarmament was widely regarded as a crank position, implying that a majority were morally and intellectually able to justify the mass extermination of civilians.

It took barely two decades for the self-serving nonentities that ruled this earth to equip it with a self-destruct mechanism, which we remain saddled with to this day. Having thought better of it, the present incumbents now fear it falling into the wrong hands, and cast themselves as the responsible adults.

I've always maintained that if I were the last person left alive on this island, I would have no appetite for exterminating millions of total strangers out of revenge. It turns out, as revealed years later,<sup>1</sup> that Dennis Healey, who as deputy Prime Minister might be responsible for the conduct of mutually assured destruction, had privately come to the same view, and resolved never to fire such a weapon. Healey was a middle of the road social democrat, no pacifist and no stranger to violence; he'd been the Military Landing Officer to the British assault brigade at Anzio. His refusal would have been an act of treason in time of war, pure individual defiance informed by conscience; it seems there's an anarchist in all of us somewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> B.B.C. interview 1988, sorry I can't be more precise, but widely quoted.

## 28. Surveillance and compliance.

*Owing to the pace of technological development this chapter is inevitably a snapshot of an ever-evolving theme. It was written at the end of 2013 and will probably be out of date by the time you read it — Mal C.*

“If you have nothing to hide you have nothing to fear”

—Another of the state’s fat lies.

Imagine for a moment the state has placed a camera in your bedroom, to protect the vulnerable and ensure all your sexual activity is consensual, seem fair enough? Have fun. Even if you belong to the special interest group that enjoys showing off I guarantee your behaviour will be modified in some way when every tender moment is scrutinised by a panel of bureaucrats. The mere fact of observation alters behaviour in self-aware beings, as if, like quantum particles we are in each instant only partially decided on which way to go, and simultaneously interacting with other self-aware beings.

Most humans value their privacy and that of others; a common symptom of mental illness is the feeling of being watched or listened in on. Many people feel uncomfortable realising they have just interrupted a private conversation or witnessed an act of intimacy. In my lifetime the idea of a camera on every street corner has gone from paranoid fantasy to *fait accompli*. Tony Benn once described his telephone as his “last remaining link with the establishment”, we don’t trust our governments and they don’t trust us, yet the idea of giving them even more power is seriously discussed, have we just given up?

“Even though there were all of these tweedy guys with pipes, I still thought the essence of the cold war and spies and stuff was fun. You know, going around listening to people’s telephones and opening their mail and stuff.”

—Stella Rimington, director general of MI5, to the Guardian, 2001.

The digital age has created (insert superlative) new opportunities for dissemination of information and opinion, independent media, and free association unlimited by geography, it has also created unprecedented potential for surveillance. As I write we are only just getting used to the idea that the US government and its allies have devoted vast resources to the automated monitoring of telecommunications. We are in the midst of controversy as to whether Edward Snowden

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<sup>1</sup> Since I wrote the foregoing paragraphs, it was revealed early in 2014 that the British government’s spy agency G.C.H.Q. used a surveillance programme called ‘Optic Nerve’ to indiscriminately monitor webcams. In a six-month period of 2008 1.8 million users of the internet provider Yahoo were spied upon, the company claimed to know nothing about it. The software gathered one still image every five minutes to be used for facial recognition experiments, looking for images that resembled intelligence targets; the metadata was also harvested. According to Snowden’s leaks, the spooks were surprised to find much of the content was sexually explicit, it turns out a large proportion of folk who use this technology are using it to show each other their private parts — well who would have thought it?

had any right to reveal the secret that the National Security Agency knows all our secrets! Further revelations are anticipated,<sup>1</sup> the state is peering into every aspect of our lives and we don't know the half of it yet.

The purpose of surveillance is not to detect or prevent crime but to modify and normalise behaviour, most of all to inhibit rebellion. Totalitarian states have traditionally stifled dissent by creating a climate of paranoia through networks of informers. Enemies of the people are everywhere and everyone is a suspect, placing the burden of proof on the citizen to demonstrate her loyalty to the regime. Questioning the existence of these enemies or the need for such measures of itself attracts suspicion, so the citizens are induced to spy on each other. Whether the penalty for dissent is death or incarceration, as in North Korea, or only financial ruin and social ostracism, as in 1950s middle-class America, there is never any shortage of people desperate to be on the winning side. The effect is to create a hegemonic narrative in which the true enemies of the people are embraced as guardians of freedom.

Surveillance in the workplace has become common especially with the expansion of the service sector, largely non-productive and pointless activity where there is no objective measure of efficiency. What is being sold is often not a product at all but a corporate brand 'image'. Surveillance, performance metrics and other such crap enforce the requirement for the worker to conform to this image, as she is, herself, the commodity.

Even within the manufacturing sector a supervisory layer has arisen whose only function is to monitor the behaviour of other workers. These people's daily struggle to justify their existence is quite entertaining to watch. They slow production and seem at first sight an expensive overhead, but their main purpose is to disrupt the cohesion of the productive workforce whose labour is being acquired at a pittance anyway.

Amongst the producers themselves, at the end of every row is a 'leading hand' or 'supervisor' with a little pointless paperwork to fill in. One day when a colleague's name came up I heard: "but she's management now!" No she isn't, she's been promoted to team leader or something; it means fuck all. You could hardly expect her to turn down another 30p an hour but no one confides in her any more. We've got 25 year-olds on just above minimum wage with crimpelene suits and plastic ties who think they're middle class. They will also be the most put-upon; alongside policing their colleagues their 'responsibilities' will often include unpaid overtime and standing in for real management in its absence. Petty workplace hierarchies have the dual use-value of destroying solidarity and creating, in its place, an illusion of social mobility.

Young people are exhorted, without a trace of irony, to go out and sell themselves; this is further illuminated by the ubiquity of the grotesque expression 'human resources' to describe the management of personnel. Here again the burden of proof is on the worker to demonstrate her loyalty to the firm, if you are lucky enough to get a full-time contract your terms of employment will make you responsible for reporting breaches of company policy by others. We hear of workers offered bonuses to have the company logo tattooed on their body, and of interviewees at an electrical goods retailer being asked to 'dance', others were expected to divulge passwords to social media, only the most malleable resources will be purchased. The loaded question, "Why do you want to work for us?" requires that you endorse the ideology of capitalism before it will agree to feed you.

## 29. Police and Law enforcement.

The police are natural enemies of the Working Class; there will be no place for such an institution in a free society. I make this observation not as an anarchist troublemaker but based on an analysis of what law enforcement amounts to, who commissions and directs it, how it is organised and what it is intended to achieve. Let's return to the history books.

Anglo-Saxon communities were bound and protected by the concept of frankpledge (frithborh) or collective accountability, based on the administrative unit of tithing, a voluntary association of ten households, grouped in turn into hundreds, then into shires. Members of the tithing swore to be responsible for each other's good conduct and to present for examination any of their number accused of an offence, or stand surety for him. On witnessing a crime, each was obliged to raise hue and cry and all were to assist in the pursuit and apprehension of the offender. Mutual responsibility to keep the peace was ultimately underwritten by the hundred's land holding; the arrangement became compulsory under the Danelaw of Canute II. After the Norman Conquest all property was held in feudal title for the monarch; so as serfs could not offer surety, the lords became responsible for justice on their Manors, administered by constables and sheriffs (shire-reeves) backed by the legal authority of the crown.

During the period of the great expropriation, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward, as the means of subsistence were progressively filched and feudal support arrangements removed, the newly landless were apt to roam around in search of the best wages, or commons and wastelands where they could live for free. Then as now, a lack of enthusiasm for waged labour was regarded as a sign of depravity, and choosing one's master weakened the power relation. A cat and mouse game ensued; a succession of Poor Laws was devised to prevent the new free proletariat from moving about and maximising the return for their efforts. 'Rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars' could be forcibly expelled, flogged, or compelled to work at the local rate. Henceforth, poverty created by the state would be an offence punishable by the state.

From 1601 Poor relief was the responsibility of the parish, administered by churchwardens and justices of the peace; with the church lands privatised, a poor rate had to be raised from property owners, who were also the landlords, employers and justices. The 1662 Settlement Act, which applied to anyone paying less than £10 per year in rent or property tax, only permitted travel if the settled parish issued a certificate agreeing to pay the cost of removal in the event of the labourer becoming eligible for poor relief. Now the bosses had control of migration, which allowed them to safely lower wages, or move the workforce around to suit themselves.

The Game Laws put an end to the "*great mischief*" by which "*inferior tradesmen, apprentices, and other dissolute persons neglect their trades and employments*" to supplement their diet by hunting and fishing. In the years 1739 to 1745 a spell of freak cold weather stalled industry and caused crop failure across Europe, killing about thirty-eight percent of the population of Ireland. In 1741, the government responded to the economic recession by making sheep theft a specific capital offence. Crucially the death penalty gave judges discretion to commute to transportation,

so that surplus rural labourers who fell into this poverty trap could be condemned to slavery in the colonies.

“Legal constraint to labour is attended with too much trouble, violence, and noise, creates ill will etc., whereas hunger is not only a peaceable, silent, unremitted pressure, but, as the most natural motive to industry and labour, it calls forth the most powerful exertions ...”

—Rev. J. Townsend: ‘A Dissertation on the Poor Laws,  
By a Well-Wisher to Mankind.’

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the industrial revolution was spreading into agriculture and threshing machines abolished a quarter of the work in a few decades. Land enclosures proletarianised the peasantry and stole the commons, resources that had supported them since prehistory. The ruling class wanted to have their cake and eat it, to create a ‘free market’ for agricultural labour whilst retaining the rigid social hierarchies inherited from feudalism and preventing economic migration. The Speenhamland system of poor relief, adopted in the 1790s, subsidised poverty wages from the parish rates according to family size and the price of bread.

Relief was tied to the parish of birth and set by the local magistrates. Paupers were obliged to take such work as was offered, and vagrancy laws stopped them crossing parish lines to look for better pay or the dwindling common land where they might live for free — “*every man must have a master*”. Landowners were thus guaranteed a captive pool of cheap labour to use as they saw fit, and to this indignity was added the further degradation of dependence on charity in return for servile conduct.

Steady employment gave way to hire by the day, or the hour, wages fell, and the bread ration was cut. There are tales of paupers being auctioned and harnessed to carts with bells around their necks. Tithes, rents and taxes rose, the bosses amassed great fortunes and ratepayers complained about the cost of poor relief. These included small farmers who didn’t like it either, when one laid off their hands, others would do likewise: “*if I must pay his men, he shall pay mine*”.

Prompted by the French Revolution and threats of invasion, yeomen cavalry were raised, low-grade gentry who were given a uniform, a horse and free grog then turned loose on the Working Class, as in the Peterloo massacre of 1819.<sup>1</sup>

On 25<sup>th</sup> November 1830, at the height of the Captain Swing uprising, labourer John Hardy was killed in action against yeomanry near his home at Tisbury in Wiltshire. Four hundred quarrymen and agricultural labourers had confronted the landowner and local M.P. John Benett at Pyt House to demand two shillings per day, the quarrymen were at that time on three and a half pence. Instead Benett read a royal proclamation against riot, then offered five hundred pounds to any worker who would inform on ten others.

The workers were unmoved and destroyed Benett’s threshing machines. They were engaged in woodland by a troop of yeoman cavalry that had pursued them from nearby Hindon. A pitched battle ensued as the workers fought back with hatchets, pickaxes, hammers, sticks and stones, knocking Benett unconscious. All day, running battles were fought across the Vale of Wylfe

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<sup>1</sup> That same year, the government of South Carolina established mandatory slave patrols, a form of yeomanry. Since 1671 there had been slave patrols that brought back runaway African-Americans to be tortured and killed. Prompted by two attempted insurrections, the new law compelled all white, adult males to serve in the patrols, so that the whole of white society was deputised into the subjugation of the majority (in the Carolinas) African-American population. Patrols were given carte blanche to enter dwellings, detain slaves and dispense summary justice.

and barricades erected on the Warminster road. Hardy was shot dead and twenty-nine others captured. At Benett's insistence the cavalry denied the injured prisoners water on the journey to Fisherton Gaol. A witness wrote: *"the blood did trickle out of the wagons the whole way to Salisbury ..."*

Captain Swing didn't start as an insurrection against the status quo but was the response of necessity after a series of bad harvests threatened the rural proletariat with starvation. Just as modern unrest is often not specifically anti-capitalist but motivated by a sense of unfairness and injustice, they aspired to no more than providing for their families as in former times. *"We don't want any mischief, but we want that poor children when they go to bed should have a belly full of tatoes"* Labourers initially trusted their masters would do right by them if reminded of their obligations: *"ye have not done as ye ought"* — sound familiar? The logic of Swing was simple and infallible: they had been raised to understand they must work to live, they must earn wages or starve as undeserving paupers, therefore they would break the machines that took their work and demand a wage for doing so. The going rate was about forty shillings per machine. The gentry and clergy that lived so well at their expense could provide them with food and beer as they worked — or else.

