

Total Liberty

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Editorial

Those of us living in these British Isles are again facing the 4 or 5 yearly circus which the Party Politicians provide for us, with this difference: this election campaign has started very early. A General Election is one time many Anarchists take the opportunity to promote our alternative message to as many people as our slender resources allow. However, while I agree with an Anarchist abstention campaign at such a time, and I believe it important that we signal our refusal to give our consent to Government, the State, or to the Corporate Capitalist economy, on their own, Anarchist Abstention campaigns can appear to be a very negative response. We are often accused of not offering an effective vision of our own. Perhaps then, our arguments, language and comments at election times should actively stress the positive alternatives that Anarchism stands for, rather than just the negative message 'don't vote'. By this I mean we should be advocating a multi-track approach, one whose message is not only *don't vote*, but also *become an active individual within one's locality, community or workplace*. There are a whole range of areas to which Anarchist and decentralist ideas are applicable, including Community Associations, Worker Co-ops, Housing Co-ops, Trade Unions, Credit Unions and

LETS schemes, among others. Encouraging responsible and free individuals to become active in these organisations and help build vibrant communities is essential. This can provide an alternative to the homogenised society produced by Governments of both left and right, an *Anarchist* alternative to the soulless uniformity of a McDonalds in every town and the same range of 'logos' marketed by the globalised Capitalist Corporations. This is surely the most effective way to build a living and sustainable future for humanity. General Elections merely promise more of the same problems and seek the population's obeisance to the resulting poverty, alienation, urban decay, pollution, and environmental degradation.

This edition of Total Liberty has articles from our regulars as well as some contributions from newcomers. Peter Neville gives us his ideas about the relevance of Science Fiction to Anarchism; Larry Gambone writes on Elitism. Cindy Milstein, faculty member of the Institute for Social Ecology, contributes an article *Reclaim the Cities*, which looks at prospects for moving beyond the confrontational street politics of *Reclaim the Streets* type protests to the creation of a social movement which could actually reclaim our cities. Jean Pollard writes in this edition on the topic W(h)ither Government.

In our present age of Green Economics, Credit Unions and LETS schemes the ideas of Equitable

Commerce, Voluntary Co-operation and Mutualist Economics promoted by Anarchist-Individualist Josiah Warren in 19th Century America, are of continuing relevance and this issue includes a reprint of a description of the Warrenite Community 'Modern Times' culled from Benjamin Tucker's journal *Liberty*. Many Anarchists, Greens and other activists continually re-invent the wheel, or use ideas whose origins they are unaware of. We do not need to be ashamed that Anarchist ideas have a long history and have at times been implemented with some degree of success and practicality. We need to be able to point to such examples as *Modern Times* when people raise the old objection ..."a very nice theory, but it would never work in practice..."

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Science Fiction as Social Criticism

By Peter Neville

In introducing this topic I must refer you to the excellent article by John Pilgrim in *Anarchy* 34 (Series 1) December 1963. I hope this piece produces something of a parallel. Perhaps one of the problems in discussing Science Fiction is its use of the term 'Science' because, to a large extent, Science Fiction is not necessarily very scientific in the physical sciences sense. It is more inclined towards the social sciences particularly psychology, sociology, political science and anthropology although when it became popular in the thirties the social sciences were, in an academic sense, in their infancy and they were less influential than they are today.

I am tempted to suggest that Science Fiction should be called Creative Fiction but here we run into the problem that all works of fiction are creative.

Another problem is that to call works of Science Fiction, *Science Fiction*, has forced them and their writers into a specific genre, like detective fiction, westerns, love stories, comedies and so on and not being seen as part of mainstream literature, tending to be pushed to one side from serious comment unless, of course, one is a 'serious' writer dabbling in Science Fiction when perhaps momentarily the genre can be taken seriously.

Examples of the latter are writers such as H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (the book - not the appalling TV serial), George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or even works of less serious novelists - everyone seems to want to have a go at least once - Geoffrey Household, Herbert Read, Colin Wilson on a number of

occasions and Howard Fast are examples.

Interestingly the last writer was once asked whether he considered his two Science Fiction anthologies part of his serious writing and surprised the interviewer by saying it was. I consider Howard Fast's short story, "I zapped an angel" about an American airman that accidentally shot one down, one of the most amusing satires on modern religion. In fact many SF writers do write non-science fiction but often do so under other names.

The reality is that Science Fiction is about two main aspects: technology and the social sciences linked together by creative writing. And if you take this approach its origins go back well beyond the advent of modern science. Peter Nichols in the new collection *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* edited by John Clute and Nichols himself, published in 1993, suggested that the earliest work of Science Fiction is the Babylonian text of three thousand years ago *The Epic of Gilgamesh* which has both a fantastic voyage and a great flood, and there are a great many others such as Beowulf. Religion itself has many Science Fiction themes such as the Judeo-Christian creation, a fine act of terra-formation (reproduced later in a Star-Trek movie). Noah's Ark could be said to be an example of Darwin's notion of survival of the fittest - there were no Brontosauruses, Tyrannosaurus Rexes or Pterodactyls after the Ark. Maybe Noah just did not like big reptiles, thought them too obstreperous or just had not got room. Jonah's whale could be the first submarine, and the Christian notion of the Ascension another SF

example. Just because the apostolic writers did not record it does not mean to say Jesus Christ's last words were not "Beam me up Scottie". All religions have examples of Science Fiction.

People claim Mohammed was illiterate and could not have written down The Koran. There are two versions accounting for this: the Science Fiction and the Science Fantasy versions. The Science Fiction version says he did not need to write it down, he had a fax machine; the Science Fantasy explanation is that he did not need a fax machine, he had a ghostwriter. But is this a division between Science Fiction and Science Fantasy or just mythology creeping in?

Most readers of popular literature are perhaps unaware that most of the works of eighteenth and nineteenth century popular novelists were written in serial form. Fielding, Thackeray, Dickens and Hardy only published complete novels when they became more popular writers. Magazines such as Blackwoods and the like are examples and Science Fiction carried on this tradition with few novels originally published complete. The first English language magazine devoted wholly to SF was *Amazing Stories* which was founded in the USA in 1926 by Hugo Gernsback subtitled *The Magazine of Scientification*.

The modern term *Science Fiction* was hardly used until the nineteen forties. It did not pass into general parlance until John W Campbell took over the editorship of *Astounding Science Fiction* (re-named ANALOG in 1960.) By the forties and early fifties other journals appeared: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Galaxy*, *If*, *Worlds* and

other titles, but these were in America although many of their writers were British, writing under a number of pseudonyms.

British magazines appeared in the nineteen fifties such as *New Worlds Science Fiction* which appeared for some fifty years (excluding a twelve year hiatus), accompanied in the sixties by parallel publications from the same publishing house: *Science Fantasy* and *Science Fiction Adventures* and other publishers magazines such as *Nebula* and other USA titles. By the sixties many paperback novels were being published and in 1953, in both Britain and the USA, Science Fiction book clubs commenced independently. Although the British one eventually petered out, the American one, I understand, continues.

Returning to John Pilgrim's article in *Anarchy* magazine. Why do I, as a person addicted to SF and a person addicted to anarchism, like Science Fiction? I like Science Fiction because it allows the examination of alternative worlds, alternative systems, alternative societies and the interplay of new ideas. It also allows for the criticism of existing society and especially its system of social control. Rather like *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam* which was absorbed into the classical Persian literature and then re-surfaced from time to time by critical scholars, who when the Muslim world became more authoritarian, used to publish their social criticism as recently discovered works of Omar.

During the period of McCarthyite witch hunting anti-communism in the fifties in the US no regular journalist dare attack McCarthy until Ed Morrow lost his temper and attacked him in public. Suddenly the gates opened, and like the discrediting of the seventeenth century witch-finder general and the halting of the killing of accused witches, everyone rushed in to discredit and destroy McCarthyism. Yet, almost unnoticed, during this period it was Science Fiction writers

who had been attacking McCarthyism, especially John W Campbell, editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, who attacked McCarthyism in editorial after editorial.

Science Fiction is a major critique of authoritarianism, state security apparatus, racism, sexism and can be a supporter of freedom. Yet when I once tried to get the then editor of *Freedom* to publish a review of a short story in a Science Fiction magazine attacking racism, it was rejected simply because they would not publish this kind of review. Not important, or perhaps they were not selling it in the bookshop. There are indeed dangers in writing criticism. Most SF writers have an idea and write a story or book on it but it does not mean the ideas expressed in the plot are necessarily their own personal ideas, but simply ideas they wish to explore. Robert Heinlein fell into this trap with his novel *Starship Troopers*, originally published in 1959, initially written as a children's story which described a future America of a corporatist nature. Heinlein was attacked by his critics as being militarist and fascist (obviously the critics had no idea what fascism meant; they were just using it as a boo word). Although the book gained a Hugo Award (a SF Prize) the criticism seriously damaged Heinlein's reputation (whereas 1984 hardly damaged Orwell's). Heinlein later wrote books supporting, yet critically examining, equal opportunities, especially feminism. His books were radical not fascist and, in an American sense, individualist. He has several times been voted "best all-time author" in opinion polls by SF fans, but it is a problem that readers can read one or more books of an author, and because they agree or disagree with the topic can praise or condemn the author. I had always felt *Starship Troopers* was essentially filmable and I am told it has now been filmed. Again Heinlein is under attack because of the film and is again called fascist, forgetting he died in 1988 so he was hardly

responsible for the film script which I gather bears little or no relation to the book.

Ursula Le Guin is often lauded as a feminist writer but when you pin her exponents down they are talking of only two or three books. In fact she has to my knowledge written twenty-six books: SF, non-SF, non-fiction, children's stories, poetry - some good, some bad - I have twenty-five of them. But to listen to some people, especially male supporters of feminism, you get the impression she invented the wheel and no other writer wrote on women. On the contrary there are a whole gamut of writers such as Zenna Henderson, C.J. Cherry and Marion Zimmer Bradley and men too like James Schmitz who wrote in the forties and fifties using women as strong main characters. Some of these were writing as feminists, some merely as SF writers. It reminds me of a woman who appeared surprised I had a book by Alison Laurie on my bookshelves. Why not? I read what I hear is good. Am I to be attacked for reading Simone de Beauvoir because I am a man? I try to read authors of quality who have something to say, not merely authors that might agree with my views.

My favourite writers are, apart from those already mentioned, Gordon Dickson, Mack Reynolds, Hal Clement, James White, Richard Cowper, Frank Herbert, John Brunner, H.P. Lovecraft and Robert Holdstock, to name but a few, although the latter two were mainly Science Fantasy writers. There may be others but I have momentarily forgotten. I do note sadly that most of my favourite writers are described in the Encyclopedia as having recently died. Perhaps I just grew up with them. I expect you have a different range of writers.

It is a pity we do not have more SF writers writing about anarchist ideas - or maybe there are but I just missed them. Much of the late Mack Reynold's work touched on Libertarianism or critically examined

modern society in an anarchic way. He was for twenty-seven years a member of the American Socialist Labour party - his father was twice its presidential candidate. Although popular in his day, he never rose above pulp fiction. The problem is that the notion of *political correctness* often blocks perception both in publishing and from a readership.

Speaking personally, I feel SF is one of the best ways of getting new

ideas across, of getting us to critically examine our pre-conceived notions, of getting people to reject their sacred cows. What a pity we do not seem to have any SF writers in our ranks - to my knowledge that is. Mind you, if we do, I expect the last thing they will do is admit the fact to an audience of anarchists because their hearers will automatically assume that one particular novel is a statement of their aims and

principles and demand they defend it mightily, to which I expect their comment might surely be: "What a bore, give me the general public any day." However, I think it is now time to ask what others of you feel about SF and its possible contribution to getting ideas, especially anarchist ideas, across?



ANARCHISM AND ELITISM

"(Workers) ...feel powerless, as an individual, against the boss. That is why workers can accept the bosses view of the world." Marxism And Anarchism
SOCIALIST WORKER 16 Sept 2000

There are two ways of relating to "The People". One way is favoured by Tories, Fascists and Marxist-Leninists who regard the ordinary people as too stupid to make decisions for themselves. This is the elitist way. An elite of "superior individuals", a result of birth, education or class / national consciousness is needed to guide the ignorant. The other way, is for lack of a better term, "populist". The average person is deemed capable of understanding and acting upon his or her rational needs. The People are seen not as ignorant victims but as historical actors. The populist view was favoured by the Populist

Movements (of course!) and anarchists such as Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Tolstoy and Landauer. George Orwell expressed a populist viewpoint when he stressed the "essential decency" of the lower-middle and working classes as opposed to the power-lust of their intellectual would-be liberators. However, both the elitist and populist concepts tend to be reduced to catch-phrases and clichés such as the swinish multitudes, the sheeple, the common man etc.

Elitists favour anecdotal evidence. They regard the popularity of some feather-brained pop star or the election of creatures like Clinton and

Blair as evidence of mass idiocy. For the elitist, this contemptible nature is self-evident. Populists tend to have a faith in the ordinary person. This faith is fine as far as it goes, but what is needed is empirical evidence. This evidence exists and is easy to find, consisting of a multitude of surveys, polls, election results and interviews.

We must examine the sort of data which indicate how "enlightened" people are, how aware they are of the political and social realities and to what extent their beliefs and actions reflect rational self interest. Take a cluster of fundamental issues such as the environment, gender equality and opposition to racial

discrimination. Huge majorities take enlightened stances on these issues. More contentious issues such as drug decriminalisation and capital punishment find significantly large minorities in favour of decriminalisation and against the death penalty. Over the years the number of people against capital punishment and favouring drug decriminalisation has grown significantly. If people really were stupid and backward, surely only a small minority would favour a progressive stance.

We must also take stock of the fact that people have contradictory opinions (or at least they seem contradictory to us.) As only one example, many people who favour less government and yet endorse capital punishment. If you dwell on the negative aspect of the contradiction, to the exclusion of the positive, such individuals seem much less “progressive” than they really are. Of course, elitists NEVER have any contradictory views.

In terms of political and social realities, the data show an intensely critical attitude among the majority of the population. Virtually all authority figures are regarded with a jaundiced eye, especially politicians and bureaucrats. People are angry over the high salaries of CEO's, sports and entertainment figures. There is a great deal of suspicion of the medical, educational, media and judicial Establishments. If the people were stupid they would admire rather than detest their masters.

A similar situation exists with rational self interest. Most people resent taxes and want to see them cut or abolished. Most prefer less government regulation, oppose social engineering such as so-called affirmative action and are hostile to political centralisation. A large minority oppose all forms of state assistance to business and agriculture. People also act upon this rational self-interest. Some 40% of the population belong to co-operatives, and millions are members of other kinds of voluntary societies.

If the people were stupid they would cheerfully pay their taxes, revel in their regulated lives and never do anything on their own.

Yet, in spite of all this cynicism toward the authorities, we are still stuck with governments that rob us and pass ever-greater amounts of repressive legislation. Don't the masses vote them in power? Well, yes and no. First off, there is no such thing as a true majority government. Depending upon the country, only 50-75% of the population bother voting in general elections. With two or more parties in the race, all governments represent only a minority of the population. The situation is even more evident at local levels of government where it is usually the case that only 30% of possible voters cast a ballot. Repressive city by-laws are the work of less than 15% of the population! It is true however, that millions of people do vote for political parties. Are they stupid? Not really. Few ordinary folk are True Believers in some party ideology or Leader. Most who bother to vote, do so for the party they feel is the least threatening to some important interest of theirs, hardly an endorsement of the system.

On the evidence, it is safe to conclude that the ordinary person, while certainly not perfect, has a pretty good idea of what's going on. People do not need an elite to tell them what to do, what to think, or how to behave. They do make mistakes, but they also learn from them. The problem for contemporary anarchism is that a number of self-styled anarchists exhibit very strong elitist tendencies. Talk to these anarchists, read their publications and you find a great number of sneering references to the “middle class”, “yuppies”, “sub-urbanites”, “SUV drivers”, etc. These despised groups, unbeknownst to them, make up most of the working population. How must a 25 year old nurse, lab technician, or teacher feel when

reading a graffiti that says “Kill The Yuppie Scum, circle A”. The few times the traditional blue collar workers do enter the picture, they are rudely dismissed as “racist”, “sexist”, “homophobic” and “consumerist”. The nearest thing we have to a proletariat today, the low-waged waitresses, bar maids, security guards, strippers, shop clerks, fast food workers, get short shifted as well.

What does get support are groups and ideologies virtually guaranteed to offend the general population. Thus we have the lauding of violence and vandalism, articles praising paedophilia, technophobia and criminality. In fact, these anarchists seem infatuated with criminals and the lumpen proletariat. How one achieves anarchism by alienating 90% of the people is never explained.

If the ordinary person is not the one to liberate society who is? If an “anarchist” elite were to impose its views on the majority, you would not have a libertarian society, but a new form of class rule. If people do not want society to change along the lines the “anarchist” elite proposes, they will resist such change and anarchism again becomes impossible. Unless it is what the populace wishes, anarchism remains a hollow utopia like Marx's communism. A social project will remain a fantasy unless it already exists in some manner in the thoughts and actions of the general population.

Elitism is an authoritarian attitude par excellence. Oppression and exploitation have always been rationalized by the belief in the inferiority of the oppressed and exploited group. Among socialists and anarchists elitism is a carry-over from the authoritarian past.

The anarchist is thus not an inspired person bringing a divine message to the benighted masses. As well as the necessary labour of exposing the oppressive and exploitative nature of illegitimate

authority, anarchists must search for the liberatory and the social within the daily existence of the people. The role of the anarchist is one of making people aware of what others are doing and generalising these

activities. Every attempt to resist or ignore illegitimate authority on the part of the "masses", the various forms of mutual aid, voluntary association, free exchange, efforts to decentralize power, to maintain

communities and regions, all become grist for the anarchist mill.

Larry Gambone

Reclaim the Cities: From Protest to Popular Power

by Cindy Milstein

"Direct action gets the goods," proclaimed the Industrial Workers of the World nearly a century ago. And in the short time since Seattle, this has certainly proven to be the case. Indeed, "the goods" reaped by the new direct action movement here in North America have included creating doubt as to the scope and nature of globalisation, shedding light on the nearly unknown workings of international trade and finance bodies, and making anarchism and anti-capitalism almost household words. As if that weren't enough, we find ourselves on the streets of twenty-first-century metropolises demonstrating our power to resist in a way that models the good society we envision: a truly democratic one. But is this really what democracy looks like?

The impulse to "reclaim the streets" is an understandable one. When industrial capitalism first started to emerge in the early nineteenth century, its machinations were relatively visible. Take, for instance, the enclosures. Pasturelands that had been used in common for centuries to provide villages with their very sustenance were systematically fenced off - enclosed - in order to graze sheep, whose wool was needed for the burgeoning textile industry. Communal life was briskly thrust

aside in favour of privatisation, forcing people into harsh factories and crowded cities.

Advanced capitalism, as it pushes past the fetters of even nation-states in its insatiable quest for growth, encloses life in a much more expansive yet generally invisible way: fences are replaced by consumer culture. We are raised in an almost totally commodified world where nothing comes for free, even futile attempts to remove oneself from the market economy. This commodification seeps into not only what we eat, wear, or do for fun but also into our language, relationships, and even our very biology and minds. We have lost not only our communities and public spaces but control over our own lives; we have lost the ability to define ourselves outside capitalism's grip, and thus genuine meaning itself begins to dissolve.

"Whose Streets? Our Streets!" then, is a legitimate emotional response to the feeling that even the most minimal of public, non-commodified spheres has been taken from us. Yet in the end, it is simply a frantic cry from our cage. We have become so confined, so thoroughly damaged, by capitalism as well as state control that crumbs appear to make a nourishing meal.

Temporarily closing off the streets during direct actions does provide momentary spaces in which to

practice democratic process, and even offers a sense of empowerment, but such events leave power for power's sake, like the very pavement beneath our feet, unchanged. Only when the serial protest mode is escalated into a struggle for popular or horizontal power can we create cracks in the figurative concrete, thereby opening up ways to challenge capitalism, nation-states, and other systems of domination.

This is not to denigrate the direct action movement in the United States and elsewhere; just the opposite. Besides a long overdue and necessary critique of numerous institutions of command and obedience, the movement is quietly yet crucially supplying the outlines of a freer society. This prefigurative politics is, in fact, the very strength and vision of today's direct action, where the means themselves are understood to also be the ends. We're not putting off the good society until some distant future but attempting to carve out room for it in the here and now, however tentative and contorted under the given social order. In turn, this consistency of means and ends implies an ethical approach to politics. How we act now is how we want others to begin to act, too. We try to model a notion of goodness even as we fight for it.

This can implicitly be seen in the affinity group and spokescouncil structures for decision making at direct actions. Both supply much needed spaces in which to school ourselves in direct democracy. Here, in the best of cases, we can proactively set the agenda, carefully deliberate together over questions, and come to decisions that strive to take everyone's needs and desires into account. Substantive discussion replaces checking boxes on a ballot; face-to-face participation replaces handing over our lives to so-called representatives; nuanced and reasoned solutions replace lesser-of-two-(or-three) evils' thinking. The democratic process utilised during demonstrations decentralises power even as it offers tangible solidarity; for example, affinity groups afford greater and more diverse numbers of people a real share in decision making, while spokes-councils allow for intricate co-ordination, even on a global level. This is, as 1960s' activists put it, the power to create rather than destroy.

The beauty of this new movement, it could be said, is that it strives to take its own ideals to heart. In doing so, it has perhaps unwittingly created the demand for such directly democratic practices on a permanent basis. Yet the haunting question underlying episodic "street democracy" remains unaddressed: How can everyone come together to make decisions that affect society as a whole in participatory, mutualistic, and ethical ways? In other words, how can each and every one of us - not just a counterculture or this protest movement - really transform and ultimately control our lives and that of our communities?

This is, in essence, a question of power - who has it, how it is used, and to what ends. To varying degrees, we all know the answer in relation to current institutions and systems. We can generally explain what we are against. That is exactly why we are protesting, whether it is against capitalism and/or nation-

states, or globalisation in whole or part. What we have largely failed to articulate, however, is any sort of response in relation to liberatory institutions and systems. We often can't express, especially in any coherent and utopian manner, what we are for. Even as we prefigure a way of making power horizontal, equitable, and hence, hopefully an essential part of a free society, we ignore the reconstructive vision that a directly democratic process holds up right in front of our noses.

For all intents and purposes, our movement remains trapped. On the one hand, it reveals and confronts domination and exploitation. The political pressure exerted by such widespread agitation may even be able to influence current power structures to amend some of the worst excesses of their ways; the powers that be have to listen, and respond to some extent, when the voices become too numerous and too loud. Nevertheless, most people are still shut out of the decision-making process itself, and consequently, have little tangible power over their lives at all. Without this ability to self-govern, street actions translate into nothing more than a countercultural version of interest group lobbying, albeit far more radical than most and generally unpaid.

What the movement forgets is the promise implicit in its own structure: that power not only needs to be contested; it must also be constituted anew in liberatory and egalitarian forms. This entails taking the movement's directly democratic process seriously - not simply as a tactic to organise protests but as the very way we organise society, specifically the political realm. The issue then becomes: How do we begin to shift the strategy, structure, and values of our movement to the most grassroots level of public policy making?

The most fundamental level of decision making in a demonstration is the affinity group. Here, we come

together as friends or because of a common identity, or a combination of the two. We share something in particular; indeed, this common identity is often reflected in the name we choose for our groups. We may not always agree with each other, but there is a fair amount of homogeneity precisely because we've consciously chosen to come together for a specific reason - most often having little to do with mere geography. This sense of a shared identity allows for the smooth functioning of a consensus decision-making process, since we start from a place of commonality. In an affinity group, almost by definition, our unity needs to take precedence over our diversity, or our supposed affinity breaks down altogether.

Compare this to what could be the most fundamental level of decision making in a society: a neighbourhood or town. Now, geography plays a much larger role. Out of historic, economic, cultural, religious, and other reasons, we may find ourselves living side by side with a wide range of individuals and their various identities. Most of these people are not our friends per se. Still, the very diversity we encounter is the life of a vibrant city itself. The accidents and/or numerous personal decisions that have brought us together often create a fair amount of heterogeneity precisely because we haven't all chosen to come together for a specific reason. In this context, where we start from a place of difference, decision-making mechanisms need to be much more capable of allowing for dissent; that is, diversity needs to be clearly retained within any notions of unity. As such, majoritarian decision-making processes begin to make more sense.

Then, too, there is the question of scale. It is hard to imagine being friends with hundreds, or even thousands, of people, nor maintaining a single-issue identity with that many individuals; but we can share a feeling of community

and a striving toward some common good that allows each of us to flourish. In turn, when greater numbers of people come together on a face-to-face basis to reshape their neighbourhoods and towns, the issues as well as the viewpoints will multiply, and alliances will no doubt change depending on the specific topic under discussion. Thus the need for a place where we can meet as human beings at the most face-to-face level - that is, an assembly of active citizens - to share our many identities and interests in hopes of balancing both the individual and community in all we do.

As well, trust and accountability function differently at the affinity group versus civic level. We generally reveal more of ourselves to friends; and such unwritten bonds of love and affection hold us more closely together, or at least give us added impetus to work things out. Underlying this is a higher-than-average degree of trust, which serves to make us accountable to each other.

On a community-wide level, the reverse is more often true: accountability allows us to trust each other. Hopefully, we share bonds of solidarity and respect; yet since we can't know each other well, such bonds only make sense if we first determine them together, and then record them, write them down, for all to refer back to in the future, and even revisit if need be. Accountable, democratic structures of our own making, in short, provide the foundation for trust, since the power to decide is both transparent and ever amenable to scrutiny.

There are also issues of time and space. Affinity groups, in the scheme of things, are generally temporary configurations - they may last a few months, or a few years, but often not much longer. Once the particular reasons why we've come together have less of an immediate imperative, or as our friendships falter, such groups often fall by the wayside. And even during a group's

life span, in the interim between direct actions, there is frequently no fixed place or face to face decision making, nor any regularity, nor much of a record of who decided what and how. Moreover, affinity groups are not open to everyone but only those who share a particular identity or attachment. As such, although an affinity group can certainly choose to shut down a street, there is ultimately something slightly authoritarian in small groups taking matters into their own hands, no matter what their political persuasion.

Deciding what to do with streets in general - say, how to organise transportation, encourage street life, provide green space, and so on - should be a matter open to everyone interested if it is to be truly participatory and non-hierarchical. This implies ongoing and open institutions of direct democracy, for everything from decision making to conflict resolution. We need to be able to know when and where citizen assemblies are meeting; we need to meet regularly and make use of non-arbitrary procedures; we need to keep track of what decisions have been made. But more important, if we so choose, we all need to have access to the power to discuss, deliberate, and make decisions about matters that affect our communities and beyond.

Indeed, many decisions have a much wider impact than on just one city; transforming streets, for example, would probably entail co-ordination on a regional, continental, or even global level. Radicals have long understood such mutualistic self-reliance as a "commune of communes," or confederation. The spokes-council model used during direct actions hints at such an alternative view of globalisation. During a spokes-council meeting, mandated delegates from our affinity groups gather for the purpose of co-ordination, the sharing of resources /skills, the building of solidarity, and so forth, always returning to the grassroots level as the ultimate

arbiter. If popular assemblies were our basic unit of decision making, confederations of communities could serve as a way to both transcend parochialism and create interdependence where desirable. For instance, rather than global capitalism and international regulatory bodies, where trade is top-down and profit-oriented, confederations could co-ordinate distribution between regions in ecological and humane ways, while allowing policy in regard to production, say, to remain at the grassroots.

This more expansive understanding of a prefigurative politics would necessarily involve creating institutions that could potentially replace capitalism and nation-states. Such directly democratic institutions are compatible with, and could certainly grow out of, the ones we use during demonstrations, but they very likely won't be mirror images once we reach the level of society. This does not mean abandoning the principles and ideals undergirding the movement (such as freedom, co-operation, decentralism, solidarity, diversity, face-to-face participation, and the like); it merely means recognising the limits of direct democracy as it is practised in the context of a demonstration.

Any vision of a free society, if it is to be truly democratic, must of course be worked out by all of us--first in this movement, and later, in our communities and confederations. Even so, we will probably discover that newly defined understandings of citizenship are needed in place of affinity groups; majoritarian methods of decision making that strive to retain diversity are preferable to simple consensus-seeking models; written compacts articulating rights and duties are crucial to fill out the unspoken culture of protests; and institutionalised spaces for policy making are key to guaranteeing that our freedom to make decisions

doesn't disappear with a line of riot police.

It is time to push beyond the oppositional character of our movement by infusing it with a reconstructive vision. That means beginning, right now, to translate our movement structure into institutions that embody the good society; in short, cultivating direct democracy in the places we call home. This will involve the harder work of reinvigorating or initiating civic gatherings, town meetings, neighbourhood assemblies, citizen mediation boards, any and all forums

where we can come together to decide our lives, even if only in extra-legal institutions at first. Then, too, it will mean reclaiming globalisation, not as a new phase of capitalism but as its replacement by confederated, directly democratic communities co-ordinated for mutual benefit.

It is time to move from protest to politics, from shutting down streets to opening up public space, from demanding scraps from those few in power to holding power firmly in all our hands. Ultimately, this means moving beyond the question of

"Whose Streets?" We should ask instead "Whose Cities?" Then and only then will we be able to remake them as our own.

Cindy Milstein is a faculty member at the Institute for Social Ecology. (For more on the ISE as well as a companion essay to this one by Ms Milstein, "Democracy is Direct," see <http://www.social-ecology.org>). She is also a board member for the Institute for Anarchist Studies (<http://flag.blackened.net/ias/>). Cindy can be reached at cbmilstein@aol.com.

Josiah Warren and Modern Times

Reprinted from Benjamin Tucker's journal Liberty Number 386



From Houghton, Mifflin & Co.'s press there have recently come two volumes which in the immediate future and for a long time will command the closest attention of progressive people, - namely, the "Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway. Bearing testimony of one of the gentlest, clear-sighted and steadfastest spirits of the age, these volumes furnish a source of unflinching delight to the kindred reader. However, it is not the purpose here to write a review, but to quote from Mr Conway's delightful pages a sketch of Josiah

Warren and his social experiment in the village of Modern Times that will be of peculiar interest to the readers of Liberty. Mr Conway writes:

Among the many letters that I have received from out-of-the-way people and places, was one dated at "Modern Times, N.Y." It seemed to have come from some place in Bunyan's dreamland. Writing to a friend in New York, I inquired if he knew anything about such a place. "It is," he answered, "a village on Long Island founded on the principle that each person shall mind his or her own business." The place

seemed even more mythical than before, but one evening when I had been addressing some workingmen on the relations between capital and labour, a stranger of prepossessing appearance approached me and said "If you ever visit Modern Times you will find out that the troubles of labour come from the existence of money." Whereupon he disappeared.

During my next summer vacation I visited New York, and was ferried over to Brooklyn, and learned that by travelling one or two hours on the railway down Long Island I would come to "Thompson's

Station" and four or five miles off would find Modern Times.

It was twilight when I reached "Thompson's" and there was no means of reaching the village I sought except on foot. That did not matter for my valise was light, but the road was solitary, sometimes forked, the forest dense, and it became quite dark. At length, however, I reached a more open space, the moon gave some light, and I met a woman who said I was close upon the village. I asked if there was any hotel and she replied, "None that I know of," passed on quickly, and left me to consider that more interest in her people's affairs might occasionally be desirable. It was not yet nine, but the street I entered was silent. I had with me a letter once received from Modern Times, and on inquiry found at last the founder of the village, Josiah Warren. He gave me welcome and, there being no hotel, and money not being current in the village, I was taken to the house of a gentleman and lady, provided with a supper and an agreeable bedroom, whereof I was much in need. The lady of the house was beautiful, and startled me by an allusion to a Utopian village in one of Zschokke's tales. "You will not find us," she said, "a Goldenthal; we are rather poor; but if you are interested in our ideas, you may find us worthy of a visit." I have idealised this lovely woman, and indeed the village, in my "Pine and Palm," but her actual history was more thrilling than is there told of Maria Shelton, and the village appears to me in retrospect more romantic than my Bonheur.

Josiah Warren, then about fifty years of age, was a short, thickset man with a severe countenance but somewhat restless eye. His forehead was large, descending to a full brow; his lower face was not of equal strength, but indicative of the mild enthusiasm which in later years I found typical of the old English reformer. He was indeed one of

these, and I think had been in Robert Owen's community at New Lanark. He had, however, an entirely original sociology. Convinced that the disproportion between wages and the time and labour spent in production created the twin evils of drudgery and pauperism, luxury and idleness, he determined to bring about a system of "equitable commerce," by which each product should have its price measured by its cost. If it were a shoe, for example, the separate cost of leather, pegs, thread, etc., was to be estimated, and the time taken in putting them together and the sum would be enough to decide the value of the shoe in other articles which the shoe maker might require. With this idea in his mind, he invested what little capital he had in a shop in Cincinnati, where he sold miscellaneous articles, somewhat under their prices in other shops. These shopkeepers broke up his establishment by creating a rumour that Warren was selling off damaged stock. He concluded that his plan would only succeed in a world where other tradesmen adopted it, and after some years established a small community at Tuscarawas, Ohio, which was unable to sustain itself, perhaps, because of the crudity of the idea as it then stood in his mind; for, when some twenty years later he founded Modern Times, there were other elements introduced.

The commercial basis of this village was that cost is the limit of price, and that time is the standard of value. This standard was variable with corn. Another principle was that the most disagreeable labour is entitled to the highest compensation.

The social basis of the village was expressed in the phrase "individual sovereignty." The principle that there should be absolutely no interference with personal liberty was pressed to an extent which would have delighted Mill and Herbert Spencer. This individual sovereignty was encouraged. Nothing was as disreputable as sameness; nothing

more applauded than variety, no fault more venial than eccentricity.

The arrangements of marriage were left entirely to the individual men and women. They could be married formally or otherwise, live in the same or separate houses, and have their relation known or unknown. The relation could be dissolved at pleasure without any formulas. Certain customs had grown out of this absence of marriage laws. Privacy was general; it was not polite to inquire who might be the father of a newly born child, or who was the husband or wife of any one. Those who stood in the relation of husband or wife wore upon the finger a red thread; so long as that badge was visible, the person was understood to be married. If it disappeared, the marriage was at an end.

The village consisted of about fifty cottages, neat and cheerful in their green and white, nearly all with well-tilled gardens. They all gathered in their little temple, the men rather disappointing me by the lack of individuality in their dress, but the ladies exhibiting a variety of pleasing costumes. For a time it was a silent meeting. Then the entire company joined in singing "There's a good time coming" and after I had read some passages from the Bible and from Emerson another hymn was sung concerning an expected day, -
the Might with the Right
And the Truth shall be

After my discourse, which was upon the Spirit of the Age, it was announced that there would be in the afternoon a meeting for conversation.

The afternoon discussion ranged over the problems of Education, Law, Politics, Sex, Trade, Marriage. It exhibited every kind of ability, and also illustrated the principle of individuality to the rare extent of in no wise exciting a dispute or a sharp word. Except that all were unorthodox, each had an opinion of his or her own; this being so frankly

expressed that behind each opened a vista of strange experiences.

Josiah Warren showed me his printing office and other institutions of the place. He also gave me one of the little notes used as currency among them. It has at one end an oval engraving of Commerce, with a barrel and a box beside her, and a ship near by; at the other end a device of Atlas supporting the sphere; beneath this a watch, and between the words "Time is Wealth". In the centre is a figure of Justice, with scales and sword, also a sister genius with spear and wreath whose name I do not know, between these being a shield inscribed "Labour for Labour" and above these the following "Not transferable"; "Limit of issue 200 hours"; "The most disagreeable labour is entitled to the highest

compensation"; "Due to _____ Five Hours in Professional Services, or 80 pounds of corn." Then follows a written signature and the engraved word "Physician."

Late in the evening a little company gathered in the porch of the house in which I was staying, where there was an informal conversation, and now and then a song. Out there in the moonlight went on an exchange of confidences, however abstract the phrases; beyond the soft tones I could hear the shriek of tempests that wreck lives. Not from happy homes had gathered these Thelemites with their motto *Fay ce que roudas*.

Some years later when the plague of war was filling the land I thought of their retreat as not so much a Theleme as a garden like that outside Florence where Boccaccio pictures

his ladies and gentlemen beguiling each other with beautiful tales while the plague was raging in the city. Modern Times had not been founded with reference to war. Those gentle people had suffered enough of life's struggle and desired only to be left in peace. But where could peace be found? I never visited Modern Times again, but heard that soon after the war broke out, most of those I had seen there sailed from Montauk Point on a small ship and fixed their tents on some peaceful shore in South America.

Quote unquote

Liberty means responsibility.
That is why most men dread it.
Bernard Shaw

W(H)ITHER GOVERNMENT?

By Jean Pollard

Murray Bookchin has spoken of people being in a deep sleep in this culture, of being deprived of the reality of the situation. It is difficult to wake people up from the ever-dumber sleep within which they have fallen, dreaming only of short-term material benefits, irrespective of the cost to planet, animals, other humans, whilst unable to comprehend that they live only a fraction of the life of which they could be capable. They are morally, academically and culturally emasculated by government, wherever they live. They think they have everything they want when in fact they have nothing they truly need.

However, it has always been very difficult for anarchists to successfully challenge the cultural "norm" because the brainwashing by government has been extremely successful so that the people uphold a structure which is, if they did but

know it, to their detriment. As Emma Goldman rightly pointed out, "Ah, the people, the people, they conspire with their masters to crucify their Christs and forge their own chains".

Government has also managed to hide those chains behind an illusion of "fulfilling" lives stripped of individual thinking and the fruits of their labours. Of course, some dissension is allowed, but this is played out in a structured setting which is really no challenge to government. The last time there was probably any real challenge in this country was the foundation of the Labour Party, but once it brought its dissension within a political arena and then within Parliament, the moulding and corruption of its ideals just became part of the everyday world of government. Is it likely that those original Victorian dissenters would recognise the Labour Party of today?

However, even amongst rational people, the adherence to government is still strong. Anarchists are seen as no more than destroyers, bent on creating chaos. The fact that anarchists are no more likely to want to live with chaos than anyone else, does not enter the discussion. We are merely part of the accepted dissension because we present no actual threat to government, but you can guarantee that if we did (and some individual anarchists in various groups may do), then government would seek to crush us. Should there be another world war tomorrow, it is probably likely that those of us who refused to take part in it would be vilified and possibly incarcerated.

I have written before that everyone is an anarchist, because the threads of anarchism have to be central to all human beings. If not, then anarchism is just another controlling regime. It's just that some of us

have broken free of the rigid programming of the education system and see the whole structure for what it is. However, some anarchists think that we should keep the flame of anarchism lit and keep passing on the information until a time emerges where the flame starts a rampant fire, sweeping away the control, cant and hypocrisy of government and its controlling arms such as the church. Others feel that direct action now is the way forward.

But what I am saying is that the flame of anarchism has to be lit or fanned in everyone else. I don't seek to impose anything on anyone else, except to get them to see the full realisation of their own individuality and how they can interact with other people, to their mutual and fulfilling benefit.

So, if government has got it pretty well wrapped up, are we no more than academic dilettantes, posturing our philosophy over wordy articles and wine? Realisation may look to be nigh on impossible at the present time, particularly in this country where people are living materially fulfilling lives, fresh from the hunt in the January sales. But I suggest government is undermining the fabric of a society it needs to uphold it. The next election is likely to see the lowest turnout, if not ever, then for a considerable time. Although this does not mean that people are rejecting government, it shows that they are upset, if not uncertain, about the structure.

Successive government policies have led to paucity in community living. Local commerce is now dominated by the global markets and small communities find their local services dying. Basic transport systems are chaotic. Hospitals are a mess. These are basic services for which people are expected to forego their money and time to pay for. Essentially, in the midst of time, people have acquiesced with government on the basis that it is for the "common good" and from that concept, government has extracted

its power and used this as its umbrella term within which to commit various atrocities. And the cost of running government in this country is now estimated at £30 billion a year – for what?

But if government is not now blatantly providing these services, what are people to think? Libby Purves, writing in *The Times* recently, suggests the formation of a *Boring Party* – one that does nothing more than sort out the basic services the country needs. This is a reflection that none of the existing parties can provide what is required. This argument, of course, still accepts that political government at a national level is what people should succumb to, so we are still removed from an anarchist society.

Nevertheless, by its adherence to the insatiable greed of capitalism, with no conscience or morality, government looks to be backing itself into a corner, because it has to wring the people dry to keep on feeding the financial machine to uphold its power. This is where the crunch comes. If people are becoming either difficult to control or the structures government relies on, need more stringent control, then the ruling group will impose ever more tighter measures. Although people will complain about them, they will continue to cling to the only structure they know and will, at least for a time, agree to ever more stringent laws, clutching at the cultural driftwood which was once their "ordered" society. There will, though, be those who would once have muttered about laws and control, but who will now challenge. The Police enjoy the poorest public support they have possibly ever had and of course, as the defenders of the system, they need the quiescence of the populace. But the more the Police pursue ridiculous laws, highlighted by recent convictions against motorists e.g. a driver taking a drink whilst stationary at traffic lights, the more dissention will be heard.

This is where anarchists can make a difference, sliding into these societal cracks. There is a general election coming up – let the people know that there is another way (and not the third one!). If it gets people to at least question their environment, then they may come to realise that anarchism is not something to be feared. If anarchism then loses its shock/horror/loony-left profile, we will be getting alongside people, helping them to wake themselves up from the nightmare culture within which they live.

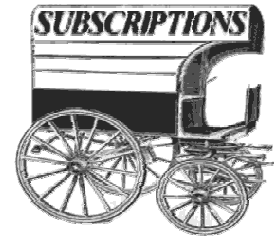
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