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A Study in Floccinaucinihilipilification

Bob Black

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importance. The portion preceding the semicolon asserts that most people, because of their attitudes, values and material conditions, support the status quo. Thus they are inferior to aristocratic McLeftists like McBookchin and McBalash who are wise to the social set-up. The portion after the semicolon asserts that McAnarchists look down on the swinish multitude just as the McLeftists are said to do. They don't – at least, McBalash adduces no evidence that they do – but McBalash by his own admission does.

Ordinary people are, as he elsewhere observes, “the little people.” He despises them, but he has no idea how to interest them in his ideology. Neither do I, for his ideology isn't interesting, not to them and not to anybody else except a few undersexed white male college students from good families. This is not the fault of the McAnarchists, it's the failure of the McLeftists. McAnarchists have never done anything to impede McLeftist access to the little people, the mob, the swinish multitude, or to anybody else. Intra-mural anarchist polemics have surely reached few readers except committed anarchists.

These sorts of smears have got to stop. Short-sighted and stupid, the McLeftists haven't noticed that it takes only a few keystrokes to transform their indictment of post-leftists into an indictment of themselves. It's already happening. Ulrike Heider has, in effect, accused Murray Bookchin of being a McAnarchist. Stewart Home's calumnies against anarchism are just Bookchin's and Balash's calumnies against post-leftist anarchism. Those who are not yet anarchists won't race to enter this mosh pit. Standing Debord on his head, one could say that the anarchists tolerate nothing, since they don't tolerate each other. Like a hanged man, the left has lost bladder control. Future enemies of anarchism will not require much originality: they will be hard put to surpass the left anarchists of the declining years.

Is it probable, or even plausible, that all my footnotes are phony? How could I hope to get away with such obvious large-scale fraud? Even Hitler and Stalin told the truth most of the time: it's just too much trouble to lie about everything. Surely after all these years my enemies should have produced exposes of my deficient scholarship, as I have exposed the deficiencies of Murray Bookchin, Ward Churchill and others. Processed World promised a systematic rebuttal to *The Baby and the Bathwater*. That was 14 years ago: I'm still waiting.

The (Rotten to the) Core Contradiction

Like Bookchin, Balash cannot decide if he is a populist or a vanguardist – not even within the content of a single sentence. In his penultimate paragraph, for instance, he first affirms his elite superiority over the masses, and then rebukes the McAnarchists for the same thing:

Moreover, any authentic change to [sic] the present nightmare would firstly require immense upheaval in the prevailing attitudes and values and material conditions of “regular” men and women ensnared by and, at the same time, contributing to the smooth functioning of the nightmare; the same people the McAnarchists, in homage to the aristocratic models they emulate, typically refer to in the “mob” or “swinish multitude” reactionary vernacular of an Edmond Burke.

As a preliminary observation, no so-called McAnarchist has ever referred to the anybody as the “mob” or the “swinish multitude.” Where a verifying citation is needed the most, it is conspicuously absent. This libel alone should discredit McBalash in the eyes of any honest and reflective reader of any political persuasion. And this pompous and ponderous sentence is of even more evidentiary

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Rage? Small as the empty shoes will be, they're too big for these clucks to fill.

I should not be read as hostile to older anarchists. At age 48, I am not so far from being old myself. Several supposed McAnarchist pied pipers, such as John Zerzan and Hakim Bey, are in their 50s. I had great respect for such older anarchists as Fredy Perlman and Ernest Mann, now deceased. I have more respect for Manolo Gonzalez or even Alex Comfort than for many anarchists fifty years their junior. It was Bookchin, not I, who put his age in issue by claiming that his years conferred gerontocratic authority upon his edicts. Bookchin libeled his chosen enemies in the most brutal terms, and when they talked back, he doffed his beret to display his gray hairs. He can't have it both ways. If he can dish it out, he'd better be ready to take it. None of those he abuses ever invited this old man to calumniate them. He was the aggressor. His recent writings are so markedly inferior to his earlier ones – which weren't that great to begin with – as to suggest that his intellectual powers are rapidly declining. All he is doing in his current condition is discredit whatever of value there is in his earlier writings. His friends, if he still has any, did him a disservice by not talking him out of writing SALA and its septic sequels. If he's as sick as, when it seems expedient, he says he is, he should retire from political polemic entirely.

Unlike the likes of Bookchin, Bekken and Balash, I do not expect my claims and conclusions to be taken on faith by the awe-struck multitudes. Whenever possible, I supply documentation and detail which even my wit and style cannot always render interesting. Thus when I disputed Bookchin on the facts as to many matters ranging from work among foragers to ancient Athenian democracy, I provided many quotations and citations – with more of them taken from Bookchin than anyone else. Balash, following Bookchin, sneers, “just try to pursue Zerzan's notes, or any of Black's.” Balash doesn't specify any erroneous reference notes by either Zerzan or myself – and we have each provided hundreds – as his purpose is to discourage the reader from verifying them.

