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The mid-1980s to the mid-1990s were a period in which class politics remained resurgent within British anarchism, even as the recuperative perspectives of *Class War* unravelled. New forms of mobilisation which came to the fore after the anti-globalisation protests in Seattle in 1999 (such as Reclaim the Streets, anti-roads protests, Earth First! and more recently the world-wide Occupy! initiative) have evoked more echoes of the activist-centred anarchist punk practice than the orthodox class perspectives of 1970s. These new radical libertarian initiatives and forms of organisations have posed new answers to the questions of agency, strategy and to the challenges of combining political autonomy with the ability to mobilise credible coalitions.

In many of these struggles the 'revolutionary subject' has been the voluntary collation of self-motivated, self-directed militants rather than an insurgent proletariat. Class struggle anarchist organisations in Britain have not responded to the emergence of such new radical forces with the hubris of dismissal which would have been commonplace in the 1980s. Indeed, these struggles have often been supported as authentic expressions of resistance to capital being waged in arenas beyond the community and workplace, by legitimate anti-capitalist forces. Although it was not the intention of either, perhaps the contemporary outcome of the 'restorative' political efforts of the agents of *Class War* and of anarcho-punk has been to contribute to the convergence of an anarchist politic able to see value in the battles being fought in both the countercultural and the class wars.

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which offered a more considered and theoretically grounded articulation of the anarchist class war impulse; based on a specific 'anarchist-communist' identity: 'the term anarchist has often been misused: 'anarchist' can range from the hedonistic individual to the naïve pacifist. We felt the need to define ourselves in stricter terms'.[49] In terms of existing class-based anarchist alternatives, the ACF later explained: 'The objections to anarcho-syndicalism which would become more defined in the following years, precluded us joining DAM. Whilst we welcomed the imaginative approach of *Class War,* we saw that they lacked a strategy for the construction of a coherent national organisation and for the development of theory.'[50] The group, which retitled itself the Anarchist Federation in the late 1990s, later suggested its efforts were largely discontinuous with earlier anarchist initiatives in the UK: 'Although there is some historic continuity with earlier anarchist groups in Britain, the federation was mainly a new phenomenon, drawing on people new to anarchism in the 1980s.'[51] This was yet another 'restorative' claim by an emergent British anarchist agency.

By the close of the decade, the cyclical nature of British anarchism's advance and retreat appeared to be reconfirmed. Neither the anarcho-punk experiment nor the *Class War* dalliance with unreconstructed 'class politics of the mob' had settled the key questions facing the movement. The issues of organisation, practice, alliance formation, the relationship between reform and revolutionary ambition, resilience, flexibility and more — none of these had been decisively resolved.

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[49] Anarchist Communist Federation, *A n archism as W e See it* (London: ACF, n.d., but circa 1987), p. 21.

[50] Anarchist Communist Federation, 'ACF: The First Ten Years', *Organise!* , 42, Spring (1996), pp. 19–20 at p. 19.

[51] Anarchist Federation, 'The Anarchist Federation: In Thought and Struggle', *Organise!,* 78 (2012), pp. 7–11. 'In the late 90s we changed our name to the Anarchist Federation, not because we had changed our politics, but for pragmatic reasons.'

Class War's public position was that its paper and organisation represented the single legitimate expression of contemporary British anarchism, and the paper rarely acknowledged the existence of other anarchist currents. Crass and other anarcho-punk artists tended to have a much more open and expansive (not to say generous and inclusive) sense of the wider anarchist movement, and to groups and campaigns beyond it (many of which Class War would have dismissed as irrelevant or even counter-revolutionary).

Impacts and legacies

By the time of the 1984–85 miners' strike, the British anarchist movement was in a more vital and dynamic condition than it had been a decade before. Its numerical strength had been much improved; its press was stronger and more visible; its ability to mobilise its forces again proven; and its orientation to contemporary political concerns reinforced.

