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Janet Biehl, Ecology or Catastrophe – The Life of Murray Bookchin. Oxford University Press, 2015, 332 pp.

Murray Bookchin died in 2006 at the age of 85. He was less widely known than Noam Chomsky as a libertarian internationally, yet a dynamic American voice in the tumultuous ’60s and ’70s. Where Chomsky became the academic voice of conscience and dissent in challenging U.S. foreign policy, Murray Bookchin fought on the edges of society, urging social and political transformation. While praised widely for his revolutionary wisdom in earlier years, towards the end of his life he became a figure of conflict and controversy.

Nonetheless, despite conflict and controversy, his influence as a leading American anarchist and social ecologist in articulating modern perceptions of these philosophies has been profound. *Ecology or Catastrophe, the Life of Murray Bookchin* by Bookchin’s later life lover and collaborator, Janet Biehl, reviews his life and legacy. It explores the development and the impact of his ideas particularly on the radical youth of his era, notably those of the 1960s and 1970s, in the United States. The theoretical and personal divisions of the late 20th Century within the anarchist and ecological movements are described. These themes will be discussed here.

Since Bookchin’s death in 2006, three books to my knowledge have highlighted differing yet complementary aspects of the man regarded by many as the foremost libertarian intellectual and anarchist in the second half of the 20th Century. Each perspective enriches the legacy of a man both much-admired and, in his later years, much-maligned. This is not to say that the views are deferential although Bookchin’s biography, as noted, was penned by his former companion, Janet Biehl in 2015. Andy Price’s *Recovering Bookchin* (2012) endeavors to discern the essential heritage of the man whose contribution he

formerly much admired. Hence, perhaps a certain caution may be appropriate. For critics of the man, this will validate their opinions that his legacy is being "sanctified." The third discussion reveals the most tangible legacy of this prolific thinker, an objective reality not a subjective reflection. It describes the valiant efforts by persecuted Kurds to establish Democratic Autonomy, mirroring Bookchin's ideas and ideals in a practical creation, documented by German activists. Janet Biehl did translate the work but can hardly be held to account for the adoption of Bookchin's ideas by the Kurds of Southern Turkey. Biehl's biography will be the focus of this critique.

Of course, the influence of a man or woman of stature is not merely discovered by reading personal or analytical descriptions. Their influence is perceived in the inspiration of such a person's knowledge, wisdom, vision. Personal experience may show this. To this I can testify. The written or spoken word may capture this. Bookchin excited thousands of particularly young people over the decades with his books, in his speeches and pamphlets, lectures and conversations as is evident in Biehl's comprehensive work. Again I may offer personal testimony as can many of left-wing orientation in Australia's major cities. He influenced the future dissemination of his ideas through the continuing efforts of the Institute of Social Ecology in Vermont. His challenging and principled, some would say dogmatic and sectarian, stands, garnered hostility and opposition but also affirmation as the past decades have witnessed.

These reflections may help us elucidate his legacy, as man, philosopher, social theorist and practical visionary. Even the man's harshest critics – and they are considerable – must acknowledge his legacy is substantial however much they dispute elements of his thought or eschew his at times contradictory personality.

Janet Biehl's biography is a vivid account of Bookchin's political and ideological journey. The thirteen chapters are con-

> tion of a rare endeavour in human history: a conscious effort to implement a socialist utopia. It sets a standard for the socialist theory and practice in the twenty-first century." (*Democratic Autonomy in North Kurdistan, The Council Movement, Gender Liberation, and Ecology—in Practice*, 2013).

The strivings for acceptance of diverse culture, for a directly democratic nation, a communal economy and an industry sensitive to ecological understanding in the face of persecution and imprisonment, patriarchy and poverty is a peon to the possibilities in humanity.

No better tribute to the inexhaustible energy and determination of a man dedicated to the visionary betterment of humanity could there be than a loving memoir and a description of the courageous implementation of his ideals. In trying to find Bookchin the man, we may have been immersed at times in contest and acrimony, despaired of discovering that full and rounded man, surrounded by friends of diverse and independent mind. We may not have discovered a man of equable temperament, cherished by all. The brilliant, contradictory humanity of the man is the true portrait.

ity. Her recognition of the "achievements" of the nation state in advancing social welfare, civil rights and environmentalism are acknowledged as progressive by some radicals but all revolutionaries perceive their seductive limitations. There is the continuing naiveté of the reformist in her peroration:

> "…although the nation state was too locked in with wealthy corporations, it also seemed to be far more likely to constrain capitalism and mitigate global warming than would a decentralised, stateless society." (306)

Radicalism, its breadth and depth, repudiated.

Her disaffection, beginning in 1999–2000, revealed to her partner a few years later, publicly announced in 2011, seems curiously at odds with her dedication to the practical application of his ideas since his passing. Probing more deeply one may in fact perceive a profound loyalty to the man himself, beyond his ideas and aspirations. Here surely lies the essence of love. Here certainly is the best motive for penning a remarkable testament to her partner, comrade and collaborator.

This testimony lies in the translation of a description of Bookchin's most tangible legacy, the adoption of the man's political ideals in southern Turkey in recent years. This is now a more accessible account of the interviews and insights compiled by the TATORT German activists in 2011 in investigating the radical implementation of Democratic Autonomy since 2005. To envisage such a utopia within the autocratic and ethnically charged atmosphere of Turkey is a tribute to the resilience and vision of the most seemingly vanquished. Proof surely that Biehl's earlier disillusionment with the narrowness of local consciousness is not so firmly held. Indeed her introductory note would seem to affirm this:

> "The book's unpretentious style masks the boldness of its vision and the richness of its descrip-

spicuous in their description of each step in this journey as the delineation of a particular politico/philosophical path, from Young Bolshevik and Labor Organizer (Chapters 1 and 2) to Assembly Democrat and Historian (Chapters 12 and 13). This is a depiction of a man's life within a particular world and life-trajectory. We will not find portraits of an intimate personal life, warm, or not, family scenes are non-existent until the final pages and these are either detached, or moving watching his final days. The absence of his father from a very early age, the death of his beloved grandmother soon afterwards, the sad inability of his mother, Rose, to live a full and healthy life, to offer him maternal care, these surely portend the subsequent immersion in a political rather than biological embrace.