Meanwhile in the cities radicals agitated for political reform and the Duke of Wellington's Tory government dug its heels in. Dissenters and ranters went around the country preaching everything from the second coming to full communism. There were revolutions on the continent and Kent villages flew tricolours or pirate flags as symbols of rebellion. A demonstration was called for the 9<sup>th</sup> November at the Guildhall to disrupt the inauguration of the Lord Mayor, to be attended by Wellington and the King. The authorities decided to cancel the day before.

Moving Westward from Kent Swing became a mass movement. The workers were joined by poachers and smugglers, formed alliances across parish and county borders abetted by agitators on horseback. Swing entered Wiltshire and Dorset from Hampshire, then on to Gloucestershire, and touched the industrial midlands where King Ludd reigned twenty years earlier; it reached Cornwall, Norfolk, Hereford and Carlisle. Jails were opened and prisoners released. Magistrates informed the Home Office that two-thirds of the rural population were involved in machine-breaking.

By the end of the year it had brought down Wellington's government. It also achieved a general increase in wages and lowering of tithes and rents. Many farmers sympathised and voluntarily acceded to the workers' demands if their neighbours would follow suit, refusing to be sworn in as yeomen or constables, and were invited to join in and take back their taxes. The mechanisation of agriculture was delayed, but that was never the root cause of the misery. The problem wasn't the machine, but its use to produce wealth for the owner rather than food for the worker. Swing challenged the hierarchy in two important ways: it assumed a parallel moral authority independent of church<sup>2</sup> and state, but above all it was mobile; the Working Class were not supposed to move around without permission or invitation.

In the cities, stipendiary police and mercenary 'thieftakers' were available for hire by churches, companies of merchants, traders and insurers to protect their property. These were supported by 'strawmen', professional witnesses who would perjure themselves for a fee.

"They [The Bow Street Magistrates] were the heads and directors of such police as existed at the time; and like the French, "Chiefs of Police," they not only arrested, but examined, the

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<sup>2</sup> It's instructive that a common form of passive protest at the time was for villagers to walk out of a sermon



prisoner who was brought to them by their officers; hence the common phrase, so familiar by repetition, “of being brought up at Bow Street.” The list is not a long one. Though the Bow Street office was not formally constituted by Act of Parliament until the year 1792, these magistrates administered justice there for many years before. We find Henry Fielding, the novelist, there in 1753...”

—Percy Fitzgerald: ‘Chronicles of Bow Street Police-Office’ 1888.

The Police Offices were later termed Police Courts, then Magistrates Courts; to this day, the ‘Police Magistrates’ will rubber stamp anything the police charge you with if they possibly can. In 2011–2012 conviction rates in the Magistrates Court were 60% as against less than a third in the Crown Court, if guilty pleas are included the figure rises to 87%, and bear in mind solicitors will often advise a guilty plea regardless of the facts, as the burden of proof at police courts is in effect, on the defendant. In industrial disputes bogus charges are often used to give the employer an excuse to sack organisers.

The modern concept of police as a uniformed, centrally controlled conduit of state power originated in pre-revolutionary France, the word, from the Greek ‘polis’ meaning city, was imported into English in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at first only used pejoratively. In 1786 the Dublin Police Act created an armed, uniformed force of 40 mounted and 400 foot constables patterned after the Gendarmerie Nationale, its function was entirely political, to put down unrest against the English occupation.

“England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century had no public officials corresponding to either police or district attorneys. Constables were unpaid and played only a minor role in law enforcement. A victim of crime who wanted a constable to undertake any substantial effort in order to apprehend the perpetrator was expected to pay the expenses of doing so. ... In 18<sup>th</sup> century England a system of professional police and prosecutors, government paid and appointed, was viewed as potentially tyrannical and, worse still, French.”

—David Friedman: ‘Making Sense of English Law Enforcement in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century’.

The French police force was transformed into this present-day malignancy by Napoleon Bonaparte’s minister of police, Joseph Fouché. The father of the modern ‘security state’ came to prominence as enforcer for the revolutionary National Convention, was responsible for mass executions which accounted for several thousand citizens, and having served both Republic and Emperor, briefly worked for the restored monarchy. Fouché’s innovations included secret police, routine censorship of the written word and a paranoid surveillance culture maintained through a network of paid informers.

“Marked at the outset by fanaticism, which, though cruel, was at least conscientious, Fouché’s character deteriorated in and after the year 1794 into one of calculating cunning. The transition represented all that was worst in the life of France during the period of the Revolution and Empire. In Fouché the enthusiasm of the earlier period appeared as a cold, selfish and remorseless fanaticism; in him the bureaucracy of the period 1795–1799 and the autocracy of Napoleon found their ablest instrument. ...

... He sought for power and neglected no means to make himself serviceable to the party whose success appeared to be imminent.”

—From his entry in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica'  
Eleventh Edition 1911.

That's what happens when people have power to compete for. Nevertheless, his methods were widely admired and copied, especially in Russia.

The English rural worker had been disciplined by the seasons, so often rose and retired with the sun; periods of intense activity were interspersed with light labour and slack times during which common land could be utilised to supplement household income. The separation of work and leisure and even the habit of only sleeping once per day are all consequences of the wage labour system. For most of human history people would cease their exertions at dusk and sleep, rising later to eat and socialise. Leisure time was occupied by the village calendar with its feasts, fairs and saints' days. The peasantry having been expropriated from their land and set to wage labour, the nature of the work brought them into close association from day to day in the factory environment, where their individuality was subordinated to mass production methods; the pace of work being dictated by the machine. At the same time they had been dragged away from the countryside and crowded into the new industrial towns, living cheek by jowl in unhealthy slums.

"No economist of the day, in estimating the gains or losses of factory employment, ever allowed for the strain and violence that a man suffered in his feelings when he passed from a life in which he could smoke or eat, or dig or sleep as he pleased, to one in which somebody turned the key on him, and for fourteen hours he had not even the right to whistle. It was like entering the airless and laughterless life of a prison."

—B.B. & J.L. Hammond: 'The Town Labourer 1760–1832:  
The New Civilisation.' (1917)

Their quality of life was much reduced, and from time to time their conditions would have to be made even more wretched in order to induce them to compete amongst themselves for work no one wanted to do, which remains the case. One of the consequences of the creation of 'free proletarians' was that the iron discipline of the machine age ended at the factory gates; this created a problem for the masters. A mass of very unhappy people were being trained to think and act as a unit rather than as individuals then turned loose every night; how would they react when threatened? If General Ludd could tie up sixteen thousand troops for three years and Captain Swing bring down a government, the Industrial Worker stood a fair chance of tearing the bourgeoisie a new arsehole.

"Though Marx predicted the inevitability of revolution at the climax of industrialization, history has shown that modernizing societies are much more prone to severe conflict during the early and early-to-medium phases of industrialization. The low wages and extreme economic pressures of the earlier stages of industrial development, together with the concentration of masses of alienated workers in new urban environments, created potentially explosive conditions that become attenuated in the later phases of industrialization."

—Stanley G. Payne: Foreword to 'The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution' By  
Burnett Bolloten.

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and smoke their pipes in the churchyard.

The Peterloo massacre led to outcry even amongst the petty bourgeoisie. The class interest of the yeomanry was too obvious. Robert Peel introduced Fouché's system lock, stock and barrel with the formation of the Metropolitan police. Peel said things like: "*workingmen (sic) must be disciplined by workingmen*", he wanted the Working Class complicit in its own oppression. Hitherto the bosses' side in class warfare had been taken by the military, but in the interest of maintaining the deceit of freedom and equality under the law, it was necessary to create a civil force that could portray itself as neutral, as if even the state were a disinterested party in disputes between masters and labourers. Smith knew better:

"Whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always the masters."

—Adam Smith: 'An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations'.

The Metropolitan police was created by the eponymous act of parliament in 1829; supposedly a politically impartial force dedicated to crime prevention, with the public's consent (Look up 'Peel's Principles', if you can be arsed). However the law has never been neutral and the Met was used as a de-facto riot squad from the start, even being dispatched to Birmingham to take on the Chartists. The new law enforcement model combined the stipendiaries' job of protecting property and trade, not just the means of production but commodities — including the necessities of life — Fouché's Machiavellian defence of the government, and the desire of the bosses to stop their workforce moving around or eating for free.

"The police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence."

—Robert Peel

But what exactly did Peel mean by the public? He spoke against the people's charter and universal suffrage, so he could only have meant male property owners. Roughly nine percent of the population of England and Wales had a say in the laws being enacted against them, and the economic policies that made crime a tool of survival for the rest. Constables were only required to be literate and of good character so most of them would not have a vote either, "the policing of prostitutes, thieves, and lamp posts" in Fouché's contemptuous words, was best left to plebs. So the concept of 'workers in uniform' arose, a group alienated from the class that spawned it, allowed to give itself airs, as it acts on behalf of some distant, unknown people. With the uniform comes a baton, a foolish swagger and a fantastic sense of entitlement.

Three years later the police introduced a tactic that will be familiar to some readers:

"Yet, lingering hostility towards covert policing was manifested in the early 1830s in the overwhelmingly indignant public response to the revelation that a police agent, Sergeant William Popay, had assumed a false identity for over a year (from February 1832 to March 1833), penetrated the radical National Political Union, and pretended to be a militant member who supported violent tactics. This disclosure confirmed to the public what undercover policemen could do in the name of government."

—Haia Shpayer-Makov: 'The Ascent of the Detective: Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England'

As ever Popay was dismissed as a 'loose cannon' and it was business as usual for the rest.

The same year The National Union of the Working Classes, disgusted by the Great Reform Act of 1832, organized a public meeting at Cold Bath Fields, Clerkenwell, to discuss plans for a National Convention. The new Home Secretary Lord Melbourne had declared the meeting illegal, a thousand people turned up anyway. Melbourne was present as were Peel's two appointed commissioners of Police, Colonel Rowan and Mr Mayne along with three thousand policemen and two plain clothes officers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Life Guards, in case troops were wanted. A man named Mee was elected Chairman:

"Mr Mee then also got upon the paling, and, after thanking the meeting for the honour they had conferred on him, said he was glad to see before him so many noble men. It was not the coronet or a flashing equipage that made a noble man, though in the eyes of the world they made noble; but he gave that name to those he saw around him, because they were the producing power? The real wealth of the country (Cheers.) He was thankful to the Whig Ministry, who had given an importance to the meeting which it otherwise would have wanted? (Cheers and hisses)? But the question now for them to consider was whether, as they had met under such disadvantages, they should go on — (Go on, go on)? Or whether they should adjourn till a more convenient opportunity — (No, no, go on, go on) He was but working man with a family, therefore if they were not prepared to give to his family one-tenth of their earning they should not cry: Go on".

—Caledonian Mercury: 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1833.

Without warning the Met charged the crowd, beating men, women and children indiscriminately; three police officers were stabbed attempting to wrest a flag from a member of the public, one later died. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of justifiable homicide. George Fursey, the man charged with stabbing the other two was acquitted at the Old Bailey. The coroner's jurors were feted as heroes by cheering crowds, treated to a boat trip on the Thames with cannon salute and a banquet, presented with medals and a silver cup:

"This cup was presented on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1834 by the Milton Street Committee, City of London to Mr Robert French one of the seventeen jurymen who formed the memorable Calthorpe Street inquest as a perpetual memorial of their glorious verdict of "justifiable homicide" on the body of Robert Culley a policeman who was slain whilst brutally attacking the people when peaceably assembled in Calthorpe Street on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1833."