Reading this tract induces feelings of sin and shame, like seeing your mother naked.

In Anarchy after Leftism I was so ambitious as to hope to put down “an ugly, stupid style and substance of doctrinal harangue.” Insofar as Bookchin has continued it in “Whither Anarchism?” and Balash in “Nihilism U.S.A.,” it might seem that I’ve failed, but maybe not. The only reason AK Press is publishing “Whither Anarchism?” is that Bookchin’s name sells books. They would never publish it if the author was Timothy Balash, which is why they will never publish “Nihilism U.S.A.” Nobody else will publish it either. Bookchin has gone far in squandering what reputation he had among anarchists by his leftist witch-hunt, and his life is effectively over. He’s purged almost every heir apparent. He’s too enfeebled to work the campus circuit. David Watson and John Clark and I, among others, have at last exposed the eccentricities and absurdities in Bookchin’s ideology. In desperation, having worn out his welcome at home, he’s sucking up to left anarchists in Britain, continental Europe and even Turkey (the Turks told him they have no use for his “warmed-over Marxism,” and his Dutch spokesman admits to being the only libertarian municipalist in the country). Since Bookchin never paid any attention to them before, and his reputation has preceded him, the workerists have not really taken Bookchin to their bosoms. His ideology will die with him, and that will be soon. No name will ever sell a book by Timothy Balash.

Since there is little reason to read Bookchin and none to read Balash, it is likely that before very long they will have no readers. They will not be censored or suppressed (as I have been), just ignored. The state may not wither away, but the anarcho-statists will. Murray Bookchin, Fred Woodworth, Colin Ward and Vernon Richards will shortly follow Sam Dolgoff, Albert Meltzer, Bob Shea and other oldsters into the void. Who will replace them? Janet Biehl? Chaz Bufe? Jon Bekken? Recycled Trotskyists from Love &

Murray Bookchin’s Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism was an apocalyptic, and apoplectic, polemic against post-leftist forms of anarchism. So closely did it approach self-parody that it escaped suspicion on that score only because of the certain fact that Bookchin has no sense of humor. No such certainty attaches to “Nihilism U.S.A. McAnarchy in the Playpen” by someone calling himself Timothy Balash. A shapeless knockoff of SALA, NUSA will find few beginning-to-end readers except those engaging in an egoscan – fandom jargon for skimming a zine looking for your own name. No one has ever heard of Balash, which is probably the pseudonym of someone whose real name, if known, would be a source of discredit, like Bill Brown or Stewart Home. But if NUSA is a debut effort, it is indeed a Titanic one: sunk on its maiden voyage.

The Politics of Language

Like George Orwell and Theodor Adorno, I believe there is a relationship (but not, of course, a one-to-one relationship) between good writing and true writing. For me to say so is, I admit, self-serving, but what do you expect from a convicted Stirnerist? If there is any truth to this proposition, then there is hardly any truth to NUSA. To read it is to experience genuine suffering. Every known violation of the English language is well represented, as well as abominations so singular as to be, as H.P. Lovecraft might say, unnamable. There are nonexistent words: “abolishment,” “exploitive,” “rompish,” “busking,” “meritous.” Mixed metaphors are the norm. In the very first sentence, anarchism, “a dizzying banquet,” “has failed to make itself heard.” By not burping? In this rompish, busking, but not very meritous vision, one might be “crushed between, on one side, a dress rehearsal” and – well, what difference does it make what’s on the other side? Then there is the “collage of mirrors” and the “cable-fed cloisters.” Necessary words

are omitted – “comes [] a little surprise” – the reader soon wishes for more of this particular mistake. Disagreement of subject and verb is nearly normative. “Many a hippy ... missed most of their opportunities”; “Lest the reader ... suspect they are beginning to detect”; “Fetishization ... are as cliched and commonplace as” (whatever); and then there’s “the runaway phenomena of the single (and usually impoverished female) parent.”

Although he has placed his gift to the world on-line, Balash has yet to activate a standard feature of the PC, the spell-checker. It’s true that the spell-checker cannot be counted on to correct misspellings of proper names like Germain Greer, Mann Ray, Eugene O’Neil, and Foucault, among other of his blunders. But it should signal possible problems with “financil,” “propogates,” “homogenous,” “juvenelia” and “subli” – mine is screaming at me right now. I feel its pain. Although I have taught writing several times, I’m an amateur as a writer as well as a teacher, and I don’t know the names of all of Balash’s mistakes. I don’t know what to call it when he starts a sentence by saying, “The adult consumer ... is able to procure for she and her family,” or “They’re losses should be” something or another. Balash routinely inserts apostrophes where they do not belong and omits them where they do. He also makes just plain dumb vocabulary blunders, as when he refers to “these basic tenants of McAnarchism egoism,” as if egoism was a landlord. The spell-checker is no substitute for a good grade-school education. And – by Bakunin’s balls! – what the hell is a “specious gaze”?