The political became his family, the rich radical environment of 1920s New York his neighbors. His marriage is barely mentioned – one sentence is devoted to this and this sentence is illuminating: "In 1951 Bookchin married Beatrice Applestein, whom he brought into the CI (Contemporary Issues group) and who became 'a good comrade' Murray told me." (Biehl, *Ecology or Catastrophe,* 54–5) Nor are his children even described, barely mentioned in passing. Biehl acknowledges this as the product of her estrangement from his family following his death but it does exacerbate the task of finding the more realized man. (Prologue, xi) Her hope that they will one day pen their memories is one no doubt shared by many. Biehl observes: "He was a genuine political and intellectual independent, living outside the usual spectrum of life choices." (Prologue, xi) While the '60s youth frolicked, Murray wrote and regretted the absence of his privacy and the demise of serious or sustained political commitment.

There are however rich portraits of Bookchin's close friendship with Allan Hoffman, a young '60s rebel, depicting an almost father-son relationship. They

> "shared a philosophical bent… Murray found intellectual interchange with Allan 'sheer pleasure,' and he was eager to teach him about radical history and theory, while Allan taught him about Albert Camus and existentialist revolt. 'We complemented each other to an astonishing extent,' Bookchin would later write. By the Summer of 1964 they were close friends — 'We loved each other dearly.'" (91–2)

Allan's move from pacifism and spirituality to urban street fighter must have been greeted with pain and bewilderment, one can only surmise the anguish caused by his comrade's early tragic death.

The connection with his early mentor, Josef Weber, is much more fraught, one might be tempted to see in this a political son-father connection. The younger man eager to please the older, shouldering much of the burden, here research, for the "Family" – the Contemporary Issues group of the 1950s – yet shattered by lack of recognition, worse, vindictive attacks.

Trotsky himself may have initially approved Weber's positions but the latter's wartime experiences had convinced him of the rigidity of "world revolution "when many "bourgeois elements" particularly the churches were opposing Hitler. Yet "Socialism or Barbarism" was his stark assessment of the post-war world and the "Movement for a Democracy of Content" was to be the former's vehicle. Despite his fervor, his acolytes did the "hard yards" and Weber scorned pathways not his own. Perhaps consolation for the younger man lay in the belated public recognition of his research and writings on pesticides, urbanization and nascent ecological exploration. The fruit would be the appearance of the seminal *Our Synthetic Environment* (1952) and *The Limit of the City* (1960). Bookchin ultimately, disillusioned, moved on.

It would seem fitting to conclude this essay here also. However, Bookchin's significance will live on beyond the off-handed observation of one reviewer that this would almost certainly be the only biography of Bookchin. It persists in the lives of the thousands who knew the man in some guise, as friend, collaborator, comrade, student, even at times rival or opponent. It is most clearly sustained in the passionate fecundity of his intellect and integrity, shared in his literature. I will attest to a 40-year affinity with the essence of his conviction, a path traced by the reading of his vigorous, emphatic, encyclopedic works. This does not belie reservations about his trenchant views and the sometime lack of nuance and flexibility in his approach and understanding, the "absence" of the man himself throughout the years.

Here, unwittingly it would seem, Biehl's work has helped fashion a portrait of a man and a background, a crucial complement to the political. Perhaps critics may dismiss her proximity to her subject, even deride the isolated souls thrown together in a world of philosophical fantasy within the utopian embrace of Vermont. If we are creatures of our culture and Bookchin is "no more" than the product of immersion in ancestral Ukrainian intellectual populism, leavened by New York cosmopolitanism, created by family exigencies and hardened in the furnace of poverty and Depression, then the absence of a more telling version of intimacy is inevitable, a loss and a flaw. The story of the man is very much this narrative but also the depiction of someone who was human in virtues and eccentricities, who sought transcendence and vision, not for himself as is even the way with the good and the decent with safe harbors and worthy destinations, but for the suffering, the exploited and the obscure. That is a testament.

Janet Biehl's disavowal of social ecology bemuses given the beleaguered hothouse of the preceding years. Perhaps also thus explicable. It is still puzzling to see her complete return to reformist politics and suspicion of the decentralized mental-

– yet he had read none of the man's work. In contrast, I heard last weekend from Brian Laver, a friend of 40 years, still active in Australian anarchist politics and thought as observed, who regaled me with the news that a 91-year-old activist had lent Biehl's biography to a leading Sydney Green and erstwhile Trotskyist, himself in his seventies. The latter experienced a moment of Damascus proportions as he followed Bookchin's journey to libertarian enlightenment. Influence despite and across the philosophical divide.

Janet Biehl is very candid about her own vulnerabilities. "I had been living in New York, introverted and socially phobic, at thirty-three I was shy and unworldly to the point of dysfunction." (259) Her own yearning but fulfillment is writ large in small dedications: "He was my surrogate father and my mentor. His love remade me psychologically: my lifelong anxiety yielded to self-confidence and even enjoyment of life." (287) This is surely a tribute to a compassion beyond the cantankerous.

Moments of tenderness near the biography's close depict a humanity in the Enlightenment man not always apparent in his political pronouncements or conversations. It would be a hard heart not to feel some sympathy at Bookchin's final moments. We share intimate occasions in these closing pages, Murray listening to Rachmaninov, Mussorgsky and Borodin. His love for movies depicting "men with grand ambitions" who became "noble failures" perhaps telling us of a man witnessing the fading realization of his own dreams as he came towards the end of his days. Here we are face to face with the essence of life near the dusk – firstly fear of abandonment, anger, reconciliation, then love, finally family, friends, Dan Chodorkoff the loyal one. There is more than false sensibility in Biehl's requiem:

> "He whispered his last words: 'I am you and you are me.'
>
> Two days later he set sail on the infinite sea." (309)

Biehl observes the journey: "Their intellectual and political relationship soon became personal as well: at twenty-six, Murray had finally found a father-figure. He abjectly adored Weber." (54) A decade later, "Weber's early death rescued Bookchin from that toxic relationship. Sorting out all the wild and bitter emotions would take years." (79) We may wonder why this experience did not enlighten him to the damage caused by the bitter personal duels of the 1980s and '90s. Perhaps he decided, often destructively, that the lesson was to return fire. He was not Robinson Crusoe, but the conflicts destroyed relationships, philosophical sharing and cooperative political progress.

