# Inventing Ordinary *Anarchy* in Cold War Britain

Sophie Scott-Brown

17 May 2023

# Contents

## Abstract

When you think of 1960s anarchism, community playgrounds and financial planning for tenants' associations may not spring to mind, yet these, along with similar topics, were Anarchy's (1961–1970) staple fare. The A5 monthly, edited by British journalist Colin Ward (1924–2010), maintained a steady output of 'anarchist applications' in the spheres of education, housing, and community development. Although published during the 1960s, the origins and ethos of the journal lay in the previous decade. Responding to this heightened Cold War "moment," Ward developed an idiosyncratic radical pragmatism prioritizing the practice of popular democracy over the theory of it. In reconstructing Anarchy's intellectual formation, this article contributes to revisionist scholarship acknowledging a more experimental radical culture in 1950s Britain than is usually granted, one that prefigured aspects of the later counterculture but also differed from it in important respects.

## Introduction

Looking back at the postwar left, socialist historian Raphael Samuel declared that *Anarchy: A Journal of Anarchist Ideas* (1961–70) was the most radical reading around in the 1960s, over and above *New Left Review* (1960–), the journal he helped to cofound.[1] While his comment owed much to lingering tensions within the British New Left (NL), it was still a strange choice. If anything, *Anarchy* went out of its way *not* to be radical, or at least not to appear to be. The A5-sized monthly, edited by journalist Colin Ward (1924–2010), with iconic front covers by Rufus Segar (1932–2015), devoted entire issues to community playgrounds, self-building, therapeutic alternatives to prison, and financial planning for tenants' associations. There was no inflamed rhetoric reviling capitalists and imploring the workers to rise; the house style was calm and benignly reasonable.

As Samuel's remark suggests, *Anarchy* had an influence beyond its relatively brief life span and modest subscription figures (2,800). The journal grew out of, and alongside, *Freedom*, the paper founded by Charlotte Wilson and Peter Kropotkin in 1886 and revived by Italian anarchists Vernon Richards and Marie Louise Berneri in 1936. As a *Freedom* editor (from 1947), Ward inevitably identified with Kropotkin's social anarchism, describing his work as "an updating footnote" to the Russian's.[2] Broadly, this committed him to a view of the individual as a socially constituted being and of equality as a necessary precondition for liberty.

The main features of his—and therefore *Anarchy*'s—updated social anarchism were pacifism, gradualism, and pragmatism. In place of violent popular insurrection, he stressed nonviolent action directed toward piecemeal change in the present.[3] To this, Stuart White added respectability as an essential correlate of his pragmatic outlook. Ward, White argued, countered prevailing

---

[1] Samuel, Raphael, "Then and Now: A Re-evaluation of the New Left," in Robin Archer, Diemut Bubeck, Hanjo Glock, Lesley Jacobs, Seth Moglen, Adam Steinhouse, and Daniel Weinstock, eds., Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left (London, 1989), 39–58, at 148.

[2] Ward, Colin, Anarchy in Action (1973) (London, 2008), 10.

[3] Goodway, David, "Colin Ward," in Goodway, Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left Libertarian Thought from William Morris to Colin Ward (Oakland, 2012), 309–25; Honeywell, Clarissa, "Colin Ward and the Future of British Anarchism," in Honeywell, A British Anarchist Tradition (London, 2011), 88–105; Wilbert, Chris and White, Damien, Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility: The Colin Ward Reader (Edinburgh, 2011), vii–xxx. See also Levy, Carl, ed., Colin Ward: Life, Thought, Times (London, 2013).

stereotypes of anarchism as violent extremism or utopian idealism by connecting it with contemporary intellectual currents and pointing to culturally familiar examples of mutual aid or cooperation in everyday life.[4] White located this "respectable anarchism" within a nexus of postwar debates among the *Freedom* group, emphasizing Ward's affinities with contemporaries Herbert Read and Alex Comfort. Alongside the American writer Paul Goodman, the three are often described as a "bridging generation" between classical anarchism's pursuit of total social revolution, and "new anarchism" which, with its focus on the individual, helped facilitate a cultural turn in the movement.

At a general level, this account assumes a stability to terms like "classical" and "new" which does not bear close examination. As David Morland observed, anarchism always accommodated a generous range of positions, with different factions becoming more prominent at some times than others.[5] More problematic is the notion of a "bridging generation." While there was agreement between figures like Read, Comfort, and Ward on issues like nonviolence, the importance of the individual, and the value of education, there were fundamental differences on the question of anarchism's "scientific" status. For Read and Comfort, the modern social sciences, especially psychology, not only aligned with anarchist principles but legitimized them as the necessary conditions for human flourishing.[6] If the two men were pragmatic in insisting that the scientific findings of the day justified anarchism, this justification still relied on, and appealed to, the Enlightenment's ideal of a rational autonomous subject.[7]

*Anarchy* is usually considered the primary organ of this social-scientific anarchism, but both the journal and its editor had a more negotiated engagement with the social sciences than the association implies.[8] On this matter at least, Ward aligned closer to a *radical* pragmatist position. Following Michael Sullivan and Daniel Solove's account, the radical pragmatist, while still committed to the "facts of the day," adopts a more ambivalent, ironical, stance towards them, conscious of their contingent and provisional nature. They also accept as relevant to all modes of social inquiry seemingly "nonrational" factors—such as beliefs, desires, ideals, and intuitions.[9]

Given this embrace of contingency, no one theory or plan, no matter how comprehensive, could hope to capture a universally satisfying design for living. For Ward, then, "conceding the practice of democracy" by stimulating as much active, voluntary participation in social organization as possible was more important than prescribing specific kinds of organization.[10] As such, the main thrust of his anarchist advocacy focused on promoting democratizing methods in all

---

[4] White, Stuart, "Making Anarchism Respectable? The Social Philosophy of Colin Ward," Journal of Political Ideologies 12/1 (2007), 11–28; White, "Social Anarchism, Lifestyle Anarchism, and the Anarchism of Colin Ward," in Levy, *Colin Ward*, 116–33.

[5] Morland, David, Demanding the Impossible: Human Nature and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Social Anarchism (London: 1997).

[6] Adams, Matthew S., Kropotkin, Read and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism (Basingstoke, 2015), 62–72; Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition*, 79–132.

[7] May, Todd, The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism (Philadelphia, 1994), ix. See also Franks, Benjamin, "Postanarchism: A Critical Assessment," Journal of Political Ideologies 12/2 (2007), 127–45; Newman, Saul, The Politics of Postanarchism (Edinburgh, 2010).

[8] Shantz, Jeff and Williams, Dana, Anarchy and Society: Reflections of Anarchist Sociology (Leiden, 2013), 40–50; White, "Social Anarchism, Lifestyle Anarchism and the Anarchism of Colin Ward," 122.

[9] Sullivan, Michael and Solove, Daniel J., "Radical Pragmatism," in Alan Malachowski, ed., Cambridge Companion to Radical Pragmatism (Cambridge, 2013), 324–45.

[10] Williams, Raymond, Culture and Society 1780–1950 (London, 1958), 341.

spheres of life: workers' control in industry, citizen's control in planning, dwellers' control in housing, and student/teachers' control in education.

This adds another layer of significance to his creed of respectability. To cultivate anarchism as a common social activity, it was not enough to render anarchist ideas "sensible," they had to be "useable," things that people could, and would, apply in their daily lives. This was the reasoning behind *Anarchy*, as he explained in a private interview: "You could say it was a confidence trick, by making the reader believe that anarchism was not a way-out notion, but was an aspect of everyday life, one of the currents of contemporary thought, and therefore had to be taken seriously."[11] As a self-identified anarchist propagandist (rather than thinker), Ward was sensitive to audiences in a way that intellectuals like Read and Comfort were not, or were far less so. He observed not only the facts of the day, but also what they meant to people. His radical pragmatist outlook, and *Anarchy* as its main outlet, evolved through paying this sort of close attention to his times, namely the political–intellectual culture of the 1950s.[12]

Even before it had finished, the 1950s were written off as conformist, apathetic, and intellectually conservative, frozen in a Cold War paradigm. In its crudest form this simply carved life up into a rigid ideological dichotomy, but it was more complex than that.[13] As Louis Menand noted of Cold War America (the same might be applied to Britain), underpinning this was a near universal mood of antitotalitarianism which both cut across and connected a spectrum of otherwise disparate positions. Antitotalitarian sentiment was not just anticommunist; it could also be anti-anticommunist.[14] In other words, some variants were just as critical of the totalizing tendencies *within* liberalism as outside it.