Curiously, Balash blames “public education” for the allure of McAnarchy for “young gullibles.” Presumably he enjoyed the privilege of a private education, confirming the growing suspicion that anarcho-leftists are missionaries from the higher reaches of the middle class who condescend to instill workerism into the workers. (Or try to. Or say that they try to.) The deficits in his own education, however high-priced it was, are palpable. It’s impossible to write as badly as he does without a lot of practice. Someone afflicted by both pedantry and masochism could probably scour the anarcho-

A few years ago I would have scoffed at such talk because I did not believe the anarchists were worth the trouble of infiltrating, but their growing numbers, after the demise of the Marxists, might have drawn the attention of political police in need of something to do to justify their existence. We now have proof that Britain’s Special Branch has planted agents in anarchist and radical environmental groups, and gay novelist Stewart Home’s anti-anarchist vendetta is surely state-sponsored. There is no reason why the FBI or the Mounties can’t do something similar in the United States and Canada. Both countries have experienced high-profile anarchist terrorism (the Unabomber and Direct Action) eliciting law enforcement campaigns which were disproportionate by orders of magnitude to the crimes committed. Jim Hogshire, the Teflon junkie, could put away several of the largest underground publishers in the country whenever his handlers think the time is ripe. So it’s not unthinkable that Internet pseud “Timothy Balash” is a state asset. It makes sense for the police to foment intra-anarchist divisions and especially to target the growing and more threatening tendency, the post-leftists. A longtime leftist loser who knows the scene might not be too hard to recruit. He might even think he was using the police instead of them using him. In so supposing he would not be very smart, but we knew that about him already.

Whether an agent, an ideologue or just an asshole, Balash is serving the state’s purposes. Murray Bookchin’s Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism dragged anarchist argumentation down into the gutter. Now Balash has taken it down into the sewer. I’d like to think it has nowhere to go but up, but as to that, I’ve been wrong before. My only consolation is that the more rabid the conservatives become, the less readable the result. “Nihilism U.S.A.” I only got through because I’m curious what people are saying behind my back (the direction from which my enemies always approach). Few readers without an ulterior motive like mine will go the distance. It is soiling just to read the first paragraph.

Lies, Damned Lies, and No Statistics

Since Balash, adducing no example, disparages my footnotes and Zerzan's, he should have been careful about his own after seeing what I did to Bookchin's footnotes in *Anarchy after Leftism*. The normal function of footnotes is to refer the reader to sources said to support the author's point. Balash's footnotes discourage rather than facilitate checking up on him. His unpaginated quotations from *The Abolition of Work* are attributed, not to the book (published 12 years ago) but to an unidentified Internet posting. Ditto for a quotation from Hakim Bey's T.A.Z.: "Pay for this swill? I think not." Indeed, Balash thinks not, nor does he want anybody else to think, only to believe. Instead he surpasses Bookchin's sloppiness and kicks it up to fraud. It seems he can reference quotations from Bey after all when it suits him. On page 44 of T.A.Z. Bey supposedly says that historical models of rebellion are "deaf to the music & lack all sense of rhythm." No such words appear on that page of T.A.Z. (or that page of *Immediatism*). Two further citations, even less likely, are attributed to pages 45 and 46, where I can find no support for them.

Balash's only accomplishment is what seemed to be impossible: making Murray Bookchin look reasonable by comparison. Maybe that was the purpose, to play good cop/bad cop, but Balash lacks the intelligence to conceive, much less carry out so sophisticated a scheme. If he were smart enough to come up with such an idea, he could not have executed it, for it would be impossible to conceal all traces of intelligence for 20 pages, but there are no such traces. To play dumb convincingly, you have to be dumb. I have read Balash, and I am convinced. To assert that all McAnarchists are pedophiles – sleaze like that conveys more vividly than any denial that Balash has as much to say, and for much the same reason, as a heavy-breathing caller who invites you to pull up your shades.

A more likely hypothesis, although I am inclined to reject it too, is that "Nihilism U.S.A." is the work of an agent provocateur.

leftist journals and identify this illiterate, but the discovery would be unrewarding. Senator, you're no B. Traven.

The Usual Suspects

Balash is no better than Bookchin at providing any coherent specification of the anarchist objects of his ire. Indeed the task is beyond better minds than theirs. "McAnarchy" is a dumbed-down version of Bookchin's "lifestyle anarchism," which was dumb enough already. When you place such a crude and silly label on those you disagree with, you announce that your intention is to insult, not to explain. Balash has, so far as I can tell, many prejudices but only one idea. It goes something like this. In its alleged individualism and actual hedonism, "McAnarchism is also an unconscious regurgitation of one of the high ideals ubiquitously embedded in mass media commercial advertising: personal success is measured by the amount of commercially approved play the adult consumer, merely a big kid with a wallet, is able to procure for she [sic] and her family." In other words, McAnarchism and Madison Avenue are as one in their message: the good life consists of the passive consumption of well-advertised commodities.