Although the bands that were together the catalysts for anarcho-punk did not set out to re-energise the British anarchist *m ovem ent* (their interest was in the vitality of British *anarchism),* anarcho-punk brought in a renewed sense of dynamism and (in relative terms) a major influx of enthused young militants, raising the formal anarchist movement from its doldrums, and proposed radical new counter-cultural practices. Crass founder-member Rimbaud has claimed that the intervention of anarcho-punk 'changed the minds of a generation'. That claim is hyperbole, but within the radical milieu the impacts of anarchist punk culture, politics and practice were significant and far reaching.

Class War reasserted the primacy of uncompromising class politics in the making of the anarchist case, and again reinvigorated the anarchist movement with a brash new sense of confidence. As Class War faltered, new anarchist organisations advanced — notable amongst them the Anarchist Communist Federation (ACF),

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a period of unexpected resurgence for the British anarchist movement, and for wider libertarian political initiatives circling in the orbit of an expanding anarchist core. The renaissance of anarchism in the UK was not something which many contemporary commentators on the British political fringe had anticipated. But British anarchism's recovery and renewed confidence was not only unexpected, it took on political hues, adopted practices and rallied around political priorities which were themselves novel and innovative (if often controversial). That British anarchism should encounter a period of revival in the unprepossessing context of the arrival of a new neoliberal, free-market, strong-state government appeared surprising, but for a significant number of political activists that combative context served to increase the attractiveness of the 'anarchist alternative', especially as the assault of Thatcherism seemed to place so many of the long-standing assumptions of the British extra-parliamentary left in doubt.

What is notable about this period in the history of post-war British anarchism is how far the political centre of gravity within the movement would shift over the course of a decade — as the pre-eminence of perspectives based on militant anti-militarism, individualism and counter-culturalism were challenged first by internal political developments and then by a largely external reassertion of anarchism based on class politics and the celebration of nascent oppositional instincts within existing, mainstream working-class culture.

That these breakthrough political initiatives could ignite such interest, and inspire the engagement of significant numbers of radical militants, is evidence of the continually innovative nature of the British anarchist impulse, of its continuing resilience and of the movement's capacity to reinvent and recover itself. That these new anarchist agents were to discover within so short a timespan that they appeared to have reached the limits of their own restorative agenda (far short of their stated ambitions) seemed to confirm

once again the cyclical nature of the advance and retreat of British anarchism.

British anarchism into the 1970s

For libertarian, autonomist, left-communist and anarchist movements across post-war Europe, the political, social and cultural upheavals of 1968 provided both a contemporary touchstone and a turning point in their modern histories. In the UK, at only a few points in the twentieth century had anarchism intruded into the mainstream of extra-parliamentary opposition; and in the post-war environment the current's varied traditions had struggled to find purchase outside of the radical political fringe. In the UK, the 1950s 'had been a period of hibernation for anarchist ideas',[1] which only entered a nascent period of recovery in the 1960s, pushed forward by the emergence of hippy counter-culture and anti-authoritarian currents around the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), notably the Committee of 100,[2] and within that subversive anti-militarist initiatives such as the 'Spies for Peace' affair.[3] The tumult which engulfed Paris, Prague and other cities in 1968 left a great deal of volatile political ferment in its wake across Europe, and although the repercussions in the UK were far more muted those ripples were conducive to the advance of libertarian forms of organisation and practice.

Prior to the 1970s, the history of post-war British anarchism had been a story of patchy, partial and inconsistent advance, in-

[1] G. Woodcock. 'Anarchism: A historical introduction', in G. Woodcock (ed.), *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp. 11–56 at p. 49.

[2] See, for example, V. Richards, *Protest without Illusions* (London: Freedom Press, 1981); R. Bradshaw, D Gould and C. Jones (eds), *From Protest to Resistance: The Direct Action Movement against Nuclear Weapons* (Nottingham: Mushroom, 1981); G. Woodcock, 'Anarchism', pp. 50–1.

[3] Anon, 'The Spies for Peace and after', *The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly,* 2, 1 (1988), pp. 61–96.

Despite these, often unacknowledged, instances of convergence, significant and irreconcilable differences between the two forms of anarchist practice persisted. Most fundamental was the disagreement on the question of revolutionary agency and the conduct of revolutionary action. *Class War* identified collective class conflict as the axis of the struggle against capitalism and the state. Anarcho-punk began with a belief that the individual is the agent of resistance to the compound tyrannies of the state, and that the maximisation of personal liberty is the cumulative guarantor of social freedom.