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 removed all provision for 'outdoor relief' requiring that anyone in need of food enter a workhouse in their settled parish. Paupers, the elderly and infirm were made prisoners of Class War, subject to summary punishment. Wives and husbands were separated and the children of widows apt to be sold to factory owners or shipped to the colonies as indentured labourers. The homeless would be detained for two days work in 'casual wards', and if they returned to the same workhouse within the month would be required to work for four days. Conditions were squalid and unhealthy, this state of affairs as described by Charles Dickens, Jack London and George Orwell, persisted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Over time the system of mutual social obligation had given way to an arbitrary justice meted out by the gentry or their hired hands; the creation of the free proletariat leading inevitably to the values of one class being imposed on another by force.

So what do you think comrades? I feel I know you well enough to presume that you would not would have read this far, if you believed such a rotten institution, ill-conceived by such

unscrupulous individuals for such a malign purpose, could ever be reformed into something beneficial, and indeed it has not. Like the Ghost of Christmas Past, I have more horrors to show you. A list of police excesses in any period of history would be tedious and harrowing, and so long no one would ever read it. Instead I shall concentrate on an episode that illustrates their continuity of purpose.

The 1984–85 Miners’ Strike was the culmination of a long battle between capital and labour, during which the power of the workers had been expressed at the point of production over a commodity that was both vital to the economy and produced under the most desperate of conditions: coal. I must declare an interest, my Gran came from Pontypridd; her cousin Redvers was on his back with his pick in the Garw seam, barely 18 inches thick, when the roof came down and took part of his head away. The doctors deemed it too distressing for his kids to see him so only his dad went in. It took him 18 months to die and ten years to get any money out of the Coal Board.

Cabinet papers released after thirty years revealed that ever since the Miners threw out Ted Heath’s government in 1974, the Tory party had plotted to abolish the troublesome mining communities altogether and import its coal from overseas. It would also pave the way for a tasty bit of primitive accumulation — the privatisation of the entire energy industry.

The National Union of Mineworkers was the most powerful of the workers’ organisations, it had a fair amount of regional autonomy but had hitherto acted coherently and often in solidarity with other workers in struggle. The strategy of the state was to split the N.U.M. isolate it from the class as a whole, and reduce its membership to the minimum; this was achieved using the variable productivity of the coalfields, a programme of misinformation and false promises, starvation and naked brutality.

In 1977 right-wing Tory MP Nicholas Ridley had devised a scheme to prepare in advance for a long drawn out dispute then provoke the Union into strike action when the government was ready. The ‘Ridley plan’ involved: building up coal stocks at power stations, importing coal from non-union foreign ports, recruiting non-union lorry drivers who would be prepared to scab, installing expensive dual coal-oil firing generators and depleting union funds. Police tactics would incorporate lessons learned in the North of Ireland.

After the 1979 election thatcher’s government began by stealth to implement the plan. For the first time, Clause 6 of the 1980 Social Security Act allowed the government to withdraw benefits from strikers’ dependents in the hope of starving them back to work. A special riot squad was created, which conducted military style training exercises early in the morning at London’s docklands. The (offensive) ‘short shield’ and baton formations, whose tactics derive entirely from the Bronze Age, were first used in this dispute.

The essence of the Ridley plan was provocation, to steer the unions into fighting on an unfavourable terrain. The appointment of the notorious right-wing asset stripper Ian MacGregor whose elder brothers had scabbed in Glasgow during the General Strike, on a fabulous salary, first at British Steel then at the National Coal Board, was guaranteed to make blood boil.

“I never thought the day would come when I wished I had some of my scruffy, sometimes ill-disciplined, sometimes loud-mouthed American police by my side in this country, and some of the curious ways of the law to back them up.”

—The Times: ‘Sir Ian MacGregor; Obituary’ April 14, 1998.

The fuse was lit at Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire in the spring of 1984. A million pounds had been spent on improved facilities then the Colliers were assembled and promised their jobs were safe for five years. A month later MacGregor announced that Cortonwood was to be closed and six thousand miners walked out on unofficial action. The following day, 6<sup>th</sup> of March, the Coal Board decided it would break the agreement reached after the 1974 strike and close twenty collieries at a loss of twenty thousand jobs. President Arthur Scargill claimed there were seventy pits on the government's secret closure list. The government and Coal Board denied the existence of such a list, but minutes of a cabinet meeting held in September the previous year show there were seventy-five.

"Mr MacGregor had it in mind over the three years 1983–85 that a further 75 pits would be closed: first, 64 which would reduce the workforce by some 55,000 and reduce capacity by some 20 million tonnes; then a further 11, with manpower reductions of 9,000 and capacity reduction of a further 5 million tonnes. There should be no closure list, but a pit-by-pit procedure. The manpower at the end of that time in the industry would be down to 138,000 from its current level of 202,000. [...] It was agreed that no record of this meeting should be circulated."

—"SECRET : CMO RECORD OF A MEETING HELD AT  
No. 10 DOWNING STREET ON 15 SEPTEMBER 1983"

Item in National Archives.

The Nottinghamshire miners, who allowed the union to be divided having been told their pits were safe, the scab administrators, pit deputies, drivers, dockers, steel and power station workers whose jobs were all eventually decimated by the scale of the secretly planned closures, and the National Coal Board themselves, were all played for fools.

"Amid the cooled air of a vault at the National Archive I trace my finger across Maggie Thatcher's handwriting, in the margin of a typewritten note marked Secret.

She's scribbled: "13 RoRo, 1,000 tons a day, 50 lorries a day..."

... During the first few days of the strike, on 14 March 1984, ministers pressed Home Secretary Leon Brittan to get chief constables to adopt a "more vigorous interpretation of their duties". A clampdown followed that prevented pickets reaching the working coalfields of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire in large numbers.

—Paul Mason blog: 'Thatcher vs. the miners: official papers confirm the strikers' worst suspicions' Friday 03 Jan 2014.

Much has been made of the timing of the strike, as a tactical error by Scargill, and by the liberal bourgeoisie on the union's refusal to hold a national ballot, which would have contravened the Miners' organisational principles. "Negotiate locally, fight centrally" had been established in the Cambrian Combine Dispute of 1910–11. It was unacceptable for any worker to vote away another's interests in pursuit of their own. This principle was upheld by vote of the National Executive in April, by which time most coalfields were out anyway. The Yorkshire Area relied on a ballot held in January 1981, with an 85.6% vote for strike action, were any pit threatened with closure on economic grounds.

"There is a prevailing view that Arthur Scargill, the NUM National President, called the strike. He did not. The strike started in Yorkshire, and he was not present at the delegate Council meeting in Barnsley. He had no means of calling a strike in Yorkshire."

—David John Douglass: “Strike, not the end of the story”.  
Published by National Coal Mining Museum for England 2005.

The police returned to their origin, being used by the thatcher regime in an unashamedly political role, their function neither to uphold neutral laws nor to protect public safety, but to hasten the end of the strike to the benefit of the capitalist class. Police were drafted in from non-mining regions, lest they balk at beating their neighbours. To the inhabitants of the coalfields, they appeared as an occupying army, and the entire community was placed under siege.

“The Metropolitan Police became infamous for their anti-Northern hostility, the abuse being directed at the miners’ Northern accents, ‘thick Geordie bastards’ or ‘ay-up ay-up ayoup’ in mock imitation of the Yorkshire greeting. At Coal House in Doncaster they poured off the buses shouting ‘we’ve come 200 miles to get you bastards, who’s first?’ Also a little touch of their own, after wrecking pickets cars at Cotgrave they left their calling card: a little sticker which read: ‘YOU HAVE JUST MET THE MET’. Burned out picket huts were found to have such stickers on their windows or nearby lamp posts. Black miners were especially singled out by the Met for the normal torrent of racial abuse, ape like gestures and monkey like cries. This open racial hostility for the first time brought the meaning of what that means home to many of the miners standing with their black mates, many of them having been guilty of similar remarks in the past albeit in a ‘friendly’ way. Seeing the class enemy display a shocking example of it led many miners to realize it really wasn’t a joke.”

—David John Douglass: NUM Branch Delegate Hatfield:  
‘Come and wet this truncheon’ 1985.

It is now inarguable that ministers held chief constables personally responsible for the outcome of a dispute in which they were technically supposed to be impartial.

“Partially this is reflected in their attitude towards our whole community and those non-miners in it who supported the strike. It was also very clear in their attitude to every success we had, for example when the train drivers refused to cross our picket lines or when a lorry turned back. The drivers inevitably being abused and the picket, no matter how small, being harassed as punishment for its success. The special treatment singled out for the people collecting for the miners their frequent arrests and confiscation of funds, even to the extent of arresting a Santa Claus in London for collecting toys for the miners’ children for Xmas.”

(*ibid.*)

In 2001 Stella Rimington confirmed in her autobiography ‘Open Secret: The Autobiography of the Former Director-General of MI5’. what the miners had known all along, that their ‘phones were being tapped.

“A Yorkshire journalist was on the phone to the Yorkshire NUM when a police radio message about traffic on the roads came over the line. The NUM employee said he was going to get a tape recorder and added ‘hello copper, can you hear me?’ ... the interruption stopped immediately. A Yorkshire miner has also claimed that on phoning the Barnsley strike control centre he had been connected to a police emergency service”

—The Guardian: 4<sup>th</sup> May 1984.

A man I met who had fought at Orgreave told me he heard a copper in uniform address another as “corporal”, maybe he imagined it, after all he had an alarming dent in his skull, but it was widely believed that Special Forces had been deployed in the major confrontations.

“We estimate in excess of 18,000 perhaps 19,000 police in operation against us; and since we don’t believe they breed that fast, unless the incubation period for cops is roughly similar to that of frog spawn, we have had many suspicions of military involvement. ...

... The number of police uniform clad characters who were clearly under regulation height, was not only a delight for some of our pickets but also a source of amusement to many of our women folk who lost no time in ridiculing the ‘unshaved bairns’ and ‘dwarfs.”

—Douglass: (*op.cit.*)

Conviction for public order offences gave the coal board an excuse to sack militants, who were subsequently blacklisted. Pickets selected for arrest would be grabbed by snatch squads, sometimes indoors or miles away from the action, and severely beaten. In many cases the standard of evidence fabricated by the police was so poor that the prosecutors embarrassed themselves in court; statements were inconsistent, contradicted by police vehicle logs, or identically worded, police witnesses appeared not to have read them, but wherever credulity could stretch to it, convictions were obtained.

“Adrian Simpson, received severe head injuries and a broken jaw, was in intensive care, many thought he might die. He recovered though, minus many teeth. He emerged from the hospital to a charge of assaulting the police. For the crime of fighting to defend other miner’s jobs he is under suspension and threat of losing his own, apart from facing a lengthy jail sentence.”

(*ibid.*)

By June 1984 the government feared losing the dispute and a plan was hatched to charge pickets with riot, which carried a heavy prison sentence. This required the police to show that trivial offences were part of a collective act of disorder. To this end batches of statements were dictated for officers to copy out in their handwriting.

The N.U.M. had by arrangement with the steel workers sanctioned strictly limited deliveries of coke to maintain blast furnaces, preventing damage to an allied industry for the sake of their comrades’ livelihoods. British Steel cheated on this arrangement at Orgreave coking plant, bang in the middle of the Yorkshire coalfield. They had no operational reason to do this; in fact they operated their own wharf at Flixborough power station, staffed by their own employees with a private section of railway line, they could bring in coke by the back door with impunity. Orgreave had been chosen by the government for a set-piece confrontation with their motley crew of paramilitaries.

Most of the scabbing was taking place in Nottinghamshire so police set up road blocks to turn back pickets entering from Yorkshire. Drivers who refused would be charged with obstruction; a summary offence the police can use against anyone who fails to comply with their instructions, however unreasonable, there is virtually no defence against it in the police court. On the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1984, pickets found themselves welcomed into Orgreave by the police, shown to their parking spaces then herded into a field. Their cars were later vandalised.