Murray Bookchin's firmest friends in the later political decades may well have been the Canadian anarchist Dimitrios Roussopoulos and his most loyal partner within the ISE, Dan Chodorkoff. Roussopoulos and his wife, Lucia Kowaluk, offered a sense of security as allies departed, acolytes challenged and politics became turgid. Montreal became, albeit briefly, an exciting realm for citizen aspirations towards organized participation, Freedom Press published many of Murray Bookchin's works. Dan Chodorkoff was the quiet and reassuring presence guiding Bookchin's charismatic exuberance into the calm waters of the ISE and Goddard in Vermont. My fleeting contact with Chodorkoff 20 years ago revealed a calm, courteous person, his collection of essays *The Anthology of Utopia* confirmed this portrait of a practical, down-to-earth, committed social ecologist as much as his professional calling as anthropologist and sociologist. Affinity of thought may have brought these men together but the enduring companionship is evident throughout the years. These loyal but not uncritical companions offered the organizing skills that even Biehl suggests Bookchin lacked.

As Bookchin embraced anarchist beliefs, the 1960s emerged with the possibility of youthful utopia. Murray's writings and oratory stimulated the radicalism of the New Left and Counter

culture. He urged liberatory thought and defied the descent of the New Left into Marxist-Leninism sectarianism and the counterculture into mainstream irrelevance.

In becoming the most eminent old man of the ecological movement, Bookchin's pedigree rested on his early exploration as a member of the Contemporary Issues group, his early environmental forays laying the groundwork for those to come. His activism in the '60s is described in the Chapter "Eco-anarchist" and in the 1970s in "Anti -Nuclear Activist," where we see his endeavors to exhort anti-nuclear movements such as the Clamshell Alliance to radical intent and direct democracy. We witness his efforts to translate libertarian ideals into reality within the radical German Green Movement. The clashes between Fundis and Realos saw disillusionment once more. Finally, though scarred by feuds with philosophical rivals, he sought utopia through the prism of social ecology and libertarian municipalism.

In the middle chapters devoted to "Social Ecologist," "Anti-Nuclear Activist," "Municipalist" and "Green Politico" we learn much about theory, activism, and the eras in which these dedications occurred but glean little about the man in more intimate guise. Here Biehl has maintained her stated aim. The paradox is evident – here was a man of heroic aspect but few of us are heroes. We like our supermen to be relatable! I like the little touch that Murray bought a yellow-painted house from the sale of land intended for a home of his own for his ex-wife turned friend, Beatrice, in Burlington, renting a room on the second floor to use for study and sleeping. More such moments would have been appealing.

Almost four decades of reading Bookchin's work has revealed so much to me about a brilliant, controversial and impassioned man and so little about the man himself. Even the more intimate format of the dialogues between Biehl and Bookchin and Doug Morris and Bookchin in *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left* (1999) divulged little about

dividualism he had decried within contemporary anarchism five years before, completely as odds with his own embrace of social anarchism. He acknowledges the "deliberately provocative" and "polemical" nature of the earlier booklet and proposes here to elaborate.

This is not his ultimate repudiation of anarchism. The essay is primarily a critique of "Beyond Bookchin," exploring and "exposing" David Watson's rejection of Civilization, Progress and Reason, his embrace of Technophobia and Primitivism. Following a reflection on the nature then demise of their earlier close relationship, Bookchin then denounces John Clark's denunciation of his work in "Bookchin Agonistes," notably condemning Clark's embrace of Taoism. Bookchin wonders if twenty-first century anarchism will be "revolutionary… coherent… well-organised… responsible… committed" or a concoction of the primitivist "personalistic… juvenile… even criminal" ideas and behavior such as those he has attacked here. (240)

However, a year later the formal break occurred when Bookchin addressed the second failed endeavor to rally anarchist support for libertarian municipalism at Plainfield in Vermont. Anarchists queried municipalism's vulnerability to state power and Bookchin's views on majority decision-making and consensus. Biehl describes his public "breaking with anarchism as his ideological home." (302) His reasons challenged the very heart of his former philosophy. He asserted that anarchists fundamentally favored individualism over collectivism and the social dimension. He maintained that as anarchists opposed laws and constitutions rational and orderly behavior was impossible. He asserted that anarchists wanted to abolish power but power only had value according to who held it. The fracture was complete. Communalism was now his sole conviction.

Yes, Bookchin polarizes, even today. I discovered this recently in conversation with an anarchist acquaintance. His dislike for the man and his views was made abundantly clear

groups and individuals in the major cities. Brian Laver, one of the most distinctive personalities from the revolutionary decades, formed an Institute of Social Ecology in Brisbane, long committed anarcho-syndicalist Sid Parissi still includes numerous Bookchin tomes in the anarchist bookshop, Jura, in Sydney. Younger generations have been touched, Hamish Alcorn, owner of Brisbane's most catholic secondhand bookstore, still maintains links to ISE forged in the '90s. Radicals in their twenties like Tim Briedis, the author of the sole comprehensive study of the Self-Management Group, have been influenced.

Bookchin's prolific reach and endeavor was a stimulus beyond the decline in radical understanding and commitment. *The Third Revolution* became a defining liberatory history to mark his final years. Experiencing personal and social isolation, for me the expectancy of awaiting the rare tomes whetted the appetite, inspired the possibility of a tangible, transcendent reality. I waited impatiently for the next volume of *The Third Revolution* to make its way to Australian shores. Bookchin's indefatigable research opened vistas of historical movements ostracized or unknown by mainstream social experience or historical account. His erudite conviction had spoken to me once, appealing to youthful ideals, now to middle-aged necessity.

The late 1990s also witnessed Bookchin's final critique of anarchism, then his rejection of the philosophy that had so profoundly characterized most of his adult life and through his erudition influenced so many.