Class War's account of privation and exploitation was grounded in a (fairly crude) material interpretation of class and class relations; Crass's understanding of oppression and alienation extended beyond the narrowly material to propose philosophical, existential explorations of the idea of individual freedom. *Class War* embraced (and made definitional) the idea of the use of direct physical force (even in pre-insurrectionary conditions) while Crass's message was (in the early years of the group's work at least) one of militant pacifism. Although acts of material sabotage and the destruction of the property of the 'war state' were exempted, Crass expressed philosophical concerns about the impact on the individual psyche of a recourse to violence, and on the social level of the corrupting authoritarianism of Blanquism.

There were sharp differences too over the question of the agency of the revolutionary 'organisation' itself. Although acutely aware of their prominence within the scene Crass, Poison Girls and other anarchist punk bands were reluctant to have their message 'branded', and actively resistant to the efforts of others to profit from the commercial exploitation of their work and popularity. In contrast, the organisers of *Class War* seized every opportunity to promote the paper and the organisation's brand, producing and selling the type of self-promoting merchandise that was anathema within anarcho-punk.

tiatives that would thrive without alienating hierarchies. As both *Class War* and the militants of anarchist punk responded to the realities of the peaking of their own political experiments, they each struggled with the recognition that their circles of influence did not correlate directly with the popularity of their current's cultural output. Crass had long been frustrated at how many punk enthusiasts who identified with the anarcho-punk canon appeared reluctant to put their ideas into practice and to move beyond the position of music fandom to political engagement. There was a sense that, amongst the movement's ranks, there often appeared to be too many passive record collectors and too few engaged, self-directing militants. The editors of *Class War* appeared to lack similar self-reflective skills (and were far less self-critical of their publishing practice), appearing reluctant to accept that a significant proportion of the paper's readership treated the paper as an 'anarchist *Viz*' rather than as an irreverent, hard-hitting political tabloid. The renovating majority of Class War reflected the difficulty that the organisation had faced in mobilising committed supporters, noting that while many believed the group had 'thousands of people about to go on the streets and fight', the reality was 'that we are a group of super-active individuals who do it for them, an essentially passive readership'.[46] Such problems seemed to typify the dangers set-out in Jo Freeman's celebrated critique of anarchist disorganisation, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness.*[47] The group belatedly suggested: 'In many respects it's true to say that *Class War* failed to become much more than a "punk" organisation.'[48]

[46] Class War, 'The Second Coming: An Open Letter to Revolutionaries', *Class War,* 73 (1997), pp. 3–9 at p. 8.

[47] First published as Jo Freeman, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', *The Second Wave*, 2, 1 (1972), available (in revised form), www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm, accessed 17 December 2013.

[48] Class War, 'The Second Coming: An Open Letter to Revolutionaries', *C lass* War, 73, p. 8.

tertwined with often prolonged periods of retrenchment.[4] The Anarchist Federation of Britain (AFB), an unstable alliance of anarchists of widely different hues ('from syndicalists and libertarian communists through hippies and liberals to individualists')[5] which had been re-established several times (most recently in 1963), had once again unravelled, suffering defections to the International Socialists (IS) and the International Marxist Group (IMG). The Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists (ORA), originally set up as 'a reaction to the powerlessness and lack of formal structure' of the AFB, as a small ginger group within the federation (around the paper *Libertarian Struggle),* had first become independent, and then in 1975 evolved into the new Anarchist Workers' Association (AWA); an organisation defined by an explicit orientation to industrial and workplace struggles and determined to move beyond the frustrations of 'synthesis' politics.[6] The AWA declared that: 'class struggle has been the primary factor in the determination of the form and structure of society', adamant that capitalism would be overthrown 'through the development of working-class organisations and by means of a violent social revolution'.[7] Despite its attempts at political redefinition, the AWA endured a volatile existence, suffering further splits and losses, whilst struggling to rally the organisation to the struggles of the day. The main current to emerge from the last major schism in the AWA (which came to a head at the May 1977 conference), became the LCG (Libertarian Commu-

[4] B. Franks, *Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchisms* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), pp. 49–70; P. Shipley, 'The Libertarian Alternative', in *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), pp. 172–206.