The spectacular falsification of evidence after police ran amok at Orgreave destroyed the prosecution case against 95 men accused of riot and unlawful assembly. The phrase: “*There was however a continual barrage of missiles.*” appeared in twenty-two separate statements; thirty-four statements contained the words: “*Periodically there was missile throwing from the back of*



*the pickets.*" A signature turned out to be a forgery. All defendants were acquitted and seven years later South Yorkshire police paid £425,000 damages to thirty-nine former miners for assault, wrongful arrest and malicious prosecution; however no action was taken against those responsible. The brains behind this fiasco, chief constable Peter Wright, was also the author of South Yorkshire's campaign to blame the 1989 Hillsborough disaster on the crowd, it seems that the experience of Orgreave led to a culture of impunity within the force resulting in the mass fabrication and media manipulation that has recently come to light.

Thirty years after the event the media were allowed to reveal the hidden footage and photographs of miners being beaten by police. As the conspiracy started to unravel, in November 2012 South Yorkshire police referred itself to the Independent Police Complaints Commission with allegations of assault, perjury, perverting the course of justice and misconduct in a public office. The IPCC was already investigating the Hillsborough case for similar criminal offences.

If the Babylon were mendacious, the media coverage was pure fantasy from beginning to end. The usual suspects, the Telegraph, Mail and Express, plus Rupert Murdoch's *S\*n*, which was marketed as a Working Class paper, were a hundred percent behind the thatcher agenda of monetarism and de-industrialisation, not only to increase profits by reducing the ratio of constant to variable capital — remember unearned income only comes from unpaid labour — but also to dissolve the political and social cohesion of the Working Class for the long term. Miners were by turns backward-looking yokels, greedy wide-boys or communist-inspired subversives, just for espousing values of socialism, community and class solidarity; no more or less than the heart and soul of our class since the industrial revolution. The publicly funded BBC also got on the bandwagon. After one police baton charge, the cornered pickets retaliated with stones and clods of earth; BBC TV news showed the stone-throwing first followed by the police charge, years later the sheepish broadcaster claimed that the film had been transposed by accident.

"The BBC acknowledged some years ago that it made a mistake over our sequence of events at Orgreave. We accepted without question that it was serious, but emphasized that it was a mistake made in the haste of putting the news together.

...The end result was that the editor inadvertently reversed the occurrence of the actions of the police and the pickets."

—Martin Hart, on behalf of the BBC director general, in response to a complaint by Charles Alverson of Cambridge, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1991.

John Harris' famous photograph showing a mounted policeman taking a baton swing at the head of fellow photographer Lesley Boulton appeared in only one of 17 national papers. Boulton made an official complaint soon afterward, and in September, Harris supplied his witness statement, revealing that the negatives of his film were stored in a London picture library, within a month they had disappeared and the DPP called off the investigation.

"There's a T-junction there and a bus stop. I was attending to a man who was on the ground and seemed to have some chest injuries. ...

... As I stood up to attract this policeman's attention, this officer on a police horse just bore down on me. Fortunately for me there was someone standing behind me who was also with the injured miner, who just yanked me out of the way.

John Harris, who was taking the pictures, was using a motor drive and I've seen not just the famous photograph but the subsequent picture which shows the baton going down very close to me. I felt it go past me. I was just missed by the skin of my teeth really."

—Lesley Boulton to Grace Shaw: BBC interview 2009.

Now if information is a commodity, as it must be in a capitalist society, surely a free market would allow you to buy any information you want? Not a bit of it, any more than a free market can deliver you clean air and drinking water if it's more lucrative to pollute it; the pollution taints everything so you won't know what truth tastes like. So now I've rambled from law enforcement to the media, two alternative and complementary methods of control, but it's all the same firm.

I urge the reader to study the miners' strike, both through the oral history of the participants, while they are still around, and in its historical context, as it tells you everything you need to know about the symbiosis between the state, the bourgeoisie and the media, it also irrevocably explodes the illusion of police and judicial neutrality. All these institutions serve a tiny elite, the kind of people you are never even likely to meet, unless they chance to run you over in their Bentley. Above all it illustrates the importance of total class solidarity in the face of a concerted attack, it doesn't even matter what the fight appears to be about; the ruling class are hardly going to let you in on their long term plans. Anyone stupid enough to think they can pursue their own interests with class war going on will earn the love of the bourgeoisie, which they will eventually demonstrate by fucking you backwards.

"In the same village (Hatfield Colliery) an 85 year old partially blind, woman was terrified. She had her back door broken down, kicked in by half a dozen riot police with shields and clubs — ransacking her home looking for pickets for a full ten minutes. They wrecked items very personal to her. When neighbours took the complaint to the local police station they were met with laughter and derision.

In the next village of Armthorpe, a similar rampage was under way. A 59 year old woman, taking too long to open the door for riot police had it kicked open, into her face, and then rammed again and again into her as she fell back against the wall.

A heroic 66 year old miner's wife, in a wheelchair, came to her door to complain about police rampaging through her front garden. She was told, by a police man waving a truncheon at her, that she could have some too, if she wanted.

Enter the brave boys. Another woman in a wheelchair, Mrs Brenda Stout, was assaulted by two of the upholders of the Law and Order on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July at a colliery in Leigh. In order to force her from protesting she was seized round the back of the neck with both hands, while the police accomplice turned her chair round by prising his knee into her back.

At Brodsworth Colliery (August 2<sup>nd</sup>) it was the turn of a 14 year old boy to be attacked and inflicted with a broken leg."

"Car drivers passing the scenes of such wanton destruction have stared in disbelief at police wielding axes through windshields, and pulling young men by their hair through shattered glass, out onto the bonnets of the cars, where they have been beaten senseless. The police proved they could stand the gasp of the passing motorist, secure in the knowledge that the press, radio and the TV will be holding the ruling class line and telling no tales."

—Douglass: (*op.cit.*)

There's a lot more of that, over a year's worth. It is easy to say with hindsight that the miners ought to have taken the fight to the enemy at the beginning and swarmed into the capital whilst they still had their health and strength, commandeered vehicles, blocked the roads, and had their

pitched battle with the state in Westminster rather than a field in South Yorkshire. Ah, we'll know better next time.

One of the worst aspects of this sorry state of affairs is of course, that some of the things police do are actually important, responding to natural disasters, traffic accidents and apprehending the occasional maniac. This is their sales pitch; but for every serial killer/rapist that is brought to book, thousands of lives are blighted. Resisting the temptation to share my own experiences, suffice it to say that if I felt my personal safety depended on that shower I wouldn't sleep at night. But if you're being stalked, a loan shark is breaking the door down with an axe, or your ex has just run off with the kids, who else are you going to call? So given that law enforcement isn't as advertised, what's the alternative?

On the establishment of a free society, devoid of poverty, property, status and dominance, most of the motives for crime would be obsolete; abolishing the arbitrary prohibition of some recreational drugs would wipe out about half of it. I'm not naïve enough to suppose that racism, patriarchy, jealousy and greed would die out overnight, so we could expect some residue of anti social and abusive behaviour, but history has demonstrated that attitudes can be revolutionised in a generation, so it isn't too tall an order.

Perhaps a return to collective responsibility is the solution; autonomous communities might elect to guarantee the conduct of their members, having agreed a code of behaviour and means of enforcement by common consent. Where conflicts arise, such as in religious communities having peculiar values, they may agree to differ and to respect one another's ordinances in certain locations. To start with, the majority of people in an anarchist society will not be from an anarchist tradition so it's going to throw up some interesting compromises. A federal council would set boundaries and certain minimum expectations. If a community found itself under threat from banditry or criminal gangs it could raise a militia for self-defence and equip it with any technological conveniences the members thought necessary, it could also call for assistance from other autonomous communities.

The concept of a workers' militia is fundamentally different from a police force for the following reasons: A militia would be non hierarchical, there would be no positions of power or political influence to compete for, so nothing to be gained by acting other than in the common interest. For tactical reasons one person might well take charge of a particular operation, but their mandate would be strictly limited, and they would be instantly recallable. For this, and operational reasons they would probably need deputies and at all times they would be accountable to the entire community; their reward? Like any other task the satisfaction of a job well done and the approbation of their equals, if that isn't enough they're probably not the best fit.

In fact I see the role of each militiaman as a delegate of the community mandated to perform a specific function. Some will be more suited to the work than others and it's possible they may get a taste for it; unlike the surgeon, architect or horticulturalist who never need to constrain anyone against their will I think this is unhealthy, so service in the militia should be part-time and limited in duration. Just as no-one can speak for the Working Class but the workers themselves, so no-one can or should attempt to defend it without sharing its needs, goals, and perils.

## 30. Stefan Kiszko.

I could have titled this chapter ‘Miscarriages of Justice’ and produced another tedious catalogue, but we could all come up with our own. These things are accepted, understood, apologised for, part of the social contract, why? Instead I’ve chosen to focus on a case which affected me profoundly when I first became aware of it, and which ever since, has informed my view of the relationship between the individual and the state, which is the realm of justice and law enforcement. In fact, they were all just doing their jobs.

Stefan Kiszko was wronged, not by individuals, though many exploited his situation for their own ends, but by an entire society, at every level. I find it instructive that none of the people who participated in this horror has ever apologised, as if it would be too much to admit. It would require acceptance of the structural nature of this wrong, and that renders it impossible for anyone to be made specifically accountable, not one of us is innocent. Judge Hugh Park expressed his sorrow at having presided over the “*worst miscarriage of justice of all time*”<sup>1</sup> but maintained he did nothing wrong.

Kiszko was born with few advantages in life, the son of mill-workers of Ukrainian, Slovakian and German heritage, who fled Eastern Europe after the Second World War. His father Iwan, who had helped to build the M62 motorway, died of an unexpected heart attack in 1970 when young Stefan was eighteen. A rare genetic disorder left him with chronic health problems; according to the medical profession his mental and emotional age was twelve years. Considering the conduct of the great and the good in this case it’s hard to imagine what measure of maturity applies here.

After school Stefan entered the tax office as a clerk, the first white-collar worker in his family. At twenty-three he was diagnosed with anaemia, hypogonadism, given a blood transfusion and prescribed testosterone to correct a deficiency, this medication caused him to go through a sudden, belated form of puberty, with all that entails. So, a profoundly disabled man, who nevertheless held down a job and ran a car, by all accounts a blameless individual of simple tastes, most deserving of our mutual aid.

The loss of a child is a terrible thing; Lesley Molseed was eleven years old when she was abducted from an estate in Rochdale, driven to moorland and stabbed to death. Before he left, the killer ejaculated on her clothing. I mention this act only because it ruled out Kiszko as a suspect; the perpetrator, unlike Kiszko had a normal sperm count.

Police took more than six thousand statements, including four teenage girls who claimed they had seen Kiszko exposing himself. He attended Rochdale police station voluntarily, in his own car. It’s usual where a suspect’s mental capacity is in question for an ‘appropriate adult’ to accompany them in interview, but this has only been a statutory requirement since 1984. Stefan was not cautioned, nor told he was under arrest, he was questioned aggressively for three days without a solicitor, and his request for his mother to be present was refused. Detective Dick

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Beaumont-Dark, a Member of Parliament, and like Park, of the establishment. Dark added that “*it brings shame on everyone involved*” no, it brings shame on your society — away with it.

Holland wrote a confession and induced him to sign it by promising he could “go home” if he did so,<sup>2</sup> instead he was remanded to Armley prison. He retracted it as soon as he realised he had been lied to.

Stefan naively believed the police were seeking the truth, and that the facts would quickly exonerate him. He insisted he had never met Molseed, and didn’t kill her. He had been in Halifax with his aunt tending his father’s grave on the day in question; there were witnesses to this, who were never called. Evidence that Kiszko had a broken ankle, and being very heavily built would have struggled to climb the forty-foot bank to where the body was found, was not heard either. Anyone who has ever been through a Crown Court trial will be aware that it is a species of theatre, in which the facts play a supporting role at best.

By the time the case came to trial police had all the necessary evidence to prove Kiszko’s innocence, his alibi, and crucially that he was infertile and sperm was found at the scene, but the state, as always, was under pressure to get a conviction, so that was neither shared with the defence nor disclosed to the court. Kiszko was convicted by the dishonesty of the police and the incompetence of his barrister David Waddington. The prosecutor was Peter Taylor.