Bookchin's 1998 essay "Whither Anarchism" (the longest of the ten comprising the anthology *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left*) is his response to the deluge of criticisms he received from a variety of anarchist thinkers and writers after the 1993 publication of his *Social or Lifestyle Anarchism – the Unbridgeable Chasm.*

"Whither Anarchism" is a more sober yet equally emphatic critique of the tendency to retreat into a form of lifestyle in-

the inner man. My first reading of *Ecology or Catastrophe* stimulated a deeper understanding of the philosophical and political influences and personalities but the people themselves all seemed almost one-dimensional, actors in a ferment of time and space but not leaping from the pages as fully formed human beings. Biehl's intention in her Prologue seemed to have been realized:

> "I make no claim to have written a full flesh-and-bones biography; it is rather a political biography of a thoroughgoing zoon politikon, a man formed by the political actors he knew, by the close-knit groups to which he belonged, by the broader movements to which he adhered, and by the times in which he lived." (Prologue, xii)

I searched for Bookchin's friendships and connections, his character, the man's vulnerabilities even idiosyncrasies to see a person beyond the charismatic prophet eulogized by his acolytes or the pugilistic sectarian depicted by his foes. It is not possible to realize this more complete portrait without reference to his political deeds and written tomes but a more intimate picture is truly biographical. Perusing the book again, at times Bookchin the man, with his virtues and flaws, does emerge, despite the difficulties imposed by Biehl's omissions. This will surely enhance our recognition of his contribution and the impact of his heritage. People relate to people, a crucial truism in an era of plastic celebrities and virtual reality.

Murray Bookchin's Russian anarchist past and dysfunctional and tragic childhood, deserted by his father at two, bereft of his grandmother a few years later, his mother emotionally incapable of caring for a brilliant, precocious boy – these surely provide a graphic insight into a man for whom the political became home. Bookchin confirms Biehl's insight that the Communist Party became his "surrogate parents…

that they taught him to subsume his personal distress into an intense devotion to the Communist Party, the Soviet Union and the coming revolution… 'It was the Communist Party that raised me …and frankly they were amazingly thorough.'" (7)

Was this the psychological moment when a young boy became embraced by a politically liberating but personally limiting world? The genesis of the brilliant but at times intolerant incarnation of radical thought and action?

For Biehl, despite her proclaimed detachment, this often poignant reflection upon Bookchin is a deeply personal one. She was the man's lover, even in a sense political muse. Objective observers may criticize her proximity to her subject. Her professed aim to describe the political man not the man himself is thus only partly realized and the reader is the richer. One may discern vivid insights into the abandoned boy, the ideologue youth, the factory-exhausted young man, threads of human connection throughout the description. This surely enhances our understanding of a complex individual.

Her support for Bookchin's views is unwavering until the surprise revelation towards the book's conclusion that she had reversed her political views, returning to the liberal democracy of her twenties and early thirties. A great surprise to Bookchin himself. He nonetheless proclaimed: "I love you anyway." (307) In many respects she is Bookchin's advocate. But there is sufficient query and depiction of frailties to transcend the David Watson jibe that she is a mere hagiographer (Watson, *Beyond Bookchin,* 37) Her portrait of tumultuous eras is focussed on one man so is limited in the role and illumination of other "secondary" characters but still reverberates with the exhortation of political and social events through both turbulent as well as less tumultuous decades.

Personal moments are portrayed. We witness Murray's early crush on a girl-disappointment. We watch his loyalty to his mother in administering her daily insulin injection over two decades. We share his tears at her death and the

this aggression and dogmatism to the scars unhealed from the clashes with deep ecology advocates. Much still lay in the man's ideological combativeness and elements of his own personality. Price may do less than justice in observing Murray's "simplicity in explaining the basis of his dialectic philosophy" (Price, 111), for Bookchin's essays on Dialectical Naturalism are lucid and profound. However, Price's response to Eckersley and Clark in their queries concerning the botanical validity of comparing the natural and human worlds (Light (ed.) *Social Ecology after Bookchin,* 1998) is incisive in that these are analogies to clarify the inherent nature of potentiality to create – or not – free, rational, ecological and socialist societies. The potential for diversity, mutuality and freedom in Nature, elevated to Humanity, is the more discernible path, but by no means the only one, nor one certain of realization. Price maintains Bookchin's most contentious yet visionary accomplishment may be that the dialectic is itself "an ongoing protest against the myth of methodology." ("Thinking Ecologically," in Bookchin *The Philosophy of Social Ecology – Essays on Dialectical Naturalism,*1996, 129, cited Price, 101)

While the revolutionary project withered in internal dissent and the fading of radicalism, in the 1990s Bookchin turned his energies to further exploring and acknowledging the history of popular revolution. He pondered the New England town meeting as a critical but neglected aspect of American history, a crucial practice in grassroots democracy. He became increasingly convinced of the city as the genesis of popular revolt. These themes were to be explored at great length and intimate detail in his four-volume study *The Third Revolution, Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era,* 1996–2005.

In Australia too, the radical eras were fading. Friends moved to the Greens or became apolitical. A few close comrades dismissed their '60s/'70s past as totally as their former commitment had been passionate. Anarchism and social ecology were largely distant memories sustained by small

Group of the 1970s, Australia's largest and most active and influential libertarian group, its journey from student radicalism, through council-communist influence to anarcho-communism, the rancorous divisions in 1977 with libertarian socialists separating from individual anarchists (and convert Marxists). When observing the bitter and painful animosity emerging between Bookchin and Clark I detected similar "issues of leadership, respect, independence, deference and growth… former acolytes needing to tread their own path." (8)

Biehl to her credit does not shy away from criticism of Bookchin's demeanor. She observes in Chapter 10 (Municipalist): "(H)is demeanour could become harsh, peremptory and dismissive, and his polemical rigour could slip over into scalding acrimony." (223) Was this the political youth of yesteryear combatting real or perceived deviation or an aberrant aspect of personality? Is it likely that if one endeavor is all-consuming that emotional balance is impossible to sustain? Bookchin claimed that content was more important than tone. Janet Biehl correctly states: "People tend to remember tone at least as much as content and if…disproportionate can undermine an otherwise solid case." Even Dimitrios Roussopoulos observed: "'The personality issue got in the way of him being able to practice his politics.'" (224) She does defend him as a man of ideological integrity and a man hardened in the symbolic and literal furnace of working-class politics: "The deepest layer of his psyche was emotionally generous." His students we are told "revered him for his moral imagination, his ebullience and his generous open-heartedness." (166–7)

Andy Price's reflections upon Bookchin's heritage in *Recovering Bookchin* may be seen as prejudiced as his writings are published by New Compass, the editorial group in essence dedicated to expounding Bookchin's legacy. Nonetheless, the honesty he exhibits in identifying Bookchin's excessive truculence in combating philosophical rivals within the anarchist sphere is reassuring. He may well be accurate in assigning some of

failure of his marriage. We applaud the loyalty of his friends in sabotaging his endeavor to join the merchant marines four days before Pearl Harbor.