In the case of Britain, as Jim Smyth noted, this produced a more politically interesting situation than is generally acknowledged.[15] Increasing disillusionment with traditional politics of all kinds, compounded by the Cold War, the nuclear programme, and the speed of change from austerity to "affluence," produced a glimpse of a possible future, prompting some to conclude that very different modes of thinking about and practicing politics were now necessary. The challenge was imagining what these were and how they would work. One response came through a revival of grassroots, direct-action traditions which, rejecting "party and parliamentary" methods, privileged "ordinary" people and issue-based (rather than ideological) campaign models.

This connects with what Lawrence Black called a transition from "political bodies" to the "politics of the body and the self," a shift marked by the emergence of new political spaces (Black cites Michael Young's Consumer Association) and a more pluralistic democratic spirit with people able to pick and choose how, and in what form, they engaged in politics.[16] Radicals, like Ward, went further still. Alongside alternative political forums, they urged a new political mentality. For Read this was the "politics of the unpolitical,"[17] for E. P. Thompson "the politics of

---

[11] Tony Gibson, "Interview with Colin Ward," TGP/ARCH0515, International Institute of Social History (IISH).

[12] The "1950s" are defined here as the period covering the three consecutive Conservative governments, 1951–64.

[13] Priestley, J. B., Thoughts in the Wilderness (New York, 1957), 1–3; MacKenzie, Norman, Conviction (Oxford, 1958), 17; Thompson, E. P., ed., Out of Apathy (London, 1960); Anderson, Perry, "Origins of the Present Crisis," New Left Review 1/23 (1964), 26–53; Anderson, "The Left in the Fifties," *New Left Review* 1/29 (1965), 3–18; Peter Laslett, ed., *Philosophy, Politics, Society* (New York, 1956), vii, x.

[14] Menand, Louis, The Free World: Art and Culture in Cold War America (London, 2021).

[15] Smyth, Jim, Cold War Culture: Intellectuals the Media and the Practice of History (London, 2021), 4–25.

[16] Black, Lawrence, Redefining British Politics (Basingstoke, 2010), 1–7.

[17] Read, Herbert, The Politics of the Unpolitical (London, 1943).

anti-politics."[18] More recently, Madeleine Davis described it as an "activist politics."[19] Across its various definitions this was usually imagined as a politics of ordinary people, for ordinary people, carried out by ordinary people in the most ordinary of places.

Emphasizing "ordinary" did not, or did not only, mean invoking a particular vision of the working class as it had done for a previous generation of writers.[20] Indeed, class became such a contested term during this time that appealing to it was problematic.[21] It came closer to a set of national character stereotypes extolled by writers like George Orwell in his 1941 essay "England Your England": unheroic, unsentimental, and practical.[22] While Orwell's overall account had dated by the 1950s, the qualities he observed intersected with emerging identities produced by shifting social formations, some of which were dramatized by the period's most iconic literature. Books like *Lucky Jim* (1954), *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1958), or *Absolute Beginners* (1959) introduced a new breed of "everyman" antiheroes who, caught between classes and cultures, struggled to get on, or even just by, in the new "mobile" society.[23]

The real significance of "ordinary" went beyond one or another set of class or national traits. These were only metaphors for describing a particular relationship and attitude towards power. "Ordinary" people did not want to acquire power, at least not permanently, nor even, in many cases, to exercise influence. They did not harbour desires, much less expectations, to do anything for the "greater good." They responded, instead, to matters directly effecting their private lives and perhaps those of their immediate communities. While this might sound like the opposite of radical, as the term is conventionally understood, for figures like Ward, tapping into those quotidian energies had revolutionary potential.

In this article, I show how his "ordinary anarchism" evolved through a series of debates among the anarchists on post-nuclear theory and strategy. These shadowed a general drift across the left from a strong "workerism" toward an emphasis on cultural transformation as the key site of revolutionary action. I note how he followed calls for an "educational" anarchism so far but objected to basing it on (as he saw it) overly deterministic accounts of human nature. Here he aligned with a wider struggle among contemporary intellectuals, including Isaiah Berlin, CND activists, and the *Universities and Left Review* (*ULR*) component of the First New Left, to reconcile political commitment with an acceptance, even embrace, of value pluralism. Finally, I show how he translated this "mood" into a tangible form in *Anarchy*. In doing so, however, the journal became disjointed from the new youth movement that flourished towards the close of the decade.

---

[18] Thompson, E. P., The Poverty of Theory (London, 1978), 19.

[19] Madeleine Davis, "Reappraising Socialist Humanism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18/1 (2013), 57–81; Michael Randle, "Non Violent Direct Action in the 1950s and 1960s," in Richard Taylor and Nigel Young, eds., *Campaign for Peace: British Peace Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 1987), 150–58.

[20] Marc Strears, *Out of the Ordinary: How Everyday Life Inspired a Nation and How It Can Again* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

[21] Stuart Hall, "A Sense of Classlessness," *Universities and Left Review*, Winter 1958, 26–31; Ralph Samuel, "Class and Classlessness," *Universities and Left Review*, Spring 1959, 44–51.

[22] Orwell, George, The Lion and the Unicorn (London, 2018), 6–8.

[23] Mandler, Peter, The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair (New Haven and London, 2006), 208; MacInnes, Colin, English Half English (London, 1961).

## Anarchism past and future

In Read's 1947 lecture "Anarchism Past and Future" the art critic declared that after two world wars, the discreditation of the Soviet Union, and the persistence of capitalism, there was little confidence that revolution as a physical seizure of the means of production by the people would be successful (or desirable). Above all and everything else, the atomic bomb handed the state absolute power with "decisive implications for revolutionary strategy."[24] Anarchists had now to adapt or perish as a romantic byway of history. This adaptation had to be in the field of ideas. "No fundamental thought has been devoted to the principles of anarchism for half a century," he argued; "the last important contribution to anarchism was Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, written fifty years ago."[25] Modern psychology, Read continued, was now sufficiently advanced to complete what Kropotkin had begun.

Psychology was indeed enjoying the beginning of a "golden age." This was part of a general expansion in the social sciences across British universities during this time, but it was also symptomatic of a larger shift in intellectual culture, the reasons for which are several. First, outside live conflict arenas, like Korea, the Cold War was experienced by many as a battle of beliefs. As well as understanding the nature of those beliefs, there was an interest in identifying the common traits exhibited by political radicals (for either recruitment or prevention purposes). Second, the institutions of the welfare state, although not created for this purpose, could supply more and better information about people's private lives.

The third reason was that, as the decade progressed, psychology, above all other sciences, seemed best placed to examine the effects of change; the breakdown of traditional social orders and community structures, the impact of affluence and aspiration, especially on the young.[26] As the Committee on Children and Young People reported (October 1960), "the material revolution is plain to see … It is not always so clearly recognised what a complete change there has been in social and personal relations … and also in the basic assumptions that regulate behaviour."[27] Ben Jackson demonstrated the significance of this "complete change" for revisionist currents within the Labour Party, while Lise Butler showed how Michael Young, frustrated with parliamentary Labour's inertia in grasping its magnitude, set up the Institute of Community Studies (ICS) in 1953 to investigate its implications.[28]

From the anarchists' perspective, the psychological turn, and the growth of the social sciences more broadly, brought mixed implications. In mainstream form, social-science research tended toward an unapologetic positivism, reinforcing the prevailing "end-of-ideology" mood and the hope (rather than conviction) that all explicit ideological systems (especially communism), along

---

[24] Herbert Read, "Anarchist Past and Future," in Read, *One-Man Manifesto*, ed. David Goodway (London, 1994), 117–25.