The difficulty here is that Balash has mistaken himself for his enemies. Nobody he identifies as a McAnarchist (John Zerzan, Laure Akai, Jason McQuinn, Hakim Bey and myself) has ever equated freedom, much less happiness, with the consumption of commodities. In 20 turgid pages, Balash adduces no evidence that any of us ever has. All our writings assert, on the contrary, that creation, not consumption – autonomous action, not induced ingestion – is the heart and soul of anarchy. "Play isn't passive," I wrote 23 years ago in an essay Balash quotes from. For us, play is not something restricted to children after school and grown-ups after work, it's much of the substantive content of freedom – it's what makes free choice worthwhile by providing something worthwhile to choose.

It is Balash who openly embraces the capitalist dogma that consumption – to put it another way, leisure – is the realm of freedom. Rather, we agree with Paul Goodman that “we must understand freedom in a very positive sense: it is the condition of initiating activity.” It should be superfluous to add that, as we all reject wage-labor and the institution of money, the “big kid with a wallet” does not embody any of our ideals. As for procuring consumer goods for our families – I thought we were supposed to be anti-family!

“Appeals to play are as mainstream as a Prozac prescription,” we are told. So are appeals to justice, equality and liberty, but anarchists make them anyway. Apparently anarchists are unwilling to surrender words they find meaningful just because they receive perverted interpretations in the media. In fact, by comparison with these long-suffering words, “play” is relatively uncontaminated, if only because its abuse is too recent to have erased the memory of what it once meant. Almost everyone retains a recent or distant memory of unmediated play, whereas authentic liberty or equality is often an abstraction at best, an illusion at worst.

Anarcho-Nationalism

Balash rides forth as the knight-errant of traditional anarchism (the “errant” part is accurate enough), but there’s rust on his (character-)armor: nationalism. It appears first in the very title of his diatribe, “Nihilism U.S.A.” – implying that his sophisticated philosophical construct McAnarchy is a uniquely American evil. The trailer to his splatterfilm identifies the principal defendants as “Hakim Bey, John Zerzan, Bob Black, Max Stirner ...”

Stirner’s inclusion is, I admit, apparently inconsistent with my theory, since Stirner was not American, he was German (Bavarian, to be precise). Balash, however, may not be aware of this, just as he must not be aware that Stirner is not our contemporary, he passed away in 1856. Lending some corroboration to my hypothesis is the

whose governments are under few legal limitations when it comes to suppressing anti-government expression. The only Nigerian anarchists I know of, for instance, are in prison.

Balash makes it sound like the abolition of work, for instance, is a topic alien to the coolies of the Third World. On the contrary, I can’t imagine anybody for whom this notion has more relevance and resonance. Hard work is obviously the source of, not the solution to, their poverty. Recently proletarianized people may also retain memories of the lighter, less time-disciplined, and more ludic work of pre-industrial times or maybe even earlier. They know it wasn’t always this way and maybe doesn’t have to always be this way. These people work, they work hard, but they do not identify with their work and they do not define themselves, as leftists say they should, as essentially workers. The workers know that real life is sometime and somewhere else. Balash’s ideology is extremely, albeit not openly, racist. The colored hordes of Asia and Africa, barely capable of real work, are entirely incapable of rejecting work. It’s all they’re good for. There’s no way they’d ever fathom sophisticated notions like “productive play.”

Balash remands the McAnarchists to “a little remedial Aristotle [on] the subject of work.” It so happens that I have not only read what Aristotle has to say about work, I have quoted him in support of my point of view: “‘the life of money-making’ is ‘undertaken under compulsion.’” The wage-slave is as much of a slave as the chattel slave, according to Aristotle. That is exactly what I’ve been arguing for at least fifteen years. Work, according to Aristotle and the other ancients, is demeaning. On the other hand, Aristotle believed, as I do not, that some people are slaves by nature. Maybe Balash agrees with Aristotle. That would be consistent with his contempt for almost every inhabitant of North America.

cast the first stone, if any such paragon can be found. Is Balash such a paragon? He doesn't say so, and if he did, I wouldn't take his word for it, I'd like to see some bank statements and tax returns.

Something else I'd like to see is the cancelled checks confirming that Balash, unlike McAnarchists, donates every dollar he can spare to the succor of the world's hungry. Count on it, he doesn't. And he can't possibly know whether McAnarchists contribute to charities like OXFAM. As a social revolutionary, he should understand that charity is only a palliative for problems like hunger and poverty – their real solution is radical social change. This idea is more valuable to the Third World masses than spasmodic handouts which are never enough.