It may be argued that the entrance of the author into the man's life in 1987 precludes a fuller and more direct comprehension of his life and personality. Certainly she finds it necessary to consult many former and current acquaintances to provide a history of these earlier years. Here Biehl's professional life as an editor and publisher comes to the fore in scrupulous attention to formatting and detail. It may be conjectured that a wider circle of interviewees might have suggested a greater variety of perspectives – what did the '60s Marxist youth think of this older radical in the post-SDS days, how was Bookchin perceived by other anarchists, such as anarcho-syndicalists in the earlier less confrontational years? Biehl provides fleeting evidence.

In the latter regard, we do know that a certain friendship did exist between Bookchin and Sam Dolgoff for some years. Indeed Bookchin attended meetings of the Libertarian League in the mid-1960s. Bookchin may have criticized the older man's anthology of Bakunin's writings – ironic given that he assisted its publication – but we learn that it was this very tome that inspired Bookchin to experience his Eureka moment in relation to grassroots local organization.

> "He came across a passage that made him gasp and shout…Murray pointed to a passage where Bakunin said that the municipal politics was qualitatively different from politics at the provincial and national levels." (240)

We are also told that Dolgoff was one of the many anarchist critics who earlier condemned his dalliance with local elections within the capitalist representative democratic arena.

Some contemporary anarcho-syndicalists who respect Bookchin's contribution wonder at and resent his criticism

of this particular traditional stream of anarchist thought and practice. Bookchin's reservations were the fruit of his bruised experience as a shop steward at factories such as General Motors in immediate post-war America. He perceived what he believed to be the death of the working-class as a viable revolutionary force in the exchange of improved wages and conditions for radical transformation, hence the futility of this realm. He also perceived a changing social and economic world which invoked a "broader" anarchist view where the proletariat were a crucial but not exclusive group in the creation of a new society. Anarchists still struggling in the mainstream might see here class dilution and consequent social irrelevance.

It is interesting to see in one of Bookchin's final writings (*Freedom, Anarchism and the Future of the Left,* 1999, 318–9) an acknowledgement of anarcho-syndicalism, together with anarcho-communism and his newly announced libertarian mutualism as the three sustaining threads embracing the four crucial tenets of social anarchism: opposition to capitalism; formation of libertarian communism; abolition of the state; confederally organized democratic political realms. A tense relationship, fraught at times, but not total separation.

Bookchin's relationship with the world's most prolific and famous anarcho-syndicalist, Noam Chomsky, is difficult to discern. The two rarely if ever mention the other in their works. My only "revelation" occurred in reading a characteristically spirited response by Murray Bookchin to an article by John Moore in the recently and sadly defunct *Social Anarchism* (Issue 20, Feb. 2006). He expresses his respect for Chomsky as someone who is striving for libertarian change while indicating their significant differences, notably here Chomsky's belief in proletariat-led revolution. Were it not for his disillusionment from personal experience and a study of international anarcho-syndicalism in Spain, France and Latin America highlighting concerns about the existence of hierarchy in trade

palpable in wounded wonder: "Why does Clark hate me so much?" (Biehl, op. cit., 298) Biehl recounts an apology from a chastened editor, Andrew Light, shortly before the birth of the hostile anthology *Social Ecology after Bookchin* in 1998. He is quoted as saying: "The contributors were frightened of Murray" and "There was so much Oedipal stuff going on." (300) Nonetheless, scrutiny of Clark's *Municipal Dreams* (1998) sees a measured, thoughtful, clinical, comparatively restrained discussion querying perceived flaws and limitations in Bookchin's embrace of libertarian municipalism and hasty repudiation of eco-communities. Ebullient it is not!

Insight into the origins of his harshest critics is instructive. Watson born into the middle-class radicalism of the '60s and '70s, Clark a fleeting, youthful supporter of reactionary Barry Goldwater, an academic in his emerging and later years. Here lay a deep gulf with the earlier radicals shaped by Depression, exhausting work and World War. "Personal experience of enforced drudgery or marginalisation inspires a different zeal from that created within a chosen realm of "romanticised" reminiscences or privileged existence." (Sheather, "Freedom, Anarchism or Social Ecology," *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 41, Summer 2005)

It seems possible to locate some of the tension between the older man and his younger critics in relation to the relative importance attached to Anarchism as autonomy or freedom, within these personal and social origins.

> "Autonomy precious to a youth of the '60s, under suspicion from a man cherishing the social liberation offered by the best of 'The Left That Was.' (Sheather, 4)

One could discern similar patterns to the U.S dissension in Australia in earlier years. The fractures observed in America resonated personally, recalling the Brisbane Self-Management

Bookchin is unyielding in his knowledge and rectitude. And such is his brilliance and breadth of erudition and vision, his decades of ideological and life experience, his coherence of argument, his arguments persuade. With such a formidable array of weapons, the humility of all great men would have enhanced his conviction. Watson's emphasis on metaphor, art, intuition and poetry may have offered a refreshing dimension. To Bookchin he displayed a dangerous and deluded attachment to primitivism, irrationalism and technophobia. Watson's rejection of primitivism in "Goodbye to All That" is either some sign of confusion or growth. Was sarcastic dismissal alone, however warranted or tempting, a sufficient response? Was the "master" himself at times lacking in subtlety, complexity, unawareness of ambiguity and nuance, indeed occasional compassion? He seemingly lacked the capacity to nurture younger questing acolytes or tolerate significant criticism, damning all opposition, undeniably fiercely provoked. In Price's eyes, such moderation may have assuaged the pain of internal anarchistic trauma.