[25] Ibid., 117.

[26] Thomson, Mathew, Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain (Oxford, 2006). See also Farr, Robert, The Roots of Modern Social Psychology 1872–1954 (London, 1996). On the expansion of social sciences see Mike Savage, "1948–1962: The Remaking of Social Class Identities," in Savage, *Identities and Social Class in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford, 2010), 215–37; Halsey, A. H., The History of British Sociology (Oxford, 2004) 89–113; Roger E. Backhouse and Phillippe Fontaine, "Toward a History of the Social Sciences," in Roger E. Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine, eds., *The History of the Social Sciences since 1945* (Cambridge, 2010), 184–254.

[27] HMSO, *Committee on Children and Young People Report* (London, 1960), 17.

[28] Jackson, Ben, Equality and the British Left (Manchester, 2007), 151–210; Butler, Lise, Michael Young, Social Science and the British Left (Oxford, 2020).

with all other forms of "specious metaphysics," could (and should) be eradicated in favour of empirically robust scientific method.[29] Science of this order was powerful when rendered into policy, and imposed through an expanded education and welfare system. It had the capacity to define, and then regulate, "normal" human experience.

For anarchists like Read, however, committed to nonviolent social change, social psychology, with its preoccupation with relations between individual, group, and environment, did not erase anarchist ideology but affirmed it. It showed how individual neuroses (such as deviancy) and collective social maladies (such as crime) would be remedied, not perpetuated, by anarchism as the form of organization that most optimized the social instinct. To achieve this, wrote Alex Comfort, fellow *Freedom* writer and psychiatrist, anarchists must start with a systematic study of the history of psychology, pruning it of all tradition and superstition (all that could not be positively verified), "leaving only a science based on pure reason."[30] For both men, then, there was no need to develop a specifically "anarchist" theory of science. Anarchism would be justified by a more rigorous application of accepted scientific methods.

Like Read, Comfort believed that modern science vindicated anarchist principles and that ideas were the only effective radical weapons; as he put it, "a scientific attempt to ferret out the concrete factors in society, the family, and in the individual which lead to 'crime' of the delinquent type is in itself a revolutionary activity, if by revolution we mean the attempt to alter inadequate social patterns by deliberate action."[31] To this end, he wrote pamphlets demonstrating how social disorders stemmed from sexual suppression,[32] or how politicians exhibited classic "deviant" traits—sustained adolescence, perpetual craving for attention, and need for control—which government gratified without truly satisfying.[33]

Read agreed that the anarchists' most promising future lay in a comprehensive research programme. He concluded his 1947 lecture with a plea to see the word "revolution" (in its conventional usage) struck from anarchist propaganda and replaced by "education." Not, he conceded, that everyone was suited to study. Those whose more unruly temperaments inclined to activism could direct their energies to the current campaign to resist military conscription and, accordingly, thought should be given to forms of nonviolent action. But it should never be forgotten that the real revolution, the kind which did not immediately dissolve into tyranny, was individual and internal. The most effective action was "molecular."[34]

Neither Read nor the anarchists were alone in considering that a strategy shift was necessary for revolutionary thinking, nor unique in feeling that emphasis must now be placed on education and individual behavioural change as the main theatre of political action. In tracing the various tributaries to postwar cultural studies, Dennis Dworkin observed a similar preoccupation with social psychology among the Communist Party Historians' Group, who were themselves re-

---

[29] Smyth, *Cold War Culture*, 18–20; Edward Shils, "The End of Ideology?", *Encounter*, Nov. 1955, 52–8.

[30] Alex Comfort, "Introduction," in Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (London, 1950), at https://libcom.org/files/authority-delinquency.pdf (accessed 8 Oct. 2021).

[31] Ibid., 9; Alex Comfort, "Delinquency and Authority," *Freedom*, 2, 16 Sept. 1950.

[32] Comfort, Alex, Barbarism and Sexual Freedom (London, 1948).

[33] Comfort, "Delinquency and Authority." *Delinquency* anticipated two similar studies in political psychology: Theodore Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), and Hans Eysenck, *The Psychology of Politics* (1954). Like Adorno, but unlike Eysenck, Comfort acknowledged the authoritarian traits on both left and right but distinguished the psychological profile of the fascist from that of the communist. This caused considerable controversy amongst the anarchists. See Alex Comfort, "Stalin the Nerve Soother," *Freedom*, 20 Jan. 1951.

[34] Read, *One Man Manifesto*, 122, 125.

sponding to the party's popular-front policy of naturalizing Marxism within respective national pasts (and by extension, theoretically, the national psyche).[35]

Nevertheless, not all accepted the case. *Freedom* was inundated with letters lamenting the lecture as a "loss of vigour" among the left, or regretting Read's substitution of sociology (class struggle) for psychology (individuals).[36] Ward, a new recruit to the movement, aged just twenty-three, had a mixed response. On the one hand he welcomed the older man's vision of pacifistic, intellectually robust anarchism that persuaded through reason, rather than force, but worried about dispensing with the "rough and tumble of propaganda and agitation" quite so readily. Read, he felt, reduced activism to crude mechanics, executed according to the careful direction of cleverer comrades which went against what he believed anarchism to be about.

"Are we so justified in setting-at-nought the activities of the last 50 years because they have not found literary expression?" he asked, continuing, "anarchism began among the people and will only retain its vitality while it remains a movement of the people, and it is the revolutionary efforts of 'ignorant' and unlettered people, which (if we are willing to learn) should teach and encourage us."[37] It was not just that the suggestion of subordinating a popular movement to a vanguard was notoriously uncomfortable for anarchists—the basis for both Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michel Bakunin's criticisms of Marx and the First International in 1846 and 1872 respectively—but any break in that close connection risked losing anarchism's ethical and intellectual anchor. Anarchism had to maintain a close dialogue with people's daily lives, whatever form they took, because this was the raw material from which it continually redefined itself and its objectives. Collapsing the variety of popular life into any sort of unified theory, whether sociological or psychological in orientation, was not an advance on its principles but a retreat from them.

Ward found Comfort's position equally perplexing. Writing in the first edition of the *University Libertarian* (*UL*), a new student anarchist journal, in 1955, he remarked,

> In your letter announcing the University Libertarian, you mention the evidence for anarchism provided by the social and human sciences … and you comment that this highly significant material "quite possibly forces us to change our views somewhat." I agree with you but am glad you did not take the argument any further, as Alex Comfort did. He said that his scientific conclusions drove him to anarchism, and that if scientific investigation led him elsewhere he would abandon anarchism. I think he was wrong. I do not think the case for anarchism rests on science.

Anarchism, he continued, came from "aspirations of the heart" for as much freedom as possible. It did not come from the "deductions of the mind." It was not a law, natural, logical, or historical, that could be discovered or revealed.[38]

An implicit point of reference here was Marxism, a reminder that his skepticism was always in conversation with the wider political mood. Alongside their historic antagonism towards Marxists, the anarchists, in privileging liberty as the highest good, had an immediate point of resonance with the Cold War liberal's broad-church antipathy to totalitarianism. Ward's personal

---

[35] Dworkin, Dennis, *Cultural Marxism in Post-war Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, 1997), 10–44; MacLachlan, Alastair, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England* (Basingstoke, 1996).

[36] Letters to the editor, *Freedom*, 31 May 1947, 7.

[37] Colin Ward, "Anarchism Past and Present," *Freedom*, 12 July 1947, 7.