Waddington’s first mistake was not calling for an adjournment on the first morning of the trial when the Crown unexpectedly delivered six thousand unused witness statements. It included one by Christopher Coverdale, who had seen a man and a girl at the lay-by on the A672 beneath the crime scene, that afternoon. The description of the girl and her clothing fitted Lesley, but the man bore no resemblance to the accused. Another came from a driver who admitted inadvertently exposing himself to the girls.<sup>3</sup> Had this witness been called it is unlikely the girls would have lied in court “*for a laugh*”, and if they had, may well have collapsed under cross-examination.

It was this one allegation that led to Kiszko’s arrest, there were no other grounds for suspicion. It was in his confession, which gave the defence good reason to exclude the whole thing as unreliable, instead they chose to challenge it during the course of the trial. This meant not only that the jury read the confession, but also that they formed an opinion of Kiszko himself as an unreliable witness. One piece of circumstantial evidence was Stefan’s habit of noting car registration numbers, he had written down one that had been spotted near the lay-by on the A672. The prosecution relied on this to place the defendant at the scene, but the least effort by his solicitor Albert Wright would have shown that the vehicle was regularly parked adjacent to his place of work.

Wright believed he was guilty so Waddington hedged his bets, exaggerating the effects of the hormone treatment.<sup>4</sup> If the trial went against them he might get the verdict reduced to manslaughter on grounds of diminished responsibility. The line was “*he didn’t do it, but if he did, it was because he was on drugs*”. That’s a fairly standard kind of defence for a politician, but doesn’t much appeal to juries with the media baying for blood. Indeed, Waddington later became Home Secretary, and ended up as Governor of Bermuda.

The tabloids published their lurid fictions about the “*monster*” Kiszko with the customary clamour for the death penalty. In prison, Stefan fell into the trap of all the maliciously prosecuted,

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<sup>2</sup> This is standard police practice the world over when dealing with vulnerable suspects.

<sup>3</sup> The judge praised the girls for their “*sharp observations, bravery and honesty*”. In 1990 after the case was reopened, they admitted they had made up the ‘flasher’ story after watching the man urinating behind a bush. As adults they were cautioned for perjury.

<sup>4</sup> Kiszko’s endocrinologist strongly denied that his medication could have caused him to act violently, out of character, but was not called as a witness.

being ineligible for parole without a confession. He was repeatedly attacked by staff and inmates, and when he defended himself he was disciplined. He refused treatment for sex offending on the grounds that he had never offended. His conviction was overturned by the Court of Appeal on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1992, the day Peter Taylor was appointed Lord Chief Justice. Seventeen years after his forced confession Stefan was finally allowed to 'go home'.

Judge Park enthused: *"I would like all the officers responsible for the result to be specially commended and these observations conveyed to the Chief Constable"*. In 1994 Detective Chief Inspector Dick Holland, Chief Superintendent Jack Dibb and forensic scientist Ronald Outteridge were charged with perverting the course of justice by suppressing evidence, namely the test results on semen samples from the victim's clothing and the accused.

Holland and Outteridge put the blame on Dibb, who died the following year. The case was abandoned owing to the passage of time and never put before a jury. Holland also led the disastrous Yorkshire ripper inquiry and participated in the false conviction of the fantasist Judith Ward for PIRA's M62 coach bomb. In 1978 Hugh Park sentenced fifteen defendants to a total of a hundred and twenty years for the 'crime' of producing cheap, clean lysergic acid. Afterwards the price of a trip rocketed and it stood a fair chance of making you ill.

During Stefan's incarceration only his mother Charlotte and aunt Alfreda campaigned against his conviction, they were rebuffed by their M.P. the obese, drug-addicted paedophile and asbestos industry stooge Cyril Smith. Their first appeal was dismissed on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1978 by the infamous Lord Justice Bridge, the judge who expressed regret at not being able to pass a death sentence on the Birmingham Six.

In July 1979 Stefan was formally dismissed by the Inland Revenue and began to develop schizophrenia, believing he was the subject of an experiment to test the effects of imprisonment on the innocent. Henceforth his declarations of innocence were labelled as schizophrenic symptoms. One prison psychiatrist made a note of Kiszko's "delusions of innocence". He reported receiving coded messages from the radio. Eventually even his mother was woven into his paranoid conspiracy theory. His mental health so deteriorated that he was transferred to Ashworth hospital in March 1991.

Late in the day the case was taken up by solicitor Campbell Malone, who spent two years unravelling the web of deceit surrounding it. Working with Philip Clegg, who had been Waddington's assistant at the trial, he prepared a petition to the Home Office; unfortunately it landed on the desk of David Waddington who took over the same day. Fearing for his own reputation Waddington sat on the file until his career path moved on to Leader of the House of Lords in November 1990, so it was a full sixteen months before it was referred back to West Yorkshire Police.

Stefan Kiszko may indeed have suffered from delusions, but there was nothing implausible about them. As we've seen the British state has done far worse things for more bizarre reasons, and it was clear that the authorities did not mean him to survive prison. Less than two years after his release the bum hand he had been dealt at birth, aggravated by systematic abuse at the hands of the state's agents and their proxies, claimed his life as it had his father before him. He died of a heart attack and never received the half a million pounds he had been promised in compensation, nor did his mother, who passed away six months later. The state kept its money. In 2006, Ronald Castree was convicted of Molseed's murder on DNA evidence.

## 31. Direct Action: the education of revolutionaries.

“Anarchism is neither sectarian nor dogmatic. It’s theory in action. It doesn’t have a pre-determined worldview. It’s a fact that anarchism is manifest historically in all of man’s attitudes, individually or collectively. It’s a force in the march of history itself: the force that pushes it forward.”

—Nestor Makhno: to Francisco Ascaso and Buenaventura Durruti, Paris, 1927.

This, my friends, is where the cop-out ends, once you’ve accepted that there is no one above or below you, you become responsible for everything that happens within your sphere of influence. Who gives governments the power to abuse, torture and kill? It is you. The prison I referred to earlier exists only in the mind, in the collective consciousness, the defeatist attitude that: “nothing can be done”. In fact everything can be done and already is, in this world we built with our hands, eyes and brains. Everything you require to live is provided by your fellow workers, as you provide for them. The intervention of bosses, accountants, academics and politicians only serves to make the process less efficient and pleasant to operate. If we allow these intermediaries to manage our desires they will stifle and kill them. Despite not being noticeably more competent or wise than anyone else they have been elevated above their fellows and it isn’t in their interests to upset the applecart. They will patiently explain why we can’t have what we want, just yet.

“Our people stand for action on the march. It is while going forward that we overtake. Don’t hold them back, even to teach them ‘the most beautiful theories’ ...”

—Francisco Ascaso, quoted by Paz and others.

Direct action is that which seeks its ends without the mediation of a third party; it does not necessarily involve protest, and where it does, is not limited to protesting. Breaking up a fight is direct action, calling the police is not. It can be anything from distributing free food to the needy or recycling old clothes, to strikes, sabotage and factory occupations. This principle demands that those who have most invested in a struggle should direct it, whilst relying on solidarity from others, so priority should be given to projects and organisational forms which give confidence to those who are marginalised or unused to taking action.

Q. How many Anarchists does it take to change a light bulb?

A. None — “The light bulb must change itself!”

—Anon.

Direct action is most popularly associated with the practice of revolutionary syndicalism or industrial unionism, which gained currency at the turn of the last century but lost out to Bolshevism; however the abject failure of political and industrial representation has revived its popularity in this one.

The importance of direct action goes far beyond its immediate goals; it ingrains the habit of taking responsibility, of working with others in a voluntary and horizontal fashion for reasons other than personal reward. It builds confidence and trust, shares skills and teaches by example. A solidarity action that at first glance seems to have only a minor impact, in fact operates on several fronts. It gives satisfaction to the participants, courage to fellow workers who hitherto felt powerless, and issues a warning to the exploiters that their acts have consequences. It helps repair the social cohesion and sense of community that capitalism tries so hard to abolish. Above all every comrade must feel valued and supported, every blow must be returned, until over time a culture of militant solidarity is established, only then can we act coherently in our common interest, and prise power from the exploiter's grip.

There are many traps into which revolutionaries can fall; relying on the limited vision and experiences of a few people for example, or on the other hand diluting the movement with those who have too much invested in the status quo; falling back on dogma, or abandoning essential principles. It's a mistake to assume that every oppressed person is ready and able to shake off their oppression, and equally erroneous to wait until conditions are perfect. To transform society we must transform ourselves, we can do it along the way but we have to start now. Lines must be walked between making real improvements to the lives of people in the here and now, and giving in to reformism, we want the earth, but we'll take it a piece at a time.

"This task of laying the groundwork for the future is, thanks to Direct Action, in no way at odds with the day to day struggle. The tactical superiority of Direct Action rests precisely on its unparalleled plasticity: organisations actively engaged in the practice are not required to confine themselves to beatific waiting for the advent of social changes. They live in the present with all possible combativity, sacrificing neither the present to the future, nor the future to the present. It follows from this, from this capacity for facing up simultaneously to the demands of the moment and those of the future and from this compatibility in the two-pronged task to be carried forward, that the ideal for which they strive, far from being overshadowed or neglected, is thereby clarified, defined and made more discernible.

Which is why it is both inane and false to describe revolutionaries drawing their inspiration from Direct Action methods as "advocates of all-or nothing". True, they are advocates of wresting EVERYTHING from the bourgeoisie! But, until such time as they will have amassed sufficient strength to carry through this task of general expropriation, they do not rest upon their laurels and miss no chance to win partial improvements which, being achieved at some cost to capitalist privileges, represent a sort of partial expropriation and pave the way to more comprehensive demands.

From which it is plain that Direct Action is the plain and simple fleshing-out of the spirit of revolt: it fleshes out the class struggle, shifting it from the realm of theory and abstraction into the realm of practice and accomplishment. As a result, Direct Action is the class struggle lived on a daily basis, an ongoing attack upon capitalism."

—Emile Pouget: 'Direct Action'.



## 32. Prefiguration: ‘Building the new world in the shell of the old’.

“If I were you I wouldn’t start from here.”

—Anon.

Anarchism is prefigurative, meaning that anarchists try to operate their spaces and projects along the same lines as the society they wish to create, actively seeking equality in all things and for all people. Decisions must be taken collectively and the process should be transparent to all; we have no need for coercion or subterfuge. As I have attempted to show, this is in direct contradiction to the way states and political institutions operate.

“There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another, this conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical.”

—Emma Goldman: ‘My Further Disillusionment with Russia’. 1924.

Prefiguration implies that you act as you feel you should act, and as if there were no obstacles to your doing so. This is not always entirely feasible, if you’re living in occupied Gaza for example, compromise with the state is sometimes mandatory to avoid being destroyed or neutralised by it; but as you get used to the idea, the structures and hierarchies of society, the threats of poverty, violence and incarceration, are only as bumps and potholes in the road, some larger than others.

In prefiguration you can act unilaterally. Suppose you have just decided to stop using sexist or homophobic language — it’s about time! You will probably slip up occasionally, I certainly did, but before long you will find yourself challenging such behaviour in others,<sup>1</sup> so prefiguration has led to direct action. Every time you do this you will gain understanding of the problem and get better at explaining it, better than the trendy academics with their impenetrable jargon. What’s more you have divorced it from its legalistic context and re-framed it in terms of personal responsibility and solidarity. You become aware of more subtle forms of prejudice you might otherwise have missed, so behaviour that once seemed normal will no longer be acceptable to you. As a general rule if you’re making someone else miserable you should stop doing it; you don’t have to be an anarchist to be considerate. You will find as you stop looking down on people you can no longer look up either, so you grow in confidence. In your attempts to transform social

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<sup>1</sup> It’s technically illegal anyway (in the U.K.) and if you’re at work it amounts to misconduct, but it’s far better for someone to be pulled up by a friend or colleague than some distant personnel manager or a cop, which is only going to deepen the resentment that created their prejudice in the first place.

relations you are transformed; you are no longer hand-wringing over oppression but making a small, positive contribution to abolishing it.

The practice of prefiguration should be developed in everyday activity and carried through into the most extreme circumstances, including revolutionary armed struggle.

“I don’t believe — and everything happening around us confirms this — that you can run a workers’ militia according to classical military rules. I believe that discipline, coordination, and planning are indispensable, but we shouldn’t define them in terms taken from the world that we’re destroying. We have to build on new foundations. My comrades and I are convinced that solidarity is the best incentive for arousing an individual’s sense of responsibility and a willingness to accept discipline as an act of self-discipline.

War has been imposed upon us and this battle will be different than those we’ve fought in Barcelona, but our goal is revolutionary victory. This means defeating the enemy, but also a radical change in men (*sic*). For that change to occur, man must learn to live and conduct himself as a free man, an apprenticeship that develops his personality and sense of responsibility, his capacity to be master of his own acts. The worker on the job not only transforms the material on which he works, but also transforms himself through that work. The combatant is nothing more than a worker whose tool is a rifle — and he should strive toward the same objective as the worker. One can’t behave like an obedient soldier, but rather as a conscious man who understands the importance of what he’s doing. I know that it’s not easy to achieve this, but I also know that what can’t be accomplished with reason will not be obtained by force. If we have to sustain our military apparatus with fear, then we won’t have changed anything except the colour of the fear. It’s only by freeing itself from fear that society can build itself in freedom.”

—Buenaventura Durruti to Perez Farras: July 1936.

Conventional military discipline is calculated to dismantle the individual personality and replace it with a corporate one, so that soldiers consider themselves as disposable as their leaders do. Similar, but (sometimes) subtler methods are employed by political parties, religious groups and large corporations to the same end. These techniques prey on, and pervert the natural craving for group identity, acceptance and solidarity. Committed militant anarchists being somewhat thin on the ground, are not disposable, as Durruti was acutely aware, having just lost his friend and comrade Francisco Ascaso. In fact the victory over the fascists in Barcelona came at the cost of many unique and exceptional human beings; heroes will never be disposable, nor can they be manufactured by psychological manipulation, they arise from the nurture of qualities we all possess, but are discouraged from developing.

Anarchists are not in the business of telling people what to do or leading them anywhere they don’t wish to go. We’d like our ideas to be discussed, adopted, and where necessary adapted, but our fundamental principles of solidarity, equality and self-government are not negotiable. We are very much a minority in the class, we can only agitate, inform, persuade and teach by example. Let everybody have their say, you may have heard it all before, but the experience of being listened to will effect a more positive transformation than the experience of being interrupted. We must beware, as a comrade once rebuked me, of superimposing our theory on the life experience of others. We cannot be afraid of our separate perceptions of reality as each will escape the cultural hegemony at a different point, it will not be an exact science.

“When the revolution begins, it has to be pushed as far as it will go. As long as some people have the power to violate the freedom of others, the revolution remains unfinished. Even so, the

pressures of fear, envy, spite, hedonism, corruption, and reaction are ever-present and ineradicable. So the revolution can never be said to be 'finished'. The struggle is forever; that is the true nature and, perhaps, even the necessary tragedy that blights the human condition. In the meantime, the violence that oppresses has to be opposed by whatever means of resistance are appropriate or available to each individual or community.

For anarchists, the essential precondition of revolution — of all actions that pursue the dream of the just society — is the safeguarding of the delicate moral thread between ends and means so that it remains unbroken. The dilemma is a familiar one: power that corrupts righteousness, the perverting tension between high ideals and the desire to use force and cunning to attain them. Power and authority are inescapable features of all social organisations, including anarchist ones; they are 'givens' that will persist no matter what the prevailing order of society. The problem is ensuring that they are perceived as legitimate, rational, competent, and subject to constant scrutiny and criticism. They must also be temporary."

—Stuart Christie: *Pistoleros! The Chronicles of Farquhar McHarg*: Volume 1: 1918

Revolutions are not made by revolutionaries, but by the mass of the people when their conditions become intolerable, either because they are starving or because their moral and cultural expectations have been elevated. At this point the conscious minority who have agitated for the transformation of society must allow the revolution to take on a life of its own. When people find themselves abandoned by the institutions on which they depend they will rapidly step up to the mark and create their own organically, because every human has it in them to do so. Most will act co-operatively, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Some interests will seek to exploit the situation and exercise power over others, these, frankly must be destroyed.

"Let us therefore trust the eternal Spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternal source of all life. The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!"

—Mikhail Bakunin: 'Reaction in Germany' 1842

We're building the new world in the shell of the old, but we're being too kind to the shell. Co-operatives, green initiatives, youth and community projects, these are good ideas, so capitalism co-opts them, and crucially, finds a way to profit from them. We should keep these things free of their interference. The shell must not limit or confine us, even as it's expanding and absorbing our blows, we have to break it to pieces. Transaction, and its evil twin coercion, can form no part of a humane society. As long as they are at its heart, there will be status, there will be power, and it will be self-perpetuating.

We are not here to lead but to engineer a meltdown of power, opening all the doors for this surge of free democratic expression. If there is any gap between our theory and practice it will become a yawning chasm into which the uprising will fall. Where the means are immoral the ends will fade from sight, and the means will become reified, as happened in the Soviet Union. If anarchist ideas gain ground, and I can't see any alternative strategy for the survival of our species, we have really no idea what people will want to do with their freedom, anarchy when it comes will be practiced mostly by those not of the anarchist tradition.

Which then begs the question: can organisational methods developed in class struggle be fit for purpose in a classless society? The answer is we don't know! We are all distorted in some

way by the oppression we have experienced, witnessed or perhaps unwittingly participated in. It would be glib to suggest that any bureaucratic structures we create in the name of equality will simply wither away when everyone is equal, as the dictatorship of the proletariat spectacularly failed to do.

We need a revolution of the mind, but not in the way meant by mystics and philosophers; abandon the concept of transaction, for if you believe as the market theorists would have it, that every decision is based on a personal cost-benefit analysis, you have accepted that your greed is only limited by your fear. When we strip away the ideology and focus on the reality, we are just seven billion people stood on a rock, totally interdependent in such a way that no-one's life or freedom is more or less important than any other.

A fungal spore alights on a fallen trunk, it embeds itself in the dead wood and weaves its threads between and along the fibres, prising them apart, and taking such sustenance as it needs, spreads out through the forest floor, feeding the living trees and carrying their chemical messages back and forth. It breaks down the useless old material into its components and builds them up into something new and magnificent that blasts more spores into the wind. Countless organisms feed on its body, when conditions are unfavourable it lies dormant, but it never dies.

### 33. Direct democracy and consensus.

An important aspect of prefiguring the new society is the practice of direct rather than representative democracy using recallable mandated delegates, with consensus decision making.

“Too long have the workers of the world waited for some Moses to lead them out of bondage. I would not lead you out if I could; for if you could be led out, you could be led back again. I would have you make up your minds that there is nothing that you cannot do for yourselves.”

—Eugene V. Debs, 1905,

Once a worker takes on a representative role, whether by standing for office or becoming a paid union official, they face a conflict of interests. A trade union leader must sell the benefits of membership to workers in order to build the union; she must also persuade management that she can deliver industrial peace or they will not negotiate. Crucially, she must be seen to put the interests of her membership above those of fellow workers in other unions or none, all the while maintaining the fiction that the management and workforce have some interest in common, in effect denying the fact of class struggle. Most unions today want dues-paying members, peace and quiet. Many trade union leaders of my youth ended up sat in the house of lords.

The elected politician, who sits at the tables of the bourgeoisie drinking their claret, may promise the earth to the electorate, but will surely deliver it to the bourgeoisie. Few of our politicians will ever have seen the shop floor let alone a call centre. Their education is in politics, their experiences and their interests are those of the political class, above all they want to carry on getting paid for what they do, and retired politicians usually end up fabulously wealthy. Nowadays politics is seen as a career choice, to stand a chance of office they must join a mainstream party, which will be virtually indistinguishable from any other capitalist business down to its accountants and marketing consultants. Here they will champion their own party over others as guardian of perceived mainstream values whilst they brown-nose their way up a career ladder. They are managers, they are executives, they are rubbish, they are dead weight in public life as are their counterparts in industry.

“The two front benches [in Parliament] liked each other and disliked their back benches ... We were children of the famous consensus... turning the opposition into government made little difference, for we believed much the same things.”

—Brian Walden: Labour MP and broadcaster.

The post-war consensus, or ‘social-democratic settlement’ gave way to the neoliberal consensus, and may yet be replaced with something even worse.

There is nothing whatsoever wrong with leadership; a leader is no more than someone people have chosen to follow, and they can stop following at any time. What is harmful is the assumption of entitlement to lead, or compulsion to follow, which taints the entire concept. An ambition to leadership for its own sake is surely a personality defect; the ambition to leadership for the

purpose of enriching oneself is contemptible, yet such people are followed and celebrated by millions.

How many ways can I say it? Representative democracy is a con! Elected representatives mediate between labour and capital as priests and kings of old mediated between the slaves and the gods; all the while living lives of indolence and luxury on the labour of others; the power relationship is as fixed now as it was then. Majority rule by definition creates winners and losers, it invites the oppression of minorities, the buying of influence and the manipulation of the electorate. Under majority rule there is little appetite for listening to dissent or minority interests because they are always outvoted, they are left to protesting impotently in police kettles. This is why we have nuclear weapons, pollute rivers and bomb other people's cities. It is why police kill innocents and get away with it.

Direct democracy inverts the hierarchy so that society is built from its foundations, the working and producing class; that's not to say that one must work to qualify for a say. There will always be some who are incapable of producing, and their status as fellow human beings qualify them for our respect (you either feel that way or you don't, I can't explain it to you). Such people will also have a voice, and in a world dedicated to efforts more worthwhile than concentrating power, ways may be found for them to contribute, according to their abilities. In any committee all members are equal regardless of age, ability or education.

Consensus decision-making doesn't imply that everyone has to agree about everything. Some will be ambivalent on many issues, or will hold only mild preferences. Many such people simply won't turn up to the meeting. They may, having given their opinion, choose to abstain to speed up the process and allow time for other business. To stand aside is to withdraw from the issue and absolve oneself from any adverse consequences. The veto is an extreme position and should be used very rarely. Ideally the question should be put in such a way that no person or group is put in that position. It means "I/we will leave the collective if this motion passes." If some residents in a given location don't want a road or railway through their community it can't be imposed on them from above.

The important thing is that all who will be affected by a decision are heard and obtain an outcome they can live with. The other necessity is for those who will be implementing the plan to agree that it is feasible and a worthwhile use of their time and skills. So everyone must have a common goal and be committed to achieving consensus. If two groups are totally at odds, best they go it alone.

In a federal system, upper level meetings will involve delegates who are carrying the mandate of a group. They will have been selected by their group for their understanding of its case and their ability to argue it coherently, but will have no power to vary it. They may be given a conditional mandate, e.g. "if  $a=b$  then  $x$ , otherwise  $y$ " a fact-finding one, "see if any of this affects us and report back" or an open one, "get the best compromise."

"Anyone who makes plans for after the revolution is a reactionary."

—Mikhail Bakunin

I said at the top I wasn't going to compare different models for the allocation of resources and division of labour under anarchy. When the mass of the proletariat is left to its own devices, and it is no longer a proletariat in reference to someone else's mode of production, who can say what choices it will make? Different communities may choose their own administrative methods.

Nevertheless, I've got a few ideas of my own that I submit for consideration here, and in the next chapter.

One way I can see it working is for local committees to form, representing maybe twenty families or dwellings. Such a level of participation would certainly build cohesion and understanding, and have a fair range of experience, anyone who wishes to join these should be welcomed. They would send delegates to area committees and regional committees. Within each geographical area there would be supply committees, water committees, energy, education, transport, environment and health committees. Each would have delegates from the residents, and the workers in each sector. Any group with special requirements, such as the chronically ill or disabled, would have its own committee and send delegates to the others. A member of the transport committee would need to sit on the supply committee, and so would delegates from workers growing and processing food, who may be in other areas. Issues such as power generation and water purification would be best discussed on a regional basis whereas food distribution could be done locally.

I'm envisaging a society beyond transaction and competition. I like Kropotkin's idea of interspersing dwellings and factories with greenhouses or allotments so that staple foods can be grown close to the end user, minimising waste and removing the need for much bureaucracy, everyone would know where to go for a cabbage or some carrots. People might choose to eat in communal canteens staffed by people who enjoy cooking, volunteer to help with the washing up or contribute some of their own produce. If this sounds a bit like the old Saxon village system that's because it is, but we'll all have solar panels, heat pumps, and little windmills feeding into the electricity grid.