[5] M. Curtis and H. Stone, 'A Short History of the Libertarian Communist Group', available online at *Big Flame, 1970–1984,* bigflameuk.files.wordpress.com, accessed 17 December 2013.

[6] G. Foote, 'Building the Revolutionary Party?', *Libertarian Communist* Review, 1, winter (1974), flag.blackened.net, accessed 17 December 2013; M . Curtis and H. Stone, 'A Short History of the Libertarian Communist Group'.

[7] AWA, 'Aims and Principles', *Anarchist Worker,* July (1977), p. 7.

nist Group), which was launched in 1978.[8] The LCG announced the group's departure from the British anarchist tradition which it insisted had rendered itself 'unable to intervene actively in the struggles of the working class'.[9]

The 1979 general election, which brought to power the first Thatcher government, became the political nadir for the fractious 'post'-anarchist group, who opted to commit the organisation to the Trotskyist-led electoral Socialist Unity initiative. After dismal poll results, the LCG majority opted for fusion with the libertarian leftist group Big Flame.[10]

Elsewhere within the anarchist movement there were signs of greater political resilience. From within the British anarcho-syndicalist tradition, the Direct Action Movement (DAM) was formed in March 1979, from remnants of the earlier Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF),[11] later acknowledging that 'syndicalism in this country has not really existed since the early 1920s'.[12] Early editions of the *Direct Action* newspaper had an irreverent style and the cut-and-paste design motif of a punk fanzine, only later adopting a more sober tenor for its industrial reportage. The more high-profile *Black Flag* newspaper which had been founded by Albert Meltzer and Stuart Christie in 1970 (initially entitled *Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross*, to emphasise its focus on

[8] Editorial Collective, 'What's in a Name? Why We're Changing', *Anarchist Worker,* October (1977), p. 2; M . Curtis and H. Stone, 'A Short History of the Libertarian Communist Group'.

[9] 'Build This New Paper', *Libertarian Communist,* January-February (1978), p. 4.

[10] 'Libertarian Communist Group [LCG] (Groups Who joined Big Flame No. 2)', *Big Flame, 1970–1984,* 3 December (2010), bigflameuk.wordpress.com, accessed 17 December 2013; B. Franks, *Rebel Alliances,* p. 74.

[11] Direct Action Movement and International Workers' Association, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: History and Action* (Manchester: DAM, n.d., but circa 1980), pp. 20–1.

[12] Direct Action Movement, 'Introduction to Syndicalism', *Direct Action* , 4 (n.d.), pp. 6–7.

their political efforts within a longer-term historical context (Crass and anarcho-punk, through a sense of affinity with the tradition of the counter-culture's rejection of the power of the state; *Class War,* by association with the history of uncontrolled working-class resistance to authority, police and state) neither saw particular value in explicit identification with the anarchist heritage, in Britain or internationally.

Both currents shared a strong opposition to mediated forms of political representation — trade unions, political parties, and in particular a deep hostility to the organised far-left and to the interference of front organisations in the arena of political activism (although initially Crass, at least, were more supportive of those campaigning bodies and single-issue pressure groups which were not seen as driven by organisational fetishism). Genuine, empowering political action was, for both currents by definition, direct, autonomous and self-directed. But the particular culture and form of the anarchist punk milieu and that surrounding *Class War* made the brokering of alliances with other activist forces extremely difficult, reinforcing an isolating 'otherness'.

The lack of clarity over strategy (and the absence of any clearly articulated sense of how this anarchist activity might, over time, be generalised into a combative revolutionary catalyst) had a number of repercussions; not least that it made it difficult to assess how political progress might be quantified, and increased the sense of frustration when these sketchily defined political advances were not forthcoming. Such uncertainties were reinforced by a reluctance within both currents to disentangle the degree of *inform ed support* for the substance of their political ideas from the (relative) popularity of the *form* and *presentation* of their political-cultural output.