[38] Colin Ward, "From the Outside Looking In," *University Libertarian*, Dec. 1955, 5.

sympathies on this matter were quite clear. In his coverage of the Congress for Cultural Freedom meetings he remarked, "I find *Encounter* very interesting, and though its typical contents reflect what the modish intellectual is thinking, there is not a great deal of Cold-War drum-beating."[39] It would later emerge that *Encounter* was a CIA-funded propaganda initiative,[40] but his point was that the contributors did not appear to be propagating only one point of view and even seemed willing to be self-critical. This is what he wanted to see among the anarchists. More often, however, sectarianism flourished, with the various factions endlessly warring over the "true" interpretation of anarchism or the "correct" model of an anarchist society.[41]

Ward confronted this problem directly in "Anarchism and the Open Society" (1952), a warm review of Isaiah Berlin's BBC Third Programme *Freedom and Its Betrayal* lecture series along with Jacob Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952) (a critique of Jean-Jacques Rousseau) and Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945). From these, he synthesized the "reasonable arguments" emerging from the liberal critique of anarchism:

1. Anarchism is an idealist and perfectionist philosophy of personal freedom stemming ultimately from Rousseau …

2. Anarchism in its rejection of compromises and lesser evils is like the varieties of religion …

3. Anarchism often talks in a Messianic way of a revolution which is to inaugurate a golden age …

4. Anarchism makes the same false assumptions about human nature as those 18th century French philosophers …[42]

Replying to the charges, he simply accepted that "people are justified in raising them, as a glance at the world's anarchist press will show."

At the same time, he believed that the critics' arguments misrepresented serious anarchist thinking. "What I think anarchism says is this," he wrote: "human nature is neither good nor bad, it is capable of anything," a conclusion drawn from personal observation of society and, "*(if one regards social psychology and anthropology as scientific) … the observations of social scientists.*"[43] Now he turned the tables. Anarchists' critical analysis of the state and its role in perpetuating competition and conflict exposed the incoherence of liberal faith in "the state as the instrument by which the individual improves his lot."[44] Anarchism, by contrast, ought, by definition, to be the fullest realization of the open society.

The spacious, malleable definition Ward afforded to human nature echoed Berlin's own pluralistic account, the basis for the latter's critique of "positive" utopianism in the *Freedom and Its Betrayal* series. Ward held Berlin in high esteem, listening to his broadcasts, collecting his books and articles, and attending his public lectures at the Pushkin Club, which he described as

---

[39] Colin Ward, "Comment on Encountering: Mr Berlin, the Indian Village, and Erasmus," *Freedom*, July 1955, 4; Ward, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom Discusses Economic Development," *Freedom*, Nov. 1955, 3.

[40] Saunders, Frances Stonor, Who Paid the Piper: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War (London, 1999).

[41] Colin Ward, "Anarchist Activity," *Freedom*, 2 Sept. 1952, 2.

[42] Colin Ward, "Anarchism and the Open Society," *Freedom*, 22 Nov. 1952, 2.

[43] Colin Ward, "Anarchism and the Open Society," *Freedom*, 29 Nov. 1952, 2, italics mine.

[44] Colin Ward, "Anarchism and the Open Society," *Freedom*, 22 Nov. 1952, 2.

"a pleasure to listen to, one seems to be actually hearing his acute and subtle brain thinking."[45] Where the two men most intersected was in their mutual appreciation of the Russian thinker Alexander Herzen (1812–70), "the hero of skeptical idealism,"[46] whose distrust of abstractions and unwavering faith in personal liberty they shared.[47]

Ward never tried to claim Berlin for anarchism but welcomed the philosopher's attempt to pick apart the crude ideological dualism which the Cold War presented. Like some other British intellectuals, Berlin was a critical "Cold Warrior" (perhaps more effective for the cause by being so), and no apologist for positivism.[48] He recognized the limits of scientific knowledge, and of claims to that knowledge, as part of what Joshua Cherniss called the self-critical ethos at the heart of his revised liberalism.[49]

Marks of this influence can be seen in Ward's own efforts to *disentangle* science from political claims, the opposite course of action to the one advocated by Read and Comfort. In his review of *Tribes without Rulers* (1958), a study of leaderless tribal systems in Africa edited by David Tait and John Middleton, he welcomed the book as one of obvious interest to anarchists who had "always been interested in the reports of travellers and ethnologists on those human societies which were once called savage." Knowing there have been examples of human societies without institutionalized authority had offered a counterargument to claims that anarchist "theories run contrary to 'human nature'." As a result, "you will often find quoted in the anarchist press some attractive description of a tribal anarchy."

The long-standing appeal of anthropology to anarchists made precision important. With regard to *Tribes*, he recommended *Freedom* readers to reflect on the difference between tribal anarchies which, even without formal governance, still used forms of coercion (through religious rites and customs, for example) and anarchist societies which rejected *all* imposition of authority of any kind. Further, he urged them to recognize that the contributors to *Tribes* were describing social structures; they were not concerned with peoples' subjective experiences, which meant there were no available data to settle the first point. It simply could not be known whether the people in question felt like free agents.[50] The book remained significant for its practical descriptions of different models of leaderless organization but could not (and should not) be called upon to support any grander claims.

Ward welcomed scientific method when it meant an attention to detail that grounded social imagination. In "'Freedom' in the Sixties," he urged anarchists, "we have to earn the right to be taken seriously. In the last decade there has grown up a whole school of writers on social and economic affairs … who are making careful and critical appraisal of this country's social institutions." "We must," he added, "find their anarchist equivalents among contributors to this paper."[51] The following year he offered a series on "The New Social Investigators" (notably "investigators" as opposed to scientists), which featured several of the Labour-leaning researchers gathered around Richard Titmuss at the London School of Economics.

[45] Colin Ward, "Mr Berlin, the Indian Village, and Erasmus," *Freedom*, 14 May 1955, 4.

[46] Gary Saul Morson, "Alexander Herzen: The Hero of Skeptical Idealism," *New York Review*, 24 Nov. 2016.

[47] Berlin, Isaiah, "Alexander Herzen and the Grand Inquistors," Encounter 6/5 (1956), 20–34; Colin Ward, "Herzen's Testament," *Freedom*, 9 July 1956.

[48] Smyth, *Cold War Culture*, 12; Hugo Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune* (Abingdon, 2013), 193–224.

[49] Cherniss, Joshua, A Mind In Its Time (Oxford, 2013), 232.

[50] Colin Ward, "Harmony through Complexity," *Freedom*, 20 Dec. 1958, 3.

[51] Colin Ward, "Freedom in the Sixties," *Freedom*, 24 Oct. 1959, 3.

Singled out for note were: Titmuss and Brian Abel Smith's *The Cost of the National Health Service* (1956), J. P. Martin's *Social Aspects of Prescribing* (1957), Titmuss's *Essays on the Welfare State* (1958), J. Vaizey's *The Cost of Education* (1959), Barbara Wootten's *Social Science and Social Pathology* (1959), and various works produced by the ICS researchers. What impressed him about these writers was that they "had shown that most of the things that are said and written about the welfare state are the expression of either hope or prejudice, unsupported by facts, and they have done this simply by taking the trouble to analyse statistics and undertake surveys."[52]

Again, enthusiasm was qualified. As with the anthropologists, surveys and statistics revealed inconsistencies in government claims, but could not get to the heart of the problem with state welfare, which lay, as he saw it, in the inherent denial of human individuality entailed by centralized welfare provision. Moreover, although many of the researchers had grown critical of the Labour Party in its current form, they retained an automatic faith in state-controlled methods of distributing and managing welfare services, recommending only a more enlightened approach to leadership which, Ward believed, fundamentally missed the point.[53] So, while "welcoming their diagnoses," he remained "sceptical about their remedies."[54]

Here, however, he encountered a problem. If social-scientific inquiry could only be used as a tool for scrutinizing and deflating grand claims, it could not provide the basis for a compelling new social ideal. Where, then, was such a motivating vision to come from?