Communicating this good idea, and other good ideas, to the people of the Third World is not as easy as Balash assumes. There are barriers of language, literacy and distance. He denounces McAnarchists for addressing their messages only to the affluent north. Has he done any better? Let's see the evidence – and the results of this missionary outreach. I read anarcho-workerist leftist periodicals from time to time, and while they cheerlead Third World strikes (for instance), they never suggest that their own ideas have anything to do with these struggles. Speaking only for myself, I can say that I've always reached out to the limits of my modest finances to get in touch with foreign individuals and groups which seemed they might be at all interested in what I was sending. I've sent stuff to Ghana, South Africa, India, Mexico, Turkey, Singapore and several South American countries. It isn't surprising that these overtures aren't usually returned. Language is the first barrier. The ideas themselves are the second – not that they are necessarily irrelevant to the local situation, but in the sense that they are expressed in terms of a different situation (an unfortunate but unavoidable circumstance). Third, the anarchist presence in these countries is even thinner than in the north. If one person burns out or goes away or dies, that can shut down access for years. Fourth, a lot of these few anarchists live in more or less authoritarian countries

fact that Balash has never read Stirner. All his Stirner quotations are at second hand from R.W.K. Paterson, who published a not very perceptive study of Stirner's ideas in 1971. Using Bookchin's scholarly methodology, Balash skimmed Paterson, not for understanding of Stirner or even Paterson's understanding of Stirner, but for sound-bites hoped to be self-incriminating when wrenched out of context. Put the meat through the grinder enough times and even filet mignon will end up as hamburger. Stirner wrote only one book that matters, and it is readily available in what is said to be a very good English translation. Marx and Engels slammed it in *The German Ideology*, the other book Balash the anarchist draws upon for his caricature of Stirner, but at least they took the trouble to read it, even if they could find no publisher for their tract, as Balash will find none for his. The Internet has ushered in a golden age of what does not even rise to the level of mediocrity.

Nationalism and Culture

Balash identifies himself as Canadian, and a resident of Edmonton, capital of the prairie province of Alberta (many of whose settlers were American). I was at first inclined to suspect that this was camouflage – not that it matters – but now I think that this, if little else, in the tract may be true. The bilious and gratuitous anti-Americanism is something not unusual among Canadian leftists. It's not only the title, it's also the way the author has modified Murray Bookchin's enemies list in *SALA*. He deleted the only Canadian, L. Susan Brown, and added Americans like myself, Jason McQuinn, and Laure Akai (although he has mistaken her for a Russian, whereas she is actually an American residing in Russia). In other words, he stacked the deck. Balash disappeared Canadian post-leftists like Michael William, Brian Davis, Dave Benedict and Jim McMartin, although he can hardly be unaware of their existence and activities. (He also disappeared the post-leftist Franco-

phonic anarchists of Quebec, such as those who put out *Le Nuit*.) Per capita, Canada is easily more anarchist – and especially more McAnarchist – than the United States.

And post-leftist anarchists are turning up all over the world, even in the Third World. *Kommunisti Kranti* in India started out as orthodox leftists and ended up as anti-work, autonomist post-leftists who have issued very sophisticated critiques akin to those of the situationists. The exiled Turkish and Kurdish anarchists who comprise the Fifth of May Group have explicitly dismissed the “watered-down Marxism” of Murray Bookchin and affirmed that they are, if you insist on drawing a line, lifestyle anarchists. In Britain, post-leftists are gaining ground on the lefties just as they are in the United States. To my personal knowledge, McAnarchism is on the rise in Mexico, the Netherlands, Belgium and Greece. There are early manifestations in Russia, Spain, Finland and the Baltic republics. It was already well-established in Italy and France. I am unaware of any place in the world where old-fashioned leftist anarchism is advancing. Post-leftist anarchism is not the only game in town, but it’s getting to be the only anarchist game in town. We may not get anarchy our way, but we will never get it any other way.

Balash’s chauvinism kicks in early on: “what [sic] is usually referred to as the individualist anarchist has, historically, found most of its [sic] adherents in John Wayne’s America.” Setting aside the fact that, as noted, none of Balash’s targets is an individualist anarchist as “usually referred to,” why is their America John Wayne’s America rather than, say, John Brown’s America or Emma Goldman’s America or Malcolm X’s America? Further references to Walt Disney (who is dead) and Arnold Schwarzenegger (an Austrian by birth whose father was a member of the Nazi Party) only magnify the mystery. Disney, Schwarzenegger and Wayne have glorified nationalism, state violence, sexual repression, and the nuclear family. No named McAnarchist does. Balash, however, indulges in indiscriminate xenophobia, denounces sexual freedom

The Third World, or, Reason in Action

McAnarchists, we are told, are overfed greedheads indifferent to the sufferings of the Third World. They are “accustomed to consuming 75% of the earth’s resources in the form of plastic playland trinkets and festive images of animated rodents, created by the other three-quarters of humanity – principally coloured humanity – enslaved by corporate colonialists and forced to subsist on 15% of available resources.” What happened to the other 10% of the available resources? We may be callous pigs, but at least we know how to add and subtract. Nor do McAnarchists comprise one-fourth of the world’s people. I myself consume barely 10% of the planet’s resources, and other McAnarchists have even more austere lifestyles. Balash presumably meant to say that one-fourth of the world’s people are (in his odd idiom) “northerners” – but he didn’t say what he meant to say. It’s not true that the northerners consume 75% of the world’s resources at Disneyland. They also set aside small sums for food, clothing and shelter.