I recall prominent Brisbane anarchist Brian Laver's reply to my query asking if he had found Bookchin arrogant in long and robust conversation: "No, he was just… right!" Much of their dispute had centered on different perceptions of the role of local or municipal government – to Bookchin an avenue of liberatory possibility, to Laver a sphere of compromise. The sad collusion of the Burlington Greens with a a mainstream party at the 1990 Ward elections shocked the unknowing Biehl and Bookchin. Anarchists would say inevitable but Bookchin's lone, public and disillusioned apology evokes pity more than censure. (274–277)

What do we learn about the subject of our discussion? His conviction transcended the need for personal and social courtesies. Being right, politically and philosophically, was his supreme concern. Losing friends or making enemies was, if necessary, the price. Yet his personal sense of loss is

unions he would be "their most ardent supporter." I guess what you would call qualified support!

Chomsky's contribution to the current Tribute issue of ROAR commemorating the centenary of Bookchin's birth in 1921 shows his admiration for the older man. He lauds Murray Bookchin's "remarkable talents and energy (in his) …search for justice and freedom." Chomsky praises "his illumination and insight, original and provocative ideas and inspiring vision." (Roar, Jan.,14, 2021) The Tribute selection is introduced by Bookchin's daughter, Debbie. The omission of Janet Biehl confirms that the split between family and biographer persists.

Another omission in Biehl's discussion is a detailed portrayal of the early anarchist influences on her lover and colleague. It is true that anarchist writings were scarce in America but Bookchin devoured them as the late '50s and '60s emerged. Such influence is hence more apparent in Bookchin's works of these times such as *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (essays appearing in 1960s, anthology in 1971), sustained in later works such as *Remaking Society* (1989). The influence of Herbert Read, his earliest introduction, confirmed his theories on city planning and the crucial balance between city and country was elicited from thinkers such as Mumford, Gutkind even Marx.

This would seem to be the omission of a writer (Biehl) whose liberal/social democratic political background until the late 1980s deprived her of this direct, rich and liberatory personal experience. As she described in her introduction to Bookchin's thought in 1987: "I knew and cared nothing about anarchism" despite the appeal of nature philosophy, ecology and communal politics. (259) In 1987 the conflicts with deep ecology and within the contemporary anarchist movement were intensifying and Biehl's views were unsurprisingly coincidental with Bookchin's desire to establish a society embracing libertarian municipalism and social ecology.

Biehl intelligently and incisively addresses Bookchin's encounters and disillusionment with Marxism as she follows his political conversions or aspirations. However, we may discover a more thorough statement of his views elsewhere, interestingly within interviews by Biehl and Morris.

Bookchin himself never forgot his Marxist roots however much he abhorred the perversions of one-party state and hierarchical rule. Some would say to the detriment of his subsequent libertarian beliefs. We see this acknowledgement and perhaps residual affection clearly described in the man's reflections, *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left* (1999). Here he briefly describes those elements of Marxism that he saw contributing to revolutionary theory and practice. He observes Marx's desire for a coherent socialism embracing philosophy, history, economics. He reserves critical praise for Marx as a man of dialect but one confined to the mechanical arena rather than his own organic and naturalistic approach. He is unstinting in his admiration for Marx's critique of capitalism, of commodification and accumulation.

Nonetheless, the primary thrust of this anthology is critical of most aspects of Marx's beliefs. "Listen Marxist" (*Post Scarcity Anarchism*) repudiated proletarian hegemony and Stalinist seduction, *Marxism and Bourgeois Ideology* (1979) decried the emerging unholy alliance between this ideology and ecology, the rigidity of the prescribed historical development of communism, authoritarian communism's ambiguity about the objectification of the workers and its blurred perception of ethics. Bookchin does acknowledge his intellectual debt to Marx, that there were polemical intentions in much of his own early critiques and Marx must be seen as a man of his time. Ultimately, Bookchin maintains the superiority of confederation over state and party, direct democracy over pragmatic bourgeois alliance, libertarian communism over the remnants of the supposedly withered state.

"this vacuous pedant" in a scathingly entitled "The World According to Clark/Cafard" (Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left,* 216–240). The irretrievable rift is laid bare.

Biehl describes the continuing sense of siege as she and Bookchin responded to critics, not least after the publication of the defining *Social Anarchism and Lifestyle Anarchism – the Unbridgeable Chasm.* (I discussed a number of these conflicts, notably David Watson's "Beyond Bookchin," in "Freedom, Anarchism and Social Ecology" *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 41, 2005, expanding on this in "Further Thoughts" (unpublished) after correspondence with Janet Biehl in which she tersely recommended reading *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left.* I did!) Was this the decline of a charismatic prophet into a bitter, arrogant old man clinging to the vestiges of his sectarian, dogmatic philosophical empire, as depicted by his critics? Was it, as his allies and supporters portrayed, a courageously desperate endeavor to arrest the decline of the Enlightenment into mystical and treacherous terrain?

In all these exchanges we see attacks on Bookchin's credibility as man and thinker. It is a recurring pattern of attack and counter-attack. Interestingly, one can perceive at times admiration for Bookchin expressed by Watson, by Purchase, by Clark, but rarely is this acknowledged in his replies. (Watson: "I agree with Bookchin …I share his hunger…" (*Beyond Bookchin,* 1996, 243); Purchase: "He deservedly emerged as a major thinker and writer…" (his) "insightful comment…" "this penetrating essay" "a gifted and talented writer and thinker…" (Social Ecology, Anarchism and Trade Unionism in *Deep Ecology and Anarchism,* 1, 2, 7); Clark: "Bookchin is certainly right…" "One of the most enduring aspects of Bookchin's thought…; Bookchin has eloquently made points…" (*Municipal Dreams,* 7, 17, 20)

One feels that the critics are akin to students, abrasively challenging the master yet expressing residual admiration.

achievements of syndicalist anarchism and commendation of its adherents' historical courage and sense of community are ignored in Bookchin's withering critique. He condemns the limitations of trade union focus, the movement's historical pragmatism and its perceived irrelevance in a world where workers are wedded to the status quo. Ironically, Purchase's depiction of environmentalists clashing with logging workers in Australia, reminiscent of the US construction workers attacking anti-Vietnam student activists, does diminish the impact of his "strikes, walk-outs and sabotage" (6) as vehicles for environmental change. Nonetheless, anarcho-syndicalists would point to the ecological awareness of modern proponents as a critical aspect of their world view.

Elsewhere, as David Foreman advocated biocentrism equating human lives with animals, Bookchin derided him as an "'eco-brutalist'" and "'a patently anti-humanist and macho mountain man.'" (*Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: a Challenge for the Ecology Movement,* in Biehl, 264) In turn, Watson dismissed Bookchin's work as "seriously limited from the very beginning" (Watson, 10), posits its "unsound and inadequate maturity" and "The saddest moment and the nadir of his career represented by his recent writings." (189) Bookchin dismisses Watson's "vituperative attacks, manic denunciations, ad hominem characterisations and even gossipy rumour" (Bookchin, *Marxism, Anarchism and the Future of the Left,* 169). He disputes the man's methodology, attacks his historical ignorance. In turn, Murray's former close friend John Clark pillories his former comrade and mentor as "a theoretical bum," "an enraged autodidact," "a practitioner of brain-dead dogmatism," accuses him of ineptitude in philosophical analysis, being "an amateur philosopher" and an "energetic graduate." (Max Cafard/John Clark, "Bookchin Agonistes," *Fifth Estate,* 20–23, 1997). Bookchin's response seems almost mild in declaiming that "the little professor is a blooming elitist," but derision is reasserted as he dismisses

Bookchin always urged the need for American libertarian visionaries but he critically acknowledges Kropotkin's and Bakunin's, to a lesser extent Proudhon's, crucial contributions to the expanding utopian project:

> "One cannot simply ignore the compelling analyses that were advanced by William Godwin… the corpus of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's writings, the incisive critiques of Michael Bakunin, the reconstructive works of Peter Kropotkin, particularly his far-reaching ecological insights…" (*Remaking Society,* 116)

He did not shrink nonetheless from rejecting Proudhon's patriarchal leanings or individualistic property contracts, Bakunin's collectivism and revolutionary instinct (the latter admittedly admired in earlier years), Kropotkin's selective "social instinct" and tendency to derive human consociation from the animal world.

The afore-mentioned estrangement between Biehl and Bookchin's family is a sad loss. We are not told the reason. The acknowledgement, in a brief footnote to the prologue, sees the unfortunate loss of enlightening intimate accounts. Such narratives would surely have offered deeper insight into the internecine Contemporary Issues years, the tumultuous '60s, the warm memories and exciting childhood years revealed by Debbie Bookchin. (Venturini, ROAR interview, Feb. 28, 2015) The man himself. These brief reminiscences from his daughter reveal a man whose life was more fulfilled emotionally before the author's entrance into his life than Biehl's discussion would suggest, a man who stayed close to his ex-wife, Bea, and children. A man also for whom the personal and political were inextricably entwined.

Biehl's creative urgings, absent in smaller, more prosaic works such as *The Politics of Social Ecology* (1996) are evident

throughout a book that is restrained yet imbued with a deep love for her subject in all dimensions of that statement. Vivid teardrops of description raise her work from what could have been a purely political tome-as indeed was her supposed intent!

> "Instantly a primal fervour swept me – to make his last days on earth as beautiful and tender as I could. I will always be grateful for the fifteen months that followed the diagnosis (of aortic valve stenosis). Emotions again escalated, but this time to an acme of mutual affection and compassion. I learned what it meant to give freely with no strings attached, no conditions, no guilt, no roles, no barriers. One late Sunday afternoon we sat quietly holding hands in the Dunkin' Donuts on Main Street, near where the Fresh Ground Coffee House once stood. As the sun came in through the plate-glass window, he leaned back on his scooter, closed his eyes in contentment, and pressed my fingers. Together we were sur l'eau." (Biehl, 308)

Bookchin was monogamous in relationships, eschewing the communal patterns of his younger friends. He believed in emotional intimacy in a relationship. He kept his hair, in the main, short and proudly wore working class clothes. He was unashamedly fond of junk food. He drove short distances. Heartening to witness eccentricity and quirks! In the era of Timothy Leary he rejected drugs. He desired clarity not confusion.

I would like to have witnessed more reflections from beyond the Social Ecology "confines." While the Institute years offered models of future activism, learning both practical and theoretical, which Biehl explores in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, the isolation became apparent in the numerical decline of ISE and "the

John Clark, as Clark increasingly embraced Taoism and deep ecology. Further mutual invective involved firstly Murray and David Foreman, then Bookchin and David Watson. Later clashes involved former ally Joel Kovel and numerous others.

While the confrontation between anarcho-syndicalist Graham Purchase is not mentioned, a perusal of the anthology *Deep Ecology and Anarchism – a Polemic* is symbolic of the heights – or depths – of acrimony invoked. Purchase sees Bookchin as consumed "by an insatiable appetite for controversy" displaying "an unhealthy desire to be to be intellectual leader and founder of the 'new' ecological movement." He asserts he displays "intellectual schizophrenia" and the plagiarism of anarchist ideas with a socialist feminist veneer in "Hegelian garb." (G. Purchase, *Social Ecology, Anarchism and Trades Unionism,* 7–8) Bookchin responds with characteristic fervor, describing Purchase as an "oaf" who bombastically equates syndicalism with anarchism – "an act of arrogance that is as fatuous as it is ignorant." He exhorts Purchase to explore anarchist historical theory and practice before revealing "inanities that reveal appalling ignorance" of the intellectual and practical consequences of his own beliefs.(Bookchin, "Deep Ecology, Anarcho-syndicalism and the Future of Anarchist Thought" in B. Morris, et al., *Deep Ecology and Anarchism – a Polemic*, 3–4)

Bookchin's late-life affirmation of syndicalism divorced from anarchism may be thus viewed with cynicism, a contradiction of his decades long belief that syndicalism had sullied pure libertarianism. Yet it mirrors his final perception, controversial as it was, that syndicalism exhorted mass movements whereas anarchism, in individualist guise, preferred spontaneity. (Murray Bookchin, "Anarchism v. Syndicalism," Youtube video, 2004)

The insights of Purchase into positive achievements of Anarcho-Syndicalist history such as the inclusion of Indians and prostitutes in unions, his advocacy of the reformist

the ecological of the 1980s and the anarchist of the 1990s. (This demarcation is merely a guide in both ideology and chronology. Clark opposed Bookchin in both realms as one could say did Watson.)

Bookchin was the lifelong secularist and humanist. His spirituality was the beauty of Nature in long walks through the abundant beauty of Vermont, "the psychological solace of walking in forests – in the Great Smoky Mountains with his friends." (263) As the deep ecologists, eco-feminists and certain anarchists embraced various versions of animism or quietist tradition, he held firm:

> "To worship or revere, any being, natural or supernatural, will always be a form of self-subjugation and servitude that ultimately yields social domination, be it in the name of nature, society, gender or religion." (*Remaking Society,* 13)

He admired the courage of Catholic Worker activist Dorothy Day and saw utopia in the visions of Martin Luther King, he evoked harmonies of an ecological world but a more transcendent spirituality was foreign. He praised the radicalism of Christian sects such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit in Europe and Lollards in England, the aspirations of the Peasant Articles of Memmingen, the theological critiques of Abelard and Wyclif, but any inherent virtues or achievements of the Judaeo-Christian tradition such as the Catholic Enlightenment were ignored. He would have no doubt condemned the recent scholarly discussions "to cast a probing light on the rich dialogue that these conflicts (between religion and anarchism) have created" as misguided and illusory. (Christoyannopolous & Adams, *Essays in Anarchism and Religion,* 2)

The price he was to pay for his passion – or arrogant hegemony as portrayed by opponents –was high and Biehl depicts it clearly. Biehl documents his split with fervent supporter,

failure of the municipal conferences in 1999–2000." (Ibid., 306) What did the ordinary people in Burlington think of the man as a neighbor? In similar vein, are there any surviving friends from his youth or foundry, General Motors days who could share their personal impressions or recollections?

Biehl's style is lucid yet thorough, her chronology of Bookchin's progress from ardent Stalinist youth, through fervent Trotskyist to the frenetic and emotionally wrought Josef Weber days, to social anarchist when the philosophy was consigned to oblivion, then to crucial voice as a social ecologist, ultimately to become the architect of libertarian municipalism, is riveting. And instructive. While reflective of the journey of many in the questing decades after World War Two, Bookchin's politico/philosophical growth is unique in its refusal to genuflect to the passing indulgences of New Left embrace of Marxism-Leninism and Counter Culture retreat, the academic romance with Marxism or deep ecology. He walked his own walk, talked his own talk in passionately erudite encounters with clearly enthralled peers and students at both ISE and Ramapo College where he had been appointed assistant professor in 1974, anointed associate professor two years later, and emeritus professor in 1982.

Bookchin's cynicism of traditional academic institutions and the harsh circumstances of his youth had negated tertiary formal study. His writings, despite their erudition, as Price observes, were for the people not the academy. A little sadly, despite such instances as his later condemnation of *Telos,* the editors of the Frankfurt School-oriented journal, for theoretical opaqueness, political timidity and social caution, Biehl informs her readers that the man who could write such respected tomes and hold audiences in thrall for hours without notes was embarrassed by his lack of university acknowledgement. No doubt he was deeply grateful for Biehl's skills as editor and researcher.

It was in maintaining his political stances and radically social integrity that Bookchin encountered, and to a degree fomented, the vitriol during the final decades of his life. A stark contrast to the respect garnered in earlier years. Andy Price (*Recovering Bookchin,* 2012) observes that these earlier publications were increasingly met with admiration, Biehl describes the impact of the printing of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism:* "when it appeared in 1971, (it) hit the New Left and the counterculture like a thunderclap… (T)he stereotype of anarchism as mere bomb-throwing (was) redefined … into a socially and ethically reconstructed alternative." (138–9) I recall as an emerging libertarian in the mid-'70s the intoxicating mix of excitement and apprehension on lifting the book from the shelves of Brisbane's "Red and Black Bookshop" the then home of the Brisbane anarchist movement.

The Ecology of Freedom (1982) was his "magnum opus," lavishly praised by thinkers and writers such as Roszak, Robin Clark and Aronowitz. Biehl was inspired to attend the ISE school after reading the book, now being "acclaimed as magisterial." (259) Again I may offer personal witness to the cerebral profundity that this work invoked. This was a time where the anarchist groups of my youth were dissolving and the appearance of a substantial testament to those ideas was critical in sustaining understanding of the luminous aspirations now again submerged in emerging cynicism, pragmatism or disillusion. The defiance of the youthful "Red and Black Bookshop" with the "conspiratorial" meetings in the stifling upper room to the tune of the old gestetner was fast becoming a memory.

So what went wrong? Biehl describes the man's "warmth and geniality" in the early halcyon days in Vermont. Now she was called upon to defend Bookchin's endeavor to maintain anarchism as a coherent social heritage and program in the face of mounting opposition and acrimony. Bookchin's disillusionment with the perceived indifference of European anarchists in relation to the Green movements of the early 1980s was a sig-

nificant disappointment. One could say that the European libertarians were correct in their cynicism given the party's swift descent into mainstream pragmatism. However, Bookchin exuded the urgency that they lacked, returning to America to discover more fertile ground.

As Biehl entered his life, she saw the coming disintegration of the friendship between her future comrade and lover and John Clark. The latter saw feelings and unity with Nature as liberation, the other a dialectical relationship characterized by reason, the "Second Nature" of Humanity emerging from the "First." This difference of experience and perception was to mark the cataclysmic debates between social anarchists and lifestyle or individual anarchists, social ecologists and deep ecology advocates. The definition indeed "ownership" of social ecology was itself in dispute.

There can be little doubt that the National Gathering of American Greens at Amherst in 1987 was a flash point for Murray Bookchin. He saw the American anarchist movement retreating into academic indulgence with an all-embracing approach to ecology that to him reeked of mysticism and postmodernist fragmentation. The ironically titled *Re-enchanting Humanity* (1995) is the vigorous defense of Enlightenment and Modernism. As he had opposed man's domination of Nature, he now condemned ideas that he perceived urged mankind's subjugation to or merging with Nature. While not acknowledged in Biehl's account, David Watson in contrast saw Amherst as an opportunity for "constructive debate with deep ecologists" as some ecologists queried the nature of this philosophy, an "opportune" moment for Bookchin to recognize positive elements in this arena and explain "the social causes of the ecological crisis." An opportunity, in his eyes, lost through Bookchin's "intellectual bullying." (Watson, *Beyond Bookchin,* 16–17).

It was clear that the significance of spirituality was a key ingredient of both the major disputes that involved Bookchin,