Both *Class War* and the anarcho-punks shared a sense of uncertainty about questions of organisation and strategy — sharing a deep suspicion of formal organisation and fixed structures; and both inspired by an innate belief in the power of spontaneous ini-

graphics of punk', but judges that 'the similarity stops there.'[45] Yet although the two approaches (the anarchist punk and the class warrior) appear on first glance to be sharply defined dichotomies in the modern British anarchist tradition, the distinctions between the two are less pronounced, and the overlaps far greater, than many have acknowledged.

Although they wrestled with the dilemmas differently, both these anarchist currents celebrated the 'otherness' of oppositional culture in their different settings — Crass idealised the hippy experience of rejecting the existing social order, seeing its subversive potential reinvented in the punk counter-culture; *Class War* championed a very specific (and in its own way no less romanticised) reading of the incendiary elements of British working-class culture. Both of these readings of anarchism celebrated radical 'moments' as having values in themselves — in anarcho-punk, the thrill and excitement of gigs and other aspects of punk culture; for *Class War*, street ruckuses and clashes with the forces of law and order. Those actions were seen as having genuine (if temporary) liberating value in themselves, and also hinting at and anticipating the more seismic possibilities to come. In doing so both manifestations of the anarchist politic appealed and made their strongest pitch to a similar core audience — primarily the disaffected, urban young.

Both movements revelled in the idea of 'saying the unsayable', seeing great value in the deployment of shock and of being provocative and intentionally seeking to offend and outrage (and at the same time attract those intrigued by such provocations). The anarchism of both approaches shared a strong (and, at times, unconvincingly overstated) anti-intellectualism, which was refracted through the neglect of the established canon of nineteenth- and twentieth-century anarchist thought. Although both were keen to position

[45] P. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 494.

anarchist prisoner support), stood firmly within the 'revolutionary class struggle' traditions of anarchism.[13] *Freedom*, the longest running of British anarchist newspapers, reflected the interests of a wider libertarian readership, and had stronger roots in the more liberal, artistic, cultural and intellectual traditions of the movement. The long-standing and bitter animosity between the latter two publications was partly refracted through the loyalty of a divided partisan readership, which (particularly in the uniquely intense political hot-house of the radical London milieu) often identified exclusively with one title or the other.

Yet when taken together, despite the politically receptive environment, the formal organisations and publications of British anarchism had failed to benefit from the seemingly more conducive post-1968 context and had again slid into the fringes at the close of the 1970s. Almost a decade earlier, Meltzer and Christie had written a landmark text on contemporary British anarchist theory which (anticipating the forward surge of the movement) concluded that the 'floodgates holding back anarchy are cracking'.[14] Ten years on and the official anarchist movement appeared to be stuck in the political backwaters, with the prospect of gains in either influence or organisation fast receding.

The impetus for the political revival of British anarchism in the late 1970s and early 1980s came from something of an unexpected quarter. Punk band the Sex Pistols, who burst into mainstream cultural notoriety in 1976–77, may have declared themselves as advocates for 'Anarchy in the UK', but the band's ideological ambitions (where they existed at all) were chaotic, and for all the band's nihilistic protestations, their political manifesto was thread-

[13] See, A. Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Common place Life and Anarchist Organisation* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996); S. Christie, *Granny Made Me an Anarchist: General Franco, the Angry Brigade and Me* (London: Scribner, 2004).

[14] S. Christie and A. Meltzer, *The Floodgates of Anarchy* (London: Stanmore Press, 1970), back cover; *passim*.

bare at best. It was the emergence of a consciously anarchist current within the 'second wave' of British punk (1978–79) which became the catalyst for the revival in the energy, initiative and momentum of the forces of British anarchism.