Balash expects his readers to take it for granted that McAnarchists are “the most spoiled brats on god’s green earth.” As this purports to be a statement of fact, some evidence of the economic status of McAnarchists is called for, but none is provided. All those named by Balash have incomes below the median. My own four-figure income is well below the poverty line. If we are hedonists, our hedonism derives from deprivation, not from privilege. And class-baiting would be objectionable even if it were accurate. Many of the great classical anarchists (such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta) came from aristocratic or high-bourgeois backgrounds. They (and we) should be judged, by anyone so presumptuous as to set himself in judgment over us, on our own merits, without regard to our parents and ancestors whom we were not, after all, in any position to choose. I propose an inflexible rule: no leftist should be allowed to class-bait until he first makes full disclosure of his own wealth, income and antecedents. Let he who is without class guilt

the anarchists always accuse them of idealizing ordinary people, but that's not true. Anarchists have no use for notions of original sin, but usually they don't posit that people are much smarter or better than they actually are. Anarchists have produced plenty of saints and heroes, but anarchy does not require saints and heroes, although it welcomes them. The most plausible and reasonable of anarchists, such as Proudhon and Kropotkin, properly pointed to the very substantial extent to which even society as we experience it, as experienced by people as they now are, is anarchistic. Authority is always parasitic upon anarchy. Authority cannot do without anarchy, but anarchy can do without authority (if you don't think so, call yourself anything you like – except anarchist).

Balash in contrast, reads like an Old Testament prophet in his denunciation of nearly all people and popular culture. If the masses are really that far gone, it would be irresponsible of us to agitate them with revolutionary ideas they are incapable of living up to. The world is about as good as people can handle. We might, if we tread carefully, reform it somewhat, but it would be reckless to aspire to more, lest we destroy what we are unable to rebuild. At some level, Balash understands this: it explains why he clings to an affiliation with the left. Like the right, the left craves order. Balash is a rather unusual leftist in that his social agenda is so right-wing, but it is only a difference in degree.

For someone who disdains mass culture, Murtagh is immersed in it. He is forever referring to films, TV shows and bands I've never heard of. The box is his window on the world. I visualize him as a bearded Bevis or Butthead who watches TV in order to find something to look down on. Only there is his own banality exceeded. Although he quotes Goethe in German (to no purpose), I suspect he got him at second hand from PBS on an evening when "Seinfeld" was a rerun. Balash has even figured out that the wrestler wearing the burnoose isn't really an Arab. Next he may develop doubts about Santa Claus. He is beginning to suspect that some television characters are portrayed by actors.

(even pornography, its mere representation), and resolutely affirms the value and necessity of the nuclear family.

"Is it not also curious that America, a people [sic] devoted to unwavering vigilance against the self-denying forces [?] of despotic collectivization and the celebration of the self-reliant, rugged John Wayne individualist, has, from its generals and its corporate CEO's down to its street gangstas and Extreme radicals, been able to achieve such blanket, homogenous [sic], collective consensus on their [sic] mass individuality?" Curious indeed if it were true! I think it would serve Balash right to be judged as if he believes exactly what he says. He asserts that there is a blanket, homogeneous ideological consensus among all Americans (except maybe Murray Bookchin), be they generals, corporate executives, McAnarchists or African-American gang members. This will come as quite a surprise to them, and might have merited a bit of evidentiary substantiation. No such consensus exists. And if it did, it would embrace Canadian thought too, which differs from American thought only in its spasmodic resentment of American influence.

The Case of Stirner

I have already suggested why Balash ripped Max Stirner out of 19th century Germany and grafted him onto 20th century America: he hopes that Stirner's candid egoism, if he can associate it with McAnarchism, will dramatize the latter's deviltry. Individualist anarchism "finds its distant roots" in the book by Stirner which he hasn't read. But Balash promptly ties his own shoelaces together by denying that there is "anything anarchist" about Stirner. If Stirner is not even remotely anarchist, Balash has his work cut out for him explaining how and in what way Stirner fathered or grandfathered McAnarchism. Saving space for his more pressing concerns, such

as TV shows, Balash attempts no such historical demonstration. It cannot be done, not even by a leftist more inventive than Balash.

In the first place, as I have elsewhere explained, individualist anarchism, as the expression has always been used, is not what Bookchin calls Lifestyle Anarchism or what Balash calls McAnarchism. Individualist anarchism affirms private property and laissez-faire, the free market. All Balash's anointed enemies are anti-capitalist and espouse collectivist forms of society. It follows that, whatever else may be wrong with them, they are not individualist anarchists.