## "Emotional anarchists"

The year 1956 was a turning point in the decade. Khrushchev's speech and the Soviet invasion of Hungary further discredited international communism. The Suez crisis and consequent humiliation exposed the British government's lingering imperialism and Labour's ineffectiveness as an opposition. The combination of these events, in conjunction with proposals to test a British built nuclear weapon, were enough to stimulate a growing student population into action. Approximately ten thousand people gathered in Trafalgar Square in November 1956 to protest again Suez. Sensing change in the air, a group of young socialists, recently graduated from Oxford joined with others on the dissident left, now swollen with former communists, to form the first British New Left (NL).

It was, however, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) (1957–) that proved the most vital, certainly most visible, vehicle for channeling this revival of popular politics. The roots of CND lay partly in the smaller-scale efforts of the Non-Violent Resistant Group, later the Direct Action Committee (DAC), who pioneered Gandhian techniques of militant passivism through a series of sit-down protests. Following the shift in public mood, the scope and scale of their

---

[52] Colin Ward, "The New Social Investigators—I," *Freedom*, 10 Sept. 1960, 3. This was not entirely the case. Titmuss and Smith's *The Cost of the National Health Service* was largely positive about the social impact of the NHS.

[53] Ward, "Freedom in the Sixties." Here he quoted John Vaizey saying, "Being radical in modern British politics now means having a certain detachment about the fate of the Labour Party. For fifty years it has seemed important to get 'the movement' in; only now is it realised that 'the movement', when in office, consists of much the same sort of power-seekers as the other lot."

[54] Ibid.

ambition increased. On 4 April 1958, approximately eight thousand people set off from London,[55] braving four days of rain and wind to reach Aldermaston.[56]

*Freedom* had several direct links to CND. Read and Comfort were both prominent members and, later, members of the Committee of 100. Naturally, the editors were sympathetic in their coverage of the first Aldermaston march, promoting it warmly, if idiosyncratically: "Ban All Bombs: But It Means Banning Government Too."[57] Many, including Ward, took part themselves. The follow-up piece, "Aldermaston and After," was more circumspect.[58] The march, they allowed, had achieved reasonable press coverage and, perhaps more importantly, tapped into a strong vein of public support, but there was no escaping the fact that the numbers had dropped off along the route, which marred the final impact, and that the speeches about Britain giving a moral lead had not impressed the younger marchers.[59] They concluded that "the Aldermaston March was a magnificent gesture and a moving protest. Now if we mean business it is needful to clothe the slogans with action informed by a dispassionate examination of the problem."

In the following year, 1959, the coverage, now by Ward, was cooler: "the march isn't going to change anything in the world of public affairs," he wrote; "it's significance is in the personal history of the people who participated." By 1960, he was mocking. In February he looked forward to "that annual Easter outing for the left-wing conscience,"[60] and the opportunity to shift copies of *Freedom* to students. After the march, he asked bluntly, "Is Aldermaston Enough?". "The CND, whatever the original motives of its founders, bases its public appeal on the fear of universal extermination."[61] This, he concluded, was not a sound basis for an alternative movement.

The *Freedom* editors understood that the peace movement was a vital recruiting ground, as it always had been for the anarchists. Indeed, this time it brought Nicolas Walter (a recent modern-history graduate from Oxford dissatisfied with the NL) into the Freedom Press fold. Nevertheless, their aloofness prevented them from fully capitalizing on the opportunity to engage a younger generation unable or unwilling to identify with conventional political channels.[62] Walter, an older member of this generation, penned a brief caricature of them as the age of "the intellectual tough or tough intellectual, who has retreated from aestheticism into philistinism, from political commitment into non-committal dissent, from exquisite sensibility into simple decency, and who is sensitive not to what is cruel or wicked, but to what is bogus or phoney."[63] This was not purely

---

[55] Pat Arrowsmith, "Marching the Ban the Bomb: Pat Arrowsmith Recalls the first Aldermaston March," *Socialist Worker*, 18 March 2008, at https://socialistworker.co.uk/news/marching-to-ban-the-bomb-pat-arrowsmith-recalls-the-first-aldermaston-march (accessed 25 April 2023).

[56] Michael Randle "Non Violent Direct Action in the 1950s and 1960s," in Richard Taylor and Nigel Young, eds., *Campaigns for Peace: British Peace Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 1987), 131–61. See also Holger Nehring, "Demonstrating Security," in Nehring, *Politics of Security: British and German Protest Movements and the Early Cold War 1945–1970* (Oxford, 2013), 190–229.

[57] Editors, "Ban All Bombs," *Freedom*, 5 April 1958, 1.

[58] Editors, "Aldermaston and After," *Freedom*, 12 April 1958, 1.

[59] Jodi Birkett, "Redefining British Morality: Britishness and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 1958–1968," *Twentieth Century British History* 21/2 (2010), 184–205.

[60] Colin Ward, "Anarchist and the Aldermaston March—A Suggestion: Easter Parade (with Soup)," *Freedom*, 13 Feb. 1960, 3.

[61] Editors, "Is Aldermaston Enough?", *Freedom*, 16 April 1960, 1.

[62] G, "Are You Marching for Kicks?", *Freedom*, 16 April 1960, 4. Generation here refers to those who were under eighteen during the war. The latter half of this cohort was the first to feel the impact of the welfare state, especially with regard education. They were under thirty in the late 1950s.

[63] Walter, Nicolas, "The 'New Wave' in Britain," Anarchy 1 (1961), 27–32, at 27.

confined to middle-class intellectuals. Modern youth, whether teddy boys or grammar-school leavers, wanted hard realities. "Everything is likely to be stood on its head: failure is interpreted as a form of unexpected success; laughter is better than tears; irony is better than anger." They despised deception: "their commitment is essentially autonomous and antinomian, adhering to no ideology and demanding no shibboleths—it is commitment in the age of the Cold War, the Welfare State and the Affluent Society."[64] Their leading figurehead was writer Alan Sillitoe, who offered "no comforting message … no indulgent affection like Orwell or MacInnes. He is just for the ordinary people and against their bosses and rulers, without question or quarter."[65]

There could have been no more fruitful audience for the anarchists, especially as the limits of the CND made themselves felt. Yet *Freedom* simply could not speak to them, as comments from the papers' readers' survey conducted in 1960 show:

> We should get down to anarchist applications in our world as it is … Those who do that sort of thing in, for example, CND, seem not to have Freedom's blessing. Why?

> I would like to see FREEDOM brought more up to date … dealing with the DAC. How about a review of surrealism sometime?

> Try to get out in front of progressive movements and give a lead to peace-loving types.

Their "rivals" in the NL, by contrast, wasted no time in courting these noncommittal dissenters. Initially, clustered around two journals—the *New Reasoner* (*NR*), edited by E. P. Thompson and John Saville, and the *Universities and Left Review* (*ULR*) edited by the Oxford graduate group Stuart Hall, Gabriel Pearson, Raphael Samuel, and Charles Taylor—both wings involved themselves with the peace movement immediately. While Thompson proved one of CND's most eloquent advocates, the *ULR* group offered up their own Soho headquarters as a campaign base, eagerly ushering novice activists into their growing club network.

Once inside the network, the *ULR* held their interests by confronting what most effected them, "the complete change … in social and personal relations" that they were experiencing firsthand.[66] Here, they drew inspiration from Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958), both of which defined culture expansively and emphasized it as a primary site of political action. As Williams argued, "culture was ordinary," with every human society possessing "its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings," emerging from its shared experiences. It expressed these through its institutions, arts, and forms of education, which in turn helped produce future experience by shaping collective and individual consciousness.[67] As such, the articles in the *ULR*'s lively magazine-style layout addressed all the most topical issues of the day—the changing workplace, youth and delinquency, town planning, education, music, and cinema—locating the "new" socialism firmly within their reader's daily lives and, more importantly, perceptions of those lives.

---

[64] Ibid.

[65] Nicholas Walter, "Because He Is a Man," *Anarchy* 10 (1961), 289–95, at 289.

[66] HMSO, *Committee of Children and Young People Report* (London, 1960), 17.

[67] Raymond Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary," in Norman Mackenzie, ed., *Convictions* (London, 1958), 74–92; Stuart Middleton, "The concept of 'experience' and the Making of the English Working Class 1924–1963," *Modern Intellectual History* 13/1 (2016), 179–208. See also Freddy Foks, "The Sociological Imagination of the British New Left," *Modern Intellectual History* 15/3 (2018), 801–20.

Ward followed the *ULR*'s activities closely. Comparing the journal to its anarchist equivalent, the *University Libertarian*, he noted,

> The University Libertarian gives you seven articles on 16 pages for 10d. The Universities and Left Review gives you 74 pages for 3s and 6d. The UL contains writers mostly familiar to readers of the anarchist press and it has struggled to get through its third issue, with a lack of publicity and support, at the expense of its editor. The U and L.R. contains articles by several of the "big names" of socialist journalism, its arrival was heralded with a great deal of publicity and advertisement, it has sold 7000 copies and has been reprinted.
>
> … the U.L. reflects a heretical, sceptical attitude, its emphasis is social rather than political. The U and L.R. mirrors the views of people who have been disillusioned by the experience of socialism both in its Western welfare state form, and in the Stalinist icebox but still think in terms of political socialism and Marxism.[68]

It was clear to him the *ULR* were groping towards ideas about post-party politics and direct action, which were not only familiar to anarchists but already developed by them with considerable sophistication. Yet the newcomers had found a style of communicating these ideas which resonated more widely. Within a year, a group of graduates had doubled *Freedom*'s (let alone *UL*'s) readership. As he wrote elsewhere,

> why does the Universities and Left Review flourish—and improve its contents—while its semi anarchist equivalent stumbles along and only just escapes extinction? Or how did it come about that a month after the Malatesta Club, pride of the London Anarchist Group, had to close down, the people gathered around the U & LR were able to open their Partisan Coffee Bar? These organs of the "New Left" whether in union militancy, publishing or catering, have been able to get more people, more money and more support since their beginnings in 1956 than the anarchists have been able to muster.[69]

To make matters worse, Alan Lovell, a CND organizer, described how the CND and the New Left attracted "emotional anarchists" (especially among the young) because the British anarchist movement was "an absolute disaster for any kind of serious anarchist thinking."[70]

These views were shared by other members of the movement. Philip Holgate thought anarchism had turned itself into a minority sect amongst minority sects which now only appealed to those who enjoyed the exclusivity of belonging to a minority sect.[71] Walter insisted that anarchists must face "the questions of the day" or become irrelevant.[72] Ward agreed that the movement had split itself between two chimerical poles: hard-line revolutionists and soft reformists.

---

[68] Colin Ward, "University Probes and Publications," *Freedom*, 1 June 1957, 4.

[69] Colin Ward, "A House of Theory," *Freedom*, 31 Jan. 1959, 3.

[70] Stuart Hall, Alan Lovell, and Patrick Whannel, "Direct Action: A Discussion with Alan Lovell," *New Left Review* 1/8 (1960), 16–24, at 19. See also Kenneth Tynan, "Theatre and Living," in Tom Maschler, ed., *Declaration* (London, 1958), 107–30.

[71] Philip Holgate, "Is Anarchism a Minority Sect?", *Freedom*, 22 Oct. 1960, 4.

[72] Nicolas Walter, "Anarchism: A Revisionist Approach," *Freedom*, 2 Jan. 1960, 2.

When it came to making decisions about the movement's future, the respective camps retrenched, and no productive discussion was possible.[73]

The sense of rivalry with the NL, in conjunction with frustrations with the movement's self-induced inertia, prompted a run of articles refreshing the case for pragmatic anarchism. Australian philosopher George Molnar's "Anarchy and Utopia" (2 August 1958) argued that the association of anarchism with naive revolutionary utopianism was overstated, often based on taking anarchist rhetoric at face value. It overlooked a deeply practical strand of anarchist thought stretching far back in the movement's roots. This could be found embedded in the writings of Proudhon, even Bakunin in places, but was best expressed by Kropotkin in *Modern Science and Anarchism* (1913). As Molnar phrased it, "Between these two currents, always alive, struggling in humanity—the current of the people and the current of the minorities which thirst for political and religious domination—our choice is made." Molnar saw in this extract an essentially agonistic account of human history as continuous and irresolvable struggle. From this he proposed that anarchism reposition itself as a movement of permanent protest and pursue an effectively "negative" program of resisting political encroachment and keeping the Romans at bay. In the wake of the Bomb, he believed this the most realistic course for the contemporary movement to adopt.

Ward accepted Molnar's post-utopian position and his argument for sustained resistance but believed there was scope for a more ambitious "constructive anarchism." In his reply, "Anarchy for Adults" (1958), he proposed that as well as defending the popular tradition, anarchists should find and expand existing examples of it but only *on their own terms*.[74] This meant acquiring a deep understanding of their latent possibilities. In a second article, "Constructive Anarchy," he agreed with Walter that the movement's greatest need was "to relate anarchism to social facts and potentialities of the day."[75] Social scientists seemed well placed to do this as "these sciences may hold the answers to some of the questions which anarchism asks as well as to those we ask of anarchism," provided they stopped short of proclaiming "that anarchism, or any other social philosophy, is scientific in origin," a statement "we should hesitate to make."[76]

"Constructive Anarchy" faced criticism from *Freedom* regular Rita Milton, who levelled the same charge at Ward as he had at Read a decade earlier. CW, she wrote, was trying to dissolve direct action into a program of bloodless scholarship.[77] In his reply he insisted that the anarchist social scientist's task was limited to preparing well-informed case studies, all the better to equip propagandists (like Milton) with the evidence they needed to dispel the heckles they so often faced ("crime and violence would prevail in an anarchist society" or "no one would do the dirty jobs"). This work, he continued, did not aim at "revealing" the "truth" of human nature, much less at presenting freedom as obedience to that nature. It only offered people "true possibilities" which would help them believe that "ordinary men and women are capable of acting responsibly given the chance and encouragement."[78]

Weary of debate, Ward determined to show his comrades what he meant. The group had long harboured plans to produce a magazine alongside the newspaper. He proposed a monthly journal devoted to promoting anarchist methods, applications, and techniques in the hopes of cultivating

---

[73] Colin Ward, "Letter to the Editors: The Tender Trap," *Freedom*, 2 Nov. 1957, 7.

[74] Colin Ward, "Anarchy for Adults" *Freedom*, 2 Aug. 1958, 2.

[75] Nicolas Walter, "Anarchism: A Revisionist Approach," *Freedom*, 2 Jan. 1960, 2.

[76] Colin Ward, "Constructive Anarchism," *Freedom*, 14 May 1960, 2.

[77] Rita Milton, "Destructive or Constructive Anarchism?", *Freedom*, 21 May 1960, 2.

[78] Colin Ward, "Constructive Anarchism," *Freedom*, 28 May 1960, 2.

the habits of direct action among readers.[79] On 25 February 1961, *Anarchy: A Journal of Anarchist Ideas* was launched.

## Anarchy

*Anarchy* was an experiment in both pragmatic anarchism and propaganda style, which for Ward were inseparable: how you communicated anarchist ideas determined whether people used them or not, which in turn determined whether you had a popular movement or not. Pragmatic anarchism was selective, not systematic; it rejected "perfectionism, utopian fantasy, conspiratorial romanticism, revolutionary optimism," and drew "from the classical anarchists their most valid, not their most questionable ideas," supplemented by "the subtler contribution of later ... thinkers Landauer and Malatesta" and "the evidence provided in this century by the social sciences, by psychology and anthropology, and by technical change."[80]

This approach demanded a new style. Here Ward learned from the early *ULR*. Rather than blast and harangue or bemuse with theory, *Anarchy* offered themed collections of case studies. Importantly, these were always self-critical. There were two reasons for this. First, by openly accepting the shortcomings of the individual or example in question, *Anarchy* writers could avoid accusations of utopianism. Second, assessing what had gone wrong with an initiative was a valuable teaching aid. Consequently, the tone of *Anarchy* was generally earnest but with a leavening note of irony.