The rise of anarcho-punk

Two unusual and highly distinctive punk bands share a pre-eminent role in the emergence of the new genre of 'anarcho-punk'. Based in a farmhouse on the outskirts of north London, the band Crass formed in 1977, but did not come fully to wider prominence in the UK punk scene until the closing months of 1978. Crass embraced a new fusion of punk and anarchism, concocting a mixture of individualism (infused with elements of bohemian culture and the ethos of hippy) and insurrectionism to inform a politics infused with anti-militarism, atheism, feminism, anti-authoritarianism and implacable anti-statism.[15] The band's sound was as distinctive as its orientation to the punk idea: a harsh, guitar layered aural assault, backed by militaristic drum patterns, and atonal soundscapes. The band's uncompromising, didactic approach (if not their musical motif) was shared by Poison Girls, a political punk band formed in Brighton, with strong anarcha-feminist

[15] For histories of the band's work, see: Crass, *A Series of Shock Slogans and Mindless Token Tantrums* (London: Exitstencil Press, 1982); G. McKay, 'Crass 621984 ANOK4U2', in G. McKay, *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance since the Sixties* (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 73–101; P. Rimbaud, *Shibboleth* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998); G. Vaucher, *Crass Art and Other Pre Post-modern Monsters* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1999); R. Cross, '"The Hippies Now Wear Black": Crass and the Anarcho-punk Movement, 1977–1984', *Socialist History,* 26 (2004), pp. 2 5 -4 4 ; B. Cogan, '"Do they Owe Us a Living? Of Course They Do!": Crass, Throbbing Gristle, and Anarchy and Radicalism in Early English Punk Rock', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism,* 1, 2 (2007), pp. 77 -9 0 ; G. Berger, *The Story of Crass* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009); S. Ignorant and S. Pottinger, *The Rest Is Propaganda* (London: Southern Records, 2010); A. Bandez, *You Can't Sing the Blues While Drinking Milk* (Coventry: Tin Angel, 2012).

Other class struggle anarchist forces judged that although *Class War* had served a useful disruptive role, it no longer served a productive purpose. The Anarchist Federation praised the group for 'helping the breakaway of serious class struggle anarchism from lifestylism and do-gooding liberalism, typified by the anti-nuclear movement of the time', but criticised the Class War Federation for its flimsy political rubric and its organisational self-obsession.[43] The short-lived Anarchist Workers Group (1988–92) declared more damningly: *'Class War* has ended up a mirror image of the pacifist ghetto it so despises: chaotic, disorganised and lacking politics and strategy, *[and]* firmly stuck in the ghetto of its own making.'[44]

Conflict and continuity: *Class War* and anarcho-punk

Historian of anarchism Peter Marshall suggests that *Class War's* style and method shared 'some of the shock tactics and "fuck-off"

[43] Anarchist Communist Federation, 'Revolution: An Unfinished Business', *Organise!,* 47 (1997), pp. 7 -8 at p. 8.

[44] Anarchist Workers Group, 'Anarchism in the Thatcher Years', *Socialism from Below* , 1, August (1989), pp. 6–11 at p. 8. With its origins in the Direct Action Movement, the founders of the AWG 'broke' with anarcho-syndicalism and positioned the group in the tradition of the anarchist *Platform* (based on the 1926 *Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)* written by Russian anarchists determined to counter the 'swamp of disorganisation' and the 'interminable vacillations on the most important questions of theory and tactics' within the international movement, and establish a more tightly defined degree of political and organisational rigour). The AWG's 'recuperative' efforts found little echo within the British anarchist movement (where its reading of the *Platform* proved contentious even amongst those in the milieu sympathetic to its perspectives) and it soon disintegrated in disagreement. A number of founding members joined Trotskyist organisations; echoing in many ways the trajectory seen in the history of the Anarchist Workers Association and Libertarian Communist Group a decade earlier.

television news to defend the 'working-class heroes' who battled with the police being reported internationally.[40]

Despite such notoriety, the poll tax struggle would in retrospect prove to be a high water mark in the organisation's influence — and its self-confidence. By the mid-1990s, the Class War Federation was finding the challenges of operating as a more traditional anarchist formation (and the longer-term limitations of the group's simple political lexicon) increasingly problematic.