Neither is Stirner. Here I am departing from certain ground for seemingly uncertain terrain, but I firmly believe I remain on terra firma. Unlike Balash, who has read nothing by Stirner which has been translated into English, I have read everything by Stirner which has been translated into English. I have read *The Ego and His Own* twice, i.e., twice as many times as Balash has. I have also read Paterson, the secondary source on Stirner which Balash cites, and a few more of which he is unaware or is indifferent to. Nothing I have read in, or about, Stirner suggests that he favored free-market capitalism. Everything he wrote argued otherwise – not in the sense that he was a socialist or communist, but in the sense that he was just not arguing on the level of the economic system but rather about something more profound, how the individual should deal with whatever social or economic system or situation she's confronted with. We may now think that Stirner's egoism is severely incomplete when it comes to how to put it into general practice – I think so – but he was not pro-capitalist.

Why does Balash deny that Stirner was an anarchist? Because his secondary source, Paterson, denies it. Paterson is no anarchist, and "Paterson [sic] comprehension of anarchist theory may have been somewhat cursory" – but his word is good enough for Murtagh if it serves Balash's polemic purpose. According to Balash, Paterson's merit is that "in contradistinction to the assorted individualist Olympians of today, he has written the only

world over, into [sic] a seething spume of presidential semen.

In this ramshackle, overlong, grammatically gruesome sentence, Balash is saying, in effect, that sexual freedom went quite far enough in the 60s to take it off the anarchist agenda, although neither then nor now has it ever gone as far as Goldman and Comfort advocated. The right to abortion is still contested and, more important, access to abortion is more and more restricted in practice; many teenagers still lack access to contraception; age-of-consent laws peg the age of consent well beyond puberty and real-world sexual activity; sodomy is still a crime in many states. The suicide rate among gay teenagers is proof enough of their ongoing oppression. Official sex education is mostly anti-sex education.

Even if sexual freedom were an accomplished fact, which is far from true, repudiating it would be catastrophically inexpedient. It seems to confirm what many young people sullenly suspect: that their parents got to have all the fun and now conveniently preach the virtues they didn't practice until they got too old for the corresponding vices. No wonder the young don't hunger for our dizzying banquet. We ate steak, now we feed them tofu. Balash writes off entire generations with a few peevish keystrokes. The baby boomers are hedonistic hypocrites. The twentysomethings are clueless Me-Generationists (and "young gullibles"). Both generations consist of compulsive consumers and channel-surfing media junkies. The implicit message is "trust no one under 60," or – to stay on the safe side – trust no one but Murray Bookchin. The only appropriate field for anarchist outreach is thus the nursing home. This is not too far from where the anarchist movement stood about forty years ago. Had it stayed there, it would be dead by now.

My own conception of anarchism, which I think is also that of the classical anarchists, is that the feasibility of anarchism does not depend upon angelic assumptions about human nature. Critics of

why young bank managers always seem so rompish and busking. Now I know: it's because they're all back-door men. Show me a banker and I'll show you an ass-bandit. This explains why so many bankers are McAnarchists.

Traditional Family Values, or, the Anarchist Anti-Sex League

Balash's envious obsession with anal sex is only the most clinically conspicuous symptom of his sexual and social conservatism. The puritanism which was mostly implicit in Bookchin is explicit in Balash. "Sex - It's Okay, says Mao, But Not too Much of It." That was a mocking Situationist graffito of the 1960s which captures Balash's attitude in the 1990s. He has a problem here, because the traditions of the traditional anarchism he champions include the affirmation of sexual freedom and the critique of the institution of marriage. On these issues the McAnarchists, not Balash, represent anarchist orthodoxy. Murtagh squirms out of the embarrassment with what is probably his only original argument:

Open discussion of, not to mention direct indulgence in, sexuality might have held some revolutionary weight when Emma Goldman squared off against the Victorian mind, or when Alex Comfort wrote in the pre-Boogie Nights 1940s his initial works arguing that sexual freedom was crucial to any meaningful anarchist society, but in the wake of the upheavals in morality accompanying the sixties, the moment has most definitely past [sic], and should have be [sic] evidenced to all by the present mass public weariness over repeated news coverage of Bill Clinton, that gleaming beacon in the night for revolutionaries the

thorough study of Stirner's thought on the novel basis of Stirner's own words." This is a judgment both inaccurate and one which Balash is unqualified to render, for he has not consulted Stirner's own words. It overlooks everybody from Marx and Engels to Herbert Read and Albert Camus. In addition to works in foreign languages, there is John P. Clark's *Max Stirner's Egoism* (1976), a thoroughly unsympathetic critique by an American philosophy professor and orthodox anarchist (at the time, a Bookchinist). Clark found little to like in Stirner, but he devoted a chapter (ch. VI) to examining Paterson's arguments against Stirner's anarchism and rejected them. Historians, anthologists and anarchists have recognized Stirner as an anarchist for as long as they have been aware of him. "Balash"-approved anarchists like Emma Goldman and George Woodcock and Herbert Read accepted Stirner as an anarchist and found merit in his critique. So too did Daniel Guerin, whose anarchism is even more Marxist than Bookchin's.