If residents need another bus route or a late bus the transport workers might ask for more volunteers to drive and maintain the vehicles. No-one's getting a bollocking for coming in late so if old Mrs Schumacher wants to visit her friend on a Tuesday morning the driver would be happy to make a short detour, and we'll all understand. We're always going to need ambulances and fire engines, so more people will train to operate these appliances.

I'm especially interested in how a voluntary society would execute large civil engineering projects, where some people would need to commit for years. Given that it can be done in this dysfunctional mess I'm confident we could pull it off. Lots of us love to see a job seen through to a successful conclusion. A culture of openness and shared responsibility would allow one to quickly pick up where another has left off. We're going to inherit a catastrophic legacy from capitalism, their nuclear power stations and weapons that will remain toxic for a thousand generations to come. Pondering these problems will give us something to do with all that free time.

Sometimes it may be useful to appoint an advisory committee of specialists, they may be retired skilled workers, or research scientists. They would report to committees but not participate in decision making and should not be personally affected by the outcome.

An epidemiologist may have a say on a new sewerage system, so will the chemist, the drainage engineer, the lorry driver and the worker who digs the holes and lays the pipes. Above all, those who will operate the system and those who must live on top of it. Are there enough pipes being made? Is there enough plant? What about road access?

The idea is that people will be making decisions within their fields of expertise, expressing opinions and desires about other areas, being presented with the available information. There will be no monopolies on knowledge or truth because training will be available in any subject to

anyone who wishes to undertake it. We could be there now, thanks to the internet it's possible to access scientific papers, or raw experimental data and apply your own statistical analysis. Many are currently held behind pay-walls, but of course all that will go.

That's enough prescriptions from me; consensus is tried and tested, with long traditions in native American and African societies among many others. There are plenty of resources available on how to operate it in practice.



## 34. Demand-led production.

Considering the success of the Japanese automotive industry in the 1980's capitalists in the West began to look into their production methods, chiefly Toyota's. Japan having gone from feudalism to industrial capitalist oligopoly via fascism in three generations, its culture was still geared to small scale pre-alienated manufacture. A form of the Toyota Production System was imported into various manufacturing industries in the U.K., and a semblance of it persists today. I had some experience of its original introduction in the sphere of commercial electronics and light engineering.

Called 'lean' or 'cellular' manufacturing the idea was to minimise over-production and reduce waste by adopting a 'pull' approach where manufacture was led by orders for finished goods. Each stage of the process held a minimal stock of parts, held in magazines on the shop floor — called 'kanban' from the Japanese — which were topped up only when they fell below a minimum level. Instead of workers sitting on a production line all day repetitively creating batches of parts to sit on the shelf, they would instead move around small cells producing sub-assemblies one at a time. When the order was complete they would tidy up and move on to the next job, it was supposed to allow flexibility of production and give the opportunity for workers to cross-train in different tasks. Rather than having each department ordering boxes of fasteners for example, the supplier would just come in and top up all the bins to a pre-determined level. Once the cell was set up it would virtually run itself, or rather the workers would take care of everything, including training new staff.

Like anything suddenly popularised it contained a good deal of sense and a generous helping of dogma, what happened of course was that the hierarchy in charge of implementing it threw out the baby and kept the bathwater. A bunch of more or less useless management types went on courses and came away with a talent for spouting jargon, producing pie graphs and flow charts, then got hired as consultants or project managers etc. Inspirational posters went up all over the place and everything got moved around. It lost a great deal in translation, the concept of '5S' derived from five Japanese words that happened to begin with sibilants. I'll spare you the excruciating triteness of the translation into English, but it was interpreted by management as 'throwing stuff away'.

Naturally the capitalists' drive for efficiency in production was to reduce cost and maximise the yield from labour-power, a lot of sanctimonious bullshit about saving the environment was indulged in and when they took away all the chairs, to keep the workforce moving around the cells, they explained that it was good for us and would reduce backache. Of course it was done so gracelessly that we all immediately acquired medical exemptions. A lot of warehouse staff were shed and the increased pressure on suppliers to manage their own orders exerted a downward pressure on wages. Meanwhile it has bled into service industries as precarity, you don't have a job until someone calls for you.

What became clear though, was that it made an entire layer of middle management obsolete, they sat in their offices twiddling their thumbs and drawing graphs, or whiled away the days

having meetings, showing people round and taking them to lunch. They've rowed back from it ever since; the concept of 'Quality Assurance' which basically means there's no requirement for the product to work as long as the paperwork's in order, gave them the perfect excuse to tie every task up with procedures and documentation so difficult to follow that the managers would need to be on hand to sort it all out. Some made work for themselves so effectively they had to take on deputies. One factory I worked in had 32 telephone extensions, of which half had the appellation of 'manager' or 'controller', the remaining 16 covered design, test and production engineers, inspectors, drawing office, goods in, packing and despatch, stores and admin staff. On top of that there was 5 or 6 production staff, who shared a telephone, and a couple of maintenance people.

Naturally like any skilled worker I resented having someone who hadn't a clue what I did come along and tell me how to do it, but what I took away from the whole affair was the realisation that without too much upheaval, all production could be demand-led, organised from the ground up, with different functions integrated across industries in an organic way. The final step the bosses couldn't take of course, was to de-alienate the process. Stop making commodities for exchange and make only those things that fulfil human need, no one need be at work until there is work to be done.

Take out the competition, profit motive, and the top-down organisation, shoot all the managers (only kidding, let 'em find their own level of usefulness, like making the tea or cleaning the shithouses) and there would be no need for overall control, nothing would be made until it was required, one would only have to know which workers to ask and call for it in good time. If demand fell in one sector and rose in another, the workers could change roles, be trained up by their colleagues and spread the load. Factories would be designed for maximum flexibility, producing many different items. They could be modular, with each process serving several lines, and a little railway track for shifting sub-assemblies around. It might be fun for a team to follow the job around, casting here, machining there, spraying, wiring and finishing,

Everyone would work at their own pace and when the work was done we could all go and do something more interesting. Given that most activity in capitalist society is futile I believe no one would have to do more than a couple of hours anyway, we'd train in many disciplines and swap jobs often to avoid getting bored. The lines between work and recreation would start to dissolve. Voluntary association would depend on the task at hand; there are people I couldn't possibly work with on laying out a garden but could easily collaborate with on digging a ditch.

## 35. Reformist and reactionary tendencies in Class Struggle.

“Obstructing the doors causes delay and can be dangerous”

—London Transport. 1980s

Class struggle throws up some highly reactionary positions. The reason is obvious: our enemy relies on a system of values and beliefs that are self-contradictory and ultimately irreconcilable, so when we fight the system from inside, we often seem to be shooting in two directions at once. For the bourgeoisie this isn't a problem, it doesn't matter to them whether the Working Class believe all their nonsense or not, as long as some sections believe some of it, and those beliefs contradict each other.

The day to day business of class struggle lends itself to reaction because it is essentially reactive; at time of writing, the bourgeoisie remains the only successful revolutionary class. As the bourgeoisie tweaks the mode of production to maximise return on its investments and tighten its dominance, the divided and alienated proletariat often sees no way forward but to turn the clock back, even if it's only as far as last week.

Workers have historically identified themselves with the work they do, to the extent of taking names such as Turner, Mason or Weaver, because their acquired skill was all they had to bargain with, or take pride in. Under bourgeois alienation there is a crushing burden in being defined by the nature of your oppression. I've already elaborated on the woeful efforts of skilled trades to preserve their received status by excluding women and immigrants. One of the skills of the bourgeoisie is to make sure its adversaries play it at its own game.

In its neoliberal phase, capitalism has abandoned many of the values that nurtured it through adversity, and its opponents — or those whose stated agenda is to mitigate its worst excesses, since they lack the confidence to call for its overthrow — opportunistically hark back to these values. Stable families, the dignity of labour, social mobility, economic growth, patriotism, political and industrial representation; all these concepts are bourgeois in origin and lead us around in ever-decreasing circles. We cannot recover that which never belonged to us in the first place.

All we can reclaim is our dignity, by setting our own standards. The Luddite and Swing uprisings were magnificent not because they stood a chance of holding back the march of technology, but because they broke the power relationship to the bosses, along with the machines. If we are ever to escape the perverse death machine that denies and extinguishes every feature of humanity, we have no option but to attack those relations directly and purposefully.

The shift from reliance on surplus-labour to reliance on fictitious capital means we don't have to care too much about economics. Capitalism was never about the allocation of resources or the satisfaction of needs but about the suppression of human activity. The labour theory of value is dead and they killed it. The labouring classes however, are still here and we're still responsible for everything of importance. All we have to do is accept that responsibility.

- That a continual agitation be carried on in favour of increasing the minimum wage, and shortening the hours of work, *until we have extracted the whole of the employers' profits.*
- That our objective be, *to build up an organisation, that will ultimately take over the [mining] industry, and carry it on in the interests of the workers.*
- Tonypandy Unofficial Reform Committee: 'The Miners' Next Step' 1912.

My italics. This remarkable document was written in the aftermath of the Cambrian Combine dispute. I urge everyone to read 'The Miners' Next Step' and inoculate themselves with the spirit of the Great Unrest, that current of revolutionary syndicalism that spread like wildfire around the globe.

As a point of interest, the Miners fiercely resisted nationalisation, and refused to even negotiate centrally. Because their industry was essential, they knew that as the bosses felt the pain, they would beg the state to take over, which:

"... simply makes a National Trust, with all the force of the Government behind it, whose one concern will be, to see that the industry is run in such a way, as to pay the interest on the bonds, ... and to extract as much more profit as possible, in order to relieve the taxation of other landlords and capitalists."

Which is precisely what happened.

Parliamentary democracy lured our class with the prospect of superseding capitalism, then set about convincing us there was no alternative. Even religion, that old 'pie in the sky', was often invoked by the late Tony Benn when politely requesting the bourgeoisie to be a little less beastly. Benn's dedication of a long and fruitless life to showing that socialism could be obtained by parliamentary means<sup>1</sup> conclusively proved the opposite. I have to admit this noble demonstration of futility was instrumental in convincing me I was an anarchist.

The nuclear family is no more than a machine for reproducing wage labourers and privatising their care, wage labour is the prostitution of dignity. The aspiration to 'better oneself' rests on the creation of a labouring class, a mirage offered in place of the security of subsistence by collective effort. You cannot do so without overtaking another of your class, so where's their social mobility? The rat race is refereed by the boss class.

Patriotism is the projection of clan loyalty onto an entity whose social and geographical boundaries are set by your oppressor. Large segments of the earth's surface are shortly to become uninhabitable, and the dominant political class is frantically trying to re-establish notions of national and folk identity to soften us up for some serious crimes against humanity. The latter concept may become obsolete. Nearly a million people have lost their lives in natural disasters already this Century,<sup>2</sup> and a tsunami that cleared the Netherlands sea defences could kill hundreds of millions.

In his 1989 work 'Remaking Society' Murray Bookchin wrote that the 'particularism' of proletarian revolution was inadequate to fend off the looming environmental catastrophe. At the time we all expected to perish in a nuclear holocaust rather than an ecological one. Then we thought we were going to run out of fossil fuel, but enough has been surveyed already to cook the planet three times over.

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<sup>1</sup> Especially nationalisation with compulsory arbitration boards and other corporatist horrors. Who wants a boss with his own army and police force?

<sup>2</sup> 2018.

Bookchin's description of ecology and feminism as 'transclass' issues grates a bit. If I read him correctly, and I'm pretty new to his work, he postulates that the imperative of human survival would even bring the bourgeoisie on board, but it's clear by now their even greater particularism can do nothing for us. We see the commodification of morality, with 'fair trade', carbon trading and green capitalism, the commodification of social duties like care of the elderly, and a new trade in the lives of the incapacitated and mentally ill. This is because there isn't anything specifically human about capitalism. It's a simple formula for extracting value from labour and the planet; it doesn't have an end point.

21<sup>st</sup> Century capitalism is little concerned with the production of things, yet it produces more things than ever, giving you bogus status to compete for. The bosses' status is underpinned by a vast cloud of fictitious capital, which somebody must be made to need or it confers no power. Why would anyone want to play such a stupid game? Capitalism lurches from crisis to crisis, from war to war, ever refining itself as a mechanism for maintaining the dominance of the few over the many. As it lays waste to its habitat and its subjects, it remains entirely successful in this. Many of the workers who produce the things, in the gadget, garment and gimmick factories of Asia, are de-facto slaves. I hope I've shown that success and advancement are collective or they are worthless. If we can't even free the slaves, or create the conditions under which they can free themselves, we will never be free.

I remember a time when you could punch a copper and duck up an alleyway, that evening you would be boasting about it in the pub. Now you'd have to burn your clothes and leave the country; they would expend vast sums of taxpayers' money to track you down, with their cameras and computers, then lock you away for years. That's the price you pay for convenience, instant payment, all your silly games and entertainments. The babylon know they can beat you to death or shoot you without endangering their pension, suspended on full pay while the enquiry exonerates them. Those of our Class who just want to turn back the clock will applaud the disciplining of 'uncontrollables'.

Recently some activists have fetishised peaceful protest, offering themselves as lambs to the police and judiciary. All they have achieved is provoking the state to criminalise peaceful protest, a move is afoot to ban the self-sacrificial forms of obstruction by attaching oneself to immovable objects. The point is that 'legitimate protest' isn't supposed to change anything, it's meant to convince you, and everyone else, of your powerlessness in the face of the ruling elite. Pretty soon there will be little to choose between demonstration and dynamite.

In practical short-term alliances with reformist unions anarchists often find that they are being used as a threat to strengthen the reformists bargaining position. From time to time even they despair of their political representatives; "call your dogs off" scream the bosses, "and you can have another penny an hour". If you're going to play that game remember the statist left will think nothing of grassing us up to the law. They are part of the system, it needs them and they need it.

There's a war on, you need to know which side you're on and who's there with you.

## 36. Mikhail Bakunin and antisemitism.

I like Bakunin a lot, I have great regard for this tireless revolutionary, who spent several years in prison chained to a wall and whose personal history shows him to have been also a kind and generous man. He influenced not only the collectivist strand of anarchism with which he is associated, but nihilism and anarcho-syndicalism. He warned against the authoritarianism of Marx and his followers, and correctly predicted the horrors of state Communism. The title of this work is taken from one of his more famous quotes — and he was always good for a quote.

I'm by no means a 'Bakunist' however, any more than I'm a Marxist or an 'Einsteinian'. Had we been contemporaries I would have had serious differences with him. In his personal correspondence he made a number of statements of crude antisemitism I find repellent and unworthy. He blamed a Jewish conspiracy for capitalism, as Churchill and Hitler would later blame one for Bolshevism. In fact, he seized on Marx's enthusiasm for a central bank as evidence that he too was in thrall to this conspiracy.

"5. Centralization of credit in the banks of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly."

—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: "Manifesto of the Communist Party"

The ugliest and most frequently repeated of the antisemitic rants attributed to Bakunin, which amid lurid accusations of sectarianism and parasitism claims "*this Jewish world today stands for the most part at the disposal of Marx and at the same time at the disposal of Rothschild*" might be a caricature.<sup>1</sup> Allegedly from a letter to the Bologna section of the International in 1871, the earliest source I have been able to find is a German publication from 1924, when there were other agendas at work.

In his published works, Judaism is only referred to in the context of his critique of religion in general. Was he simply using 'Jewish' colloquially as a synonym for bourgeois? Populist antisemitism was opportunistically appropriated by some 19<sup>th</sup> Century revolutionary movements, especially in central Europe. The perennial myth that Jews belonged to a secret transnational society, that they possessed hidden wealth, power and influence<sup>2</sup> resulted from ignorance and suspicion, as ever. Arguments framing them as moneylenders, profiteers and oppressors of the Slavs, must have seemed facile even at the time. The victims were not bankers but Working Class Jews and surely Bakunin had personal dealings with such people.

None of these factors, nor his bitter rivalry with Marx and other intellectuals who happened to be Jewish, nor his natural disdain for the social hegemony of the Abrahamic religions, excuse these comments. They are at odds with the rest of his work, for example his assertion that: "*I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free.*" Or "*The freedom of all is essential to my freedom.*"

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<sup>1</sup> And somewhat nonsensical, as absurd as Marx's allegation that Bakunin was a Russian agent.

<sup>2</sup> Like Freemasonry, which Bakunin briefly dabbled in.

Proudhon was also a paranoid anti-Semite, but do not come away with the idea that anti-semitism is a founding principle of anarchism nor that it has any place in the movement. There is a long and noble tradition of anarchist thought and action in the Jewish communities of Russia, Britain and the United States, and they have always been in the forefront of the fight against fascism. Peter Arshinov, in his eponymous history of the Makhnovist Movement relates that Nestor Makhno, on coming across an antisemitic poster, asked who had put it up. When the man stepped forward, Makhno drew a revolver and shot him. The rest of his unit, being recent defectors from a nationalist contingent were immediately stood down and sent home.

Ideas should not be tied to personalities or they become tainted. People will always judge the personality rather than the idea because it's less effort. The recent fashion of dismissing a person's entire canon for any ill-conceived word or action is not anarchist, it's clearly rooted in liberalism, as is guilt by association. Ideas can stand or fall on their merits regardless of the character of the person articulating them, this requires quite a mature perspective. The modern habit of using social justice issues as a stick with which to beat one's political rivals is borrowed from Marx and Engels, via Lenin & co. The point is that people are flawed, I can't be any different, nor can you. As the man himself wrote:

"Real humanity presents a mixture of all that is most sublime and beautiful with all that is vilest and most monstrous in the world."

— Mikhail Bakunin: God and the State

So we are safest when we follow ideas rather than people, and trust our own judgement. In the words of someone who never, so far as I know, expressed any political views but comes across as a great humanitarian:

"Research your own experiences: absorb what is useful, reject what is useless, add what is specifically your own"

—'Bruce' Lee Jun Fan.

## 37. “It’ll never happen.”

Well no it won’t if you just fucking sit there. I saw a poster once, on the back of a shithouse door as it goes, the gist of which was the idea: *“pessimism is counter-revolutionary!”*

Getting the job done is often just a matter of knowing which hammer to hit it with. Wherever a minority oppresses a majority, or vice versa, this must be resisted, by force if necessary, but with the minimum of bloodshed. The structures and institutions we oppose are held in place by violent coercion, but anarchists are not violent by nature; we take great pains to avoid hurting each other, even with our speech and conduct. If only you could walk away from a prison or an invading army without hurting anyone.

Anarchist violence has always been defensive, but not necessarily reactive, it eschews petty vengeance and personal vendetta, it doesn’t need to be justified, any more than the other side feels the need to justify its relentless everyday atrocities. There is always an end in mind, a practical purpose. We’ve punched a few fascists and assassinated the occasional tyrant but we’ve never had a flypast of bombers or paraded missiles on trucks. The importance of prefiguration cannot be overstated. We must take small steps and we must do it together. Overthrowing the state is not the same as taking it over, I would like to see it abolished completely, but first the Working Class must take responsibility for itself.

If the workers take a notion,  
They can stop all speeding trains;  
Every ship upon the ocean  
They can tie with mighty chains  
Every wheel in the creation,  
Every mine and every mill,  
Fleets and armies of the nation,  
Will at their command stand still.

—Joe Hill: ‘Workers of the World, Awaken’.

All over the world communities are organising to defend themselves against fascist gangs or developments that threaten their environment, only the Working Class can do this. Capitalism is our problem and it survives only with the compliance of workers in Dorset, Minnesota and Guangdong. Practices of direct democracy or consensus are being developed, tried and tested; this is an idea whose time has come. Voluntary networks are forming for mutual aid and sharing information; in the process we educate each other and ourselves. What might have seemed a pipe dream twenty years ago is looking increasingly feasible through the new technology.

This is the common interest of the proletariat; the political side at least, our economic clout is exercised when we decline to participate in the economy, withdraw our labour or use it for purposes other than generating surplus-value. The seemingly invincible hegemony of the bourgeoisie depends on debt (an illusion), commodity fetishism (a form of collective insanity) and



evolutionary hangovers like social status and patriarchy. The alternative is developing beneath its feet, one morning you may awake to find the mirage of bourgeois reality has evaporated.

“Our social institutions are founded on certain ideas; as long as the latter are generally believed, the institutions built on them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present-day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism. Progress consists in abolishing what man has outlived and substituting in its place a more suitable environment.”

—Alexander Berkman: ‘ABC of Anarchism’.

There is of course another possible end to the story: if the optimism and determination of The Miners’ Next Step has worn off on you, and you are overwhelmed by the spectacle: “*today even more spectacular and more totalitarian than it was ever imagined to be, carrying its crimes to the extreme of assassinating reality itself*”<sup>1</sup> its mirages may drag you up your own virtual arsehole.

Everywhere there is talk of reform, of liberalisation, of progress, yet the grip of the bourgeoisie grows ever tighter. So we are led in imaginary chains to our destruction, dazzled by the spectacle as our world burns, persuaded by our captors to believe we have anything to lose by sorting the bastards out. Here we come face to face with the perennial dilemma between individual and collective action.

Capitalism and the state are not capable of solving humanity’s crises, we will have to do it because we’re the only class that ever does anything. As time runs out there is a nagging suspicion that the world will not be saved and there is nothing left to us but revenge. I’m fascinated by tales of resistance in the Nazi death camps, for all the thousands who were led trance-like to their doom many kicked off, disarming, injuring or killing their captors only to be machine-gunned immediately, and fell with their humanity undefeated. Some lacked the strength to do more than spit in the faces of their executioners, so they did that. Most of these were individual acts of defiance, but others organised, plotted, conspired against all odds to pull off assassinations, sabotage, escapes, and of course very few survived.

If the workers of the world are too slow to awaken, we could take a leaf from the nihilists.<sup>2</sup> Since the enemy is everywhere we can strike it anywhere, any time.

Nihilism was a reaction to the partial reforms of a leader who remained explicitly an autocrat.<sup>3</sup> It was a rejection of style in favour of substance, a rejection of mysticism and mythology in favour of natural science, a rejection of ideology in favour of utility.

There are many well-rehearsed arguments against terrorism (vanguard adventurism, revolutionary gymnastics, propaganda by the deed etc). It makes the population feel unsafe and excuses repression, it separates the revolutionary from their class, and can corrupt those who practise it. The masses are seldom inspired by bandits and no state that wasn’t already on its way out was ever overthrown this way.

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<sup>1</sup> Anselm Jappe: (*op.cit.*)

<sup>2</sup> Now, according to Volin, Russian nihilism was only an intellectual and philosophical current, and self-styled ‘nihilist revolutionaries’ were just appropriating the name because they liked the sound of it; I don’t know.

<sup>3</sup> Tsar Alexander the second, killed by ‘nihilist revolutionaries’.

However, anyone who feels safe right now is deluded, and while capitalism thrives the political structures it once relied on are less relevant, running to catch up with their master as its relations of dominance become more visibly direct. In a world run by demagogues and corporate moguls, imagine the human suffering that could be avoided by blowing the heads off them. That isn't propaganda by the deed, it's more akin to clearing up the dog shit in the park. Guerrilla gardening and tyrannicide share a common motivation, making your environment more pleasant to live in. The CNT-E's assassinations of Cardinal Soldevilla and Bravo Portillo come into that category. Nihilism and syndicalism are often posited as opposites, I see them as different potential strategies for removing the obstacles to our goal of a free society.

"Ironically, if I hadn't chosen to fight back in jail, and suffer the consequences, I doubt that I would have survived. Had I conformed and submitted in the vain hope that such 'model prisoner' behaviour would be rewarded with a reasonably early release, I'd have withered and died as a proud human being and lost the essence of my humanity. To submit to repression is to die — to die mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and in every way that defines us as real human beings."

—John Bowden: 'Unbroken!'

I've shared my reasons for being an anarchist. I've examined all the alternatives and I believe I've given them fair consideration. If you want to know what kind of person you would be without submitting to illusion or delusion, without the weight of your chains bending you out of shape; if you want to achieve your full potential as a human being, take courage, for there is no other way to live.

Whatever happens, we couldn't possibly do any worse than this.

**Mal C x**

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