Self-critical voices inside the organisation gathered momentum, and at the organisation's annual conference in Nottingham in 1997, Class War again split: the majority agreeing to dissolve the organisation, while a far smaller minority (based around the London group) determined to continue without the 'quitters'. The Leeds editorial group announced that issue 73 of *Class War* would be the last ever, and focused on 'an open letter to the revolutionary movement' which would raise the question of potential political regroupment of class struggle anarchist forces. Announcing that 'Class War is dead … long live the class war', the final issue's editorial offered a political balance sheet of the organisation's history concluding: 'The Federation remains a tiny group with a big image that has outlived its usefulness. The appeal of our paper has become too narrow and limited', and insisting that the time had come 'to try something new.'[41] The London Class War minority fitfully produced editions of *Class War* for several years (announcing in its first issue that: 'Just as the Labour Party had to get rid of its 'militant' tendency, we have got rid of our non-militant tendency')[42] before winding-up operations in the mid-2000s.

[40] An off-air recording of the interview with Murphy is included in the anonymously produced documentary *The Poll Tax Revolt* which was widely circulated amongst protest groups (in VHS format) in the early 1990s.

[41] Class War, 'Class War Is Dead … Long Live the Class War', *Class War,* 73 (1997), p. 2.

[42] Class War (London), 'Editorial', *Class War,* 74 (1997), p. 2.

credentials and a background more rooted in nightclub cabaret and theatre than in rock and pop.[16] The band's libertarianism was no less anti-state than Crass's, although Poison Girls' early lyrical focus concentrated on the themes of gender identities and the alienated experiences of women; particularly in the context of the family. Though their approaches had their differences, both bands shared a common recuperative aim: to rekindle the subversive, revolutionary original ambitions of punk. Founder member of Crass, Penny Rimbaud, later recalled: 'When in 1977 the Sex Pistols harped on about anarchy in the UK, it became pretty obvious to me that their interest was not in revolution but in their bank balance […] We saw Johnny Rotten's "no future" rantings as a challenge. We believed that there was a future if we were prepared to fight for it, and fight for it we did.'[17] Following Poison Girls' relocation to London, both bands began a period of intense and close cooperation; collaborating on shared record releases, live gigs and tours; and a broadly similar approach to the practice of design, presentation and political publishing.

Anarcho-punk provided the momentum to re-energise the movement, but its impact changed its profile and the centre of political gravity within it. The political priorities of anarcho-punk were very different from what had gone before. Clear political foci were provided by the anti-nuclear and anti-war movements, but the attentions of anarcho-punk extended to include a matrix of other issues — including militant vegetarianism and animal liberation; civil liberties and opposition to police powers; struggles against wage slavery; feminism and struggles over gender equality; opposition

[16] The history of Poison Girls has been only sparsely written to date. Key articles from the contemporary music press include: P. Du Noyer, 'Passion and Poison', *New Musical Express,* 17 October 1981, p. 17.

[17] P. Rimbaud, 'Introduction', in P. Rimbaud, *The Last of the Hippies: An Hysterical Romance* (London: Active Distribution, 2009), pp. vii-xxi at vii-viii.

to organised religion; and opposition to cuts and the reductions in the wider 'social wage'.[18]

Key to anarcho-punk identity was a focus on the practice of Do-It-Yourself (DIY); an approach to production and distribution based on the assumptions of not-for-profit, independence and autonomy, anti-commercialism, and driven by strong anti-hierarchical and collaborative considerations.[19] Over the next four to five years, with next to no formal organisation to support it, an independent network of radical punk practitioners identifying with the ethos of anarcho-punk came together through the shared production of recordings (on vinyl and cassette tape), fanzines and magazines, gigs (usually outside the circuit of commercial venues), and a diverse array of punk propaganda in a variety of different formats, all designed to make the anarchist case.[20]

As anarcho-punk was not much interested in the traditional prescriptions of the movement, conflict and disagreement accompanied this resurgence.[21] For many traditionalists, the insurgency of young punks was confusing, unwelcome or irrelevant to the 'real business' of the movement.[22] Many of the papers and organisa-

[18] See, for example, the approaches outlined in: Crass, *A Series of Shock Slogans and Mindless Token Tantrums.*

[19] For an appraisal of the practice of contemporary 'DIY culture', see A. Spencer, *DIY: The Rise of Lo-fi Culture* (London: Marion Boyars, 2005); for a discussion of the struggle for independence by independent punk record labels, see: A. O 'Connor. *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

[20] For a collection of participant accounts of their involvement in anarcho-punk culture in the UK, see I. Glasper (ed.), *The Day the Country Died: A History of Anarcho-punk, 1980–1984* (London: Cherry Red Books, 2006); R. Wallace (dir.), *The Day the Country Died — the DVD* (London: Cherry Red Films, 2006).