Stirner's own words on the issue are clear and conclusive: "we two, the state and I, are enemies... the state betrays its enmity to me by demanding that I be a man, which presupposes that I may also not be a man, but rank for it as an 'un-man'; it imposes being a man upon me as a duty... Enough; before it and its permanence I am to be impotent and respectful." Again: "Every state is a despotism, be the despot one or many, or (as one is likely to imagine about a republic) if all be lords, that is despotize one over another." No Bookchinist casuistry here about "politics" (good) versus "statecraft" (bad)! This is unqualified anarchism. "I am the deadly enemy of the state," writes Stirner, "which always hovers between the alternatives, it or I." These comments, frequently quoted in widely available secondary sources, could easily be multiplied. At the very least, they leave no doubt that Stirner considered an egoist accession to state power a practical impossibility, which should calm anarchist fears, for the egoist does not act from a sense of duty and therefore never does anything he believes to be futile or self-defeating.

It is patently false that individualist anarchism “finds its roots” – not some of its roots, all of its roots – in Stirner. This is the case whether you refer to individualist anarchism in its proper meaning or in Balash’s mudslinging way. In its narrower, precise and historically accurate sense, as all historians know, American individualist anarchism predates Stirner. Adin Ballou espoused it as early as 1837. Josiah Warren, born in the 18th century, arrived at the position by 1846, about the time Henry David Thoreau wrote “Civil Disobedience.” By the 1870’s, the roster of prominent individualists was largely filled out: Lysander Spooner, Stephen Pearl Andrews, Benjamin Tucker, Ezra Heywood, William B. Greene. Their foreign influences, those who had any, were Proudhon or the utopian socialists, not Stirner, who was utterly unknown in the United States until about 1880 and was not translated until the 1890s. Tucker was already an individualist anarchist when he became a Stirnerist egoist. So was James L. Walker, who had worked out a form of egoism years before he read Stirner and noticed the similarity in their thought. Stirner was not the source of American individualist thought, rather, he came to influence a part of that tendency – leading to a split within individualism and contributing to its permanent decline. Balash’s claim is chronologically impossible.

Disneyworld and Anal Sex

Balash comes across as an obsessive, driven by demons peculiarly important to himself. As with Bookchin, all things great and small which rile him are assimilated into a generic Other, however heterogeneous the others may be. Thus Balash affirms an occult affinity between a fast-food chain and anal sex, between anarcho-primitivism and Walt Disney. I wouldn’t rule any of these odd hypotheses out, but I’d like to see some evidence and argument. In the meantime, I find more persuasive the Rev. Susan “Crowbar” Poe’s observations concerning the Disney obsession: “His fixation with

Disney as the culmination of capitalist evil. He must have had a horrible time there. Maybe his parents forced him to go and his psyche still hasn’t recovered from those cartoon characters walking around him. Somewhere in his unconscious he hasn’t come to terms with the fact that they were [in] costumes. You think I’m kidding. I’d love to ask him.” Actually, I don’t think she’s kidding, and I wish she could ask him, but Balash is hiding behind his fake name and his Internet front, like so many leftist bushwhackers.

Thus spake Balash: “Thus writing an article on Decadence has now become a revolutionary act. So too has perusing pornography as well as being able to recount ‘The Ten Rules of Anal Sex.’” Huh? Moreover: “At a point in history where corporate Caligulas have never before had such sweeping powers to enslave so many people and condemn their lives to such absolute misery, a rompish evening of anal sex, as delicious as that may be, seems a rather impotent response to the problem of 40,000 people, mostly children, dying each day as a direct result of hunger and poverty, which is the sort of issue that has traditionally occupied the thoughts and efforts of self-proclaimed revolutionaries.” By implication, abstinence from anal sex would somehow reduce death from hunger and poverty. I am unaware that sodomites have ever held out buggery as a cure for hunger and poverty, although I suppose they might point out that it alleviates overpopulation, a problem directly attributable to penile-vaginal heterosexuality. Grudgingly acknowledging that “leading McAnarchist John Zerzan” has denounced New Age narcissism and mysticism, contrary to the Bookchin/Balash line, Balash might have admitted that so has every one of his identified enemies with the partial exception of Hakim Bey, the only one on the list for whom Balash’s criticisms have any validity. Balash’s idea of an “escape into pure hedonism” is – here he goes again – “pornography and anal sex, doing the same thing every young bank manager and money-trader in the Western world is doing but being among the shrewd few who’ve declared they’ve done something radical.” I’ve always wondered