Between 1961 and 1970, Ward oversaw the production of 118 issues, approximately 25 percent of which covered aspects of anarchist history and theory, 14 percent education, 10 percent international events or area case studies, 9 percent non-anarchist political commentary, 8 percent housing and environment, 8 percent health and relationships, 7 percent popular culture, 7 percent work and industry, 5 percent crime and law, and 2 percent modern technology. Naturally, the classical anarchist ancestors—Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Tolstoy, Kropotkin, now joined by Emma Goldman—featured prominently, regularly quoted or referenced, but *Anarchy* also instated new icons, more resonant with the times. There was a special issue on Comfort, whose fame as a peace activist, as well as his work on sex and delinquency, appealed to the CND demographic, but it was Paul Goodman who was the journal's real abiding spirit.[81]

Alongside fiction writing, Goodman's prolific, polymathic output spanned the fields of social psychology, education, and town planning. He was an advocate for gestalt therapy as well as for the free-school movement, communalism, and federalism. It was not, however, any one of his ideas in particular that Ward admired so much as his general intellectual ethos. Goodman's method of dealing with social problems was to invent "practical expedients," or, as he put it (and Ward quoted it) "my way of writing a book on social theory has been to invent community plans ... a discussion of human nature is a programme or pedagogical manual of therapeutic exercises."[82]

---

79 Colin Ward, "The Future of Anarchism 3," *Anarchy* 28 (1963), 175–6.

80 Colin Ward, "The Unwritten Handbook," *Freedom*, 28 June 1958, 3.

81 *The Anarchism of Alex Comfort*, special issue, *Anarchy* 33 (1963); *The World of Paul Goodman*, special issue, *Anarchy* 11 (1962); *The Community of Scholars*, special issue, *Anarchy* 24 (1963); *The Present Moment in Education: Paul Goodman*, special issue, *Anarchy* 107 (1970).

82 Quoted in Ward, "The World of Paul Goodman," 2.

Such expedients, and the creativity required to invent them (but not necessarily the proposals themselves) lay at the journal's heart. As such, traditional aspects of anarchist theory, such as workers' control, were supplemented with practical ideas drawn from industrial management. *Anarchy* 47, for example, *Towards Freedom in Work*, was given over to outlining James Gillespie's 12-step method for implementing workplace "free groups" who would slowly assume managerial power over their sections. In his editorial, Ward warned that Gillespie's detailed account of group numbers (no more than twelve) and of meeting and reporting procedures would please no one, "industrialists will see him as an anarchist, and anarchists will see him as an apologist for half measures." Nevertheless, the free-group method provided a transitional step towards full workers' control, which, he reminded his readers, typically failed because people were not accustomed to exercising control and needed to learn the techniques more gradually.[83]

Issues on education tempered praise for free or alternative schools with accounts of the problems encountered when people pursued their ideals too narrowly. *Freedom* had long cherished adventure playgrounds, which encouraged children to build for themselves, as a parable of anarchy in action, but *Anarchy* acknowledged how attempts to establish them in England had met with resistance from local communities suspicious of organizers' intentions.[84] Similarly, Michael Duane's controversial tenure as a revolutionary head teacher at Risinghill Comprehensive, London, had floundered when, for all his progressive ideas, he had not taken his staff along with him.[85] The lesson here was that, to be effective, anarchists must grasp the limits of a situation and compromise where necessary.

With regard to crime, *Anarchy* built on anarchists' long-standing critique of the penal system by giving space to proponents of the "New Criminology," including Stanley Cohen, David Downes, and Jock Young (who later cofounded the National Deviancy Conference). Finding themselves in conflict with the "technical parochialism" that dominated mainstream criminology studies, especially the typically narrow focus on the criminal act in isolation from larger contexts,[86] they sought for holistic, "therapeutic" approaches taking in wider sociological, psychological, and even philosophical factors. In the pages of *Anarchy*, Cohen and Young shared their doubts about the possibility of neutrality in science, pointing to the limits within the white, liberal, middle-class "ideology of objectivity." While this certainly unsettled official orthodoxies, some felt it also undermined any basis for robust resistance. As veteran anarchist Tony Gibson complained, "Undoubtedly such self-reflexive science is seized upon by capitalists, Marxists, and other ideologues with the argument that there can be no objective fact—only facts seen through this or that pair of subjective goggles. It is against this, as I have said, that the scientist much kick."[87] Inevitably, it was Ward himself who wrote the most representative examples of *Anarchy*'s anarchy. "Tenants Take Over," for example, came in response to parliamentary debates about the sale of council houses to tenants. He began by explaining that Britain had the lowest range of choice in housing in Europe. Housing associations offered a plausible alternative to address this situation,

---

[83] Gillespie, James, "Self Management," Anarchy 47 (1965), 1–32, at 1. See also Blitzen, Dorothy, "Autonomous Groups," Anarchy 77 (1967), 210–11.

[84] Annie Mygind, "New Town Adventure," *Anarchy* 7 (1961), 202–4.

[85] Martin Small, "About Risinghill," *Anarchy* 92 (1968), 289–306.

[86] Alvin Gouldner, "Foreword," in Ian Taylor, Paul Walton, and Jock Young, *The New Criminology*. (London, 1973), ix–xiv.

[87] Young, Jock, "The Zookeeper of Deviancy," Anarchy 98 (1969), 101–8; Cohen, Stanley, "Notes on Detention Centres," Anarchy 101 (1969), 210–22; Gibson, Tony, "Letter," Anarchy 101 (1969), 223.

but current legislation inhibited their formation. More worrying was the apparent lack of popular demand for them. Again, he put this down to people's lack of practical experience in exercising control and proposed that this be remedied by forming tenants' associations (adapted from Gillespie's industrial free-groups models) as an intermediary step. These Associations would gradually absorb the daily work of running a municipal housing estate until all centralized administration became redundant. The final sections set out possible models for association organization, as well as solutions to likely legal and financial problems.[88]

"Tenants" took a contemporary problem, familiar to many people, particularly working-class people, and proposed a realistic goal that would (ultimately) lead to a genuine redistribution of power at a pace they could adapt to and master easily. It then bolstered the proposal with practical advice on the steps required to overcome probable obstacles. As ever, he faced critics. In *Anarchy* 88, Bookchin's "Against Meliorism" ferociously condemned all "revisionist" approaches to anarchism, especially "Goodman-style pragmatism," which, he argued, was just weak liberalism in disguise. There could be no gradual revolution. To claim otherwise was to deny political reality, the essence of which was struggle. Compromise and small steps only reinforced the *ancien régime* by making it more bearable, defusing the build-up of frustration necessary to bring about its final destruction.[89] While he was not talking about "Tenants," Ward, or even *Anarchy* directly, the point was applicable. In *Anarchy*, the division between social anarchism and social liberalism was porous.

In this respect, the journal often bore more resemblance to its near contemporary *New Society* (*NS*) (1962–86) than it did to *Freedom* or to the rest of the international anarchist press. In fact, as Ward wrote in a letter to Paul Baker (*NS* editor 1966–86),

> the impulses that made me start ANARCHY were just the same were just the same as those that made Tim Raison start NEW SOCIETY: the realisation that we were in a world that didn't fit the accepted "facts." Suez/Hungary/Look Back in Anger/ the new social analysts of the 50s like Townsend and Abel-Smith etc, and the new sociologists of deviance, Cohen, the Taylors and David Downes.[90]

*NS* also supplied critical, empirical case studies on planning, housing, education, welfare, family, crime, popular culture, political economy, and social theory,[91] and regularly featured Ward's favourite "social investigators," such as Barbara Wootton and Peter Townsend. Admittedly, it was less forthcoming on suggesting practical expedients, but he was still an instant fan when it launched in 1962, the year after *Anarchy*.[92] As with the *ULR* four years earlier, admiration mixed with jealousy. *Anarchy* may have used the licence that its political marginality permitted to push its demands further, but *NS* gained ground, and subscriptions, because it did not first have to seduce its readers passed their political prejudices.

In another sense, however, this desire to be accepted into mainstream culture worked against the journal when it came to engaging the next generation of outraged youth. As the years passed and *Anarchy*'s pages filled with the intelligent comments of social researchers and writers, there

---

[88] Ward, Colin, "Tenants Take Over," Anarchy 83 (1968), 1–19.

[89] Bookchin, Murray, "Against Meliorism," Anarchy 88 (1968), 191.

[90] Colin Ward to Paul Barker, 23 Oct. 1990, Letters 1990–99, CWP/ARCH03180, IISH.

[91] Mike Savage, "The Moment of Sociology," in Savage, *Identities and Social Class in Britain since 1940*, 112–36.

[92] Colin Ward to Paul Barker, 23 Oct. 1990.

were points when it appeared as a sort of progressive's professional–confessional. Young people were more often subject matter than authors in its pages. Some efforts were made in this quarter: younger writers such as Martin Small and Charles Ratcliffe were given space, *Anarchy* 18 carried an interview with a recent school leaver and an essay by a sixth-former, *Anarchy* 24 had a verbatim description of life on the dole for teenager Tom Pickard, *Anarchy* 99 had interviews with Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Alexander Hebert, leaders of the French student movement. But these were whispers in a chorus of articulate adult voices, and yet this was exactly the time when young people, globally, were gaining in political volume and visibility, reaching a crescendo in 1968.

*Anarchy* covered the international student and youth protests attentively: *Anarchy* 66 was devoted to Provo, the Dutch countercultural movement; *Anarchy* 99 addressed the French protests of May 1968; *Anarchy* 112 focused on antiapartheid struggles in South Africa; and *Anarchy* 90 surveyed the whole global movement. Ward's editorial summary in *Anarchy* 90 was encouraging: "the student movement has been a microcosm of anarchism-in-action: spontaneous self-directed activity replacing the hierarchy of authority by a society of autonomous groups and individuals."[93]

At the same time there were reservations, the drift of which was captured by Richard Mabey writing on a student anti-Vietnam demonstration outside the US embassy in Grosvenor Square:

> What was this ritual we were being asked to join? A revolutionary prelude, a sort of mass shaking of the fist? A vast symbolic morality play starring the Metropolitan police as Satan and Tariq Ali as Everyman? Or a mini coup, an actual attempt to take over the control of certain key institutions? The fact that nowhere to my knowledge were these questions even discussed … seems to me a sad reflection of our lack of any theory of demonstrations.[94]

His comments echoed Ward's on Aldermaston almost a decade earlier. While acknowledging that the energy of anger, the desire for change and the drama of protests were all important, Mabey voiced similar frustration with the student protestors' lack of plausible alternatives or practical organizational skills in applying them.

*Anarchy* was created to address a similar need in 1961. It might have attempted to do so again, only Ward read the times and realized the distinctions. While it is difficult to generalize about the global student movement as whole, there were several common strands threaded across its various arenas. To begin with, it was emphatically a "youth" movement predicated on a rejection of a "corrupt" adult world. The aesthetic of radicalism was, therefore, important, not merely consequential. It mattered that the counterculture was *visibly* different, symbolically expressed through clothing, hairstyles, music, and above all language. Sensitivity to the politics of language and self-expression was another defining feature most evident in the springtime of radical newspapers and magazines—such as *The International*, *Oz*, *Black Dwarf*, *Gandalf*—that flourished by the end of the decade.[95] Where *Anarchy*, in form and content, aimed to resonate with people's existing lives, values, and concerns, these papers wanted to shock and disrupt what they took to

[93] Ward, Colin, "Student Anarchy," Anarchy 90 (1969), 225–34.
[94] Mabey, Richard, "Grass Roots or Hair Roots?", Anarchy 96 (1969), 33–7.
[95] Vinen, Richard, The Long 68: Radical Protest and Its Enemies (London, 2018), 4.

be the hypocrisy of dominant social norms.[96] Ward admired them all as autonomous enterprises and welcomed their dissenting energy, but did not share their values.

## Conclusion

In December 1970, the last *Anarchy* (118) under Ward was issued. This was no inglorious decline; *Anarchy* retained its steady subscription rate of 2,800 until the end. If it never achieved stellar readership figures it was still modestly successful in engaging certain individuals as readers or writers who consequently disseminated aspects of its ideas in their different fields: Walter in political and cultural journalism, Downes and Cohen through the New Criminology, Mabey in his environmental writing, and Samuel through adult education and the History Workshop movement. Ward, meanwhile, moved on to other projects. He was appointed education officer at the Town and Country Planning Association in 1971, and made his break into authorship proper, publishing *Anarchy in Action* (1973), an impressively condensed synthesis of *Anarchy*'s greatest hits and recurrent themes.

As per its pragmatic philosophy, *Anarchy* engaged closely with the social facts of its times, but that philosophy, and its accompanying style, grew out of the political moment of the 1950s and early 1960s. This moment was conversant with late 1960s radicalism but not merely a crucible for it. It was distinct. Acknowledging this is not to deny the standard charges of political conservatism and conformity levelled at the period, only to grant that some elements within it had radical potential, not least the wish to resist capture by ideology in any form. Figures like Ward only extended this, exploiting the skepticism implicit within this anti-ideology mood by turning it in on itself.

It is also to recognize that apparently stultifying political forces can sometimes inspire civil creativity. As Berlin observed (in reference to another context, but the principle translates), "the demand for conformity generates a [counter]demand for 'more light' and extension of the areas of individual responsibility and spontaneous action."[97] In a nuclear age of fracturing solidarities and shifting identities, where first welfare and then affluence penetrated people's private lives, opportunities for both contracted. Yet, by the same token, this also brought politics "home" to people more intensely than ever before.

If politics became personal, there was yet a difference between that and the personal-is-political associated with the counterculture, stemming, in the first place, from the women's movement. This touches on the second main legacy of the 1950s for *Anarchy*'s anarchy, the aesthetic constraints imposed by Cold War hostility which, in a way, demanded another form of creativity. If, as Ward acknowledged, you stood for a way-out notion like anarchism, you would simply not get a hearing if you acted way-out. This compelled him, and others, towards more ingenious methods of translating anarchist principles into palatable forms. As such, he placed great faith in being reasonable and appealing to "common sense," even if, at closer quarters, that proved slippery. A decade later, the mood among radicals had swung the other way and the very notion of "common sense" became something to be openly rejected.

---

[96] See Birch, James and Miles, Barry, The British Underground Press of the Sixties: A Catalogue (London, 2017).

[97] Isaiah Berlin quoted in Kelly, Aileen, Towards Another Shore: Russian Thinkers Between Necessity and Chance (New Haven, 1998), 17.

*Anarchy*, no less than the political culture it grew out of, had limits. It could be too conciliatory in its compromises. It was unclear how even successful "expansions" of voluntary social action could ever stimulate and sustain larger-scale systemic change or dismantle structural barriers. It did not fully acknowledge how factors like class, gender, race, and sexuality actively foreclosed certain forms of voluntary participation to many people. Nevertheless, it represented a serious effort to think through the Cold War's ideological impasse and to cultivate, instead, a protean popular democratic ethos that did not depend on maintaining a strict consensus but still avoided collapsing into perpetual conflict.

## Acknowledgments

Sophie Scott-Brown
Inventing Ordinary *Anarchy* in Cold War Britain
17 May 2023