[21] B. Franks, *Rebel Alliances,* pp. 71–4.

[22] See the discussion in R. Cross, '"There Is No Authority But Yourself": The Individual and the Collective in British Anarcho-punk', *Music & Politics,* 4, 2 (2010), pp. 1–20; K. Dunn, 'Anarcho-punk and Resistance in Everyday Life', *Punk & Post-Punk,* 1, 2 (2012), pp. 201–18.

though he acknowledged that the group 'quickly became the most popular anti-establishment youth grouping for years'.[36] In contrast, one correspondent to *Freedom* reported the emergence of the group's 'crudely nihilist broadsheet' with some alarm, concluding that the paper's amoral advocacy of crude class violence meant its ideas had 'more in common with Marxist dictatorship than with anarchy'.[37]

Anarcho-punk had (collectively) resisted attempts to germinate formal organisation out of the subculture's networks. Within three years of the paper's launch, the majority view within *Class War* was to support the shift toward a new anarchist support structure. In 1986, supporters of the paper agreed to form the national Class War Federation in an attempt to place the production of *Class War* on a sounder footing; a move which heralded a minor split: 'Some people could not accept the idea of such a degree of organisation and left', the group later acknowledged.[38]

At a conference in Manchester in 1990, a majority of the federation voted to become 'a membership organisation, with membership fees, and a straightforward constitution',[39] effectively completing the evolution of *Class War* from an informal editorial collective to a more orthodox anarchist organisation. The March 1990 anti-poll tax riot in Trafalgar Square once again thrust all of the UK's anarchist organisations into the limelight, as the British press began the obligatory post-riot hunt for the 'outside agitators' responsible for the violence. Amongst their peers *Class War* exploited the publicity opportunities this provided to greatest effect, with member Andy Murphy's appearance on national

[36] A. Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels*, pp. 338–40.

[37] D. Isiorho, 'Class War', *Freedom* , 30 July 1983, p. 5.

[38] Class War, *This Is Class War,* p. 8; A. Brown (interviewer), 'Solidarity and Class War meet uptown', p. 6.

[39] Class War, *This Is Class War*, p. 8.

As anarcho-punk had been able to do five years earlier, *Class War* seized the initiative and the notoriety of the movement. *Class War* 'the paper' only later became Class War 'the organisation', and throughout its lifespan, its numerical strength (initially, editors and networks of paper sellers; later, signed-up members) remained extremely small. Even at its height, the Class War Federation 'never had more than 150 members', with paper sales peaking at between 15–20,000 copies.[33]

Class War organised a short series of 'Bash the Rich' marches (first in Kensington, then in Henley-on-Thames, and then finally in 1985 in Hampstead and then Bristol). These highly theatrical demonstrations of 'class hatred' (which saw the march led by a banner proclaiming 'Behold your future executioners!') met an increasingly uncompromising response from the authorities, with the final Hampstead event being completely swamped by a large police mobilisation. Although the pages of *Class War* lauded the success of the marches, others in the anarchist scene judged the marches as absurd and politically inept. Speaking the following year, Bone conceded: 'I think most people in *Class War* would acknowledge that the 'Bash the Rich' marches were unsuccessful.'[34] Years later, Bone suggested that the Hampstead event: 'was to prove a disastrous farce for *Class War*', reinforced by the abortive last-gasp re-enactment in Bristol.[35]

Just as the insurgency of anarcho-punk had not been universally welcomed by the existing anarchist movement, *Class War*'s arrival was also met by wary scepticism from some and outright opposition by others. *Black Flag's* Meltzer suggested in his autobiography that the new paper: 'came as a cultural shock … to many older revolutionaries', who were initially unsure 'whether it was a one-off parody of anarchists' or 'a modern version of the caricature-sheet',

[33] B. Franks, *Rebel Alliances,* p. 78; Bone, *Bash the Rich,* p. 177.

[34] A. Brown (interviewer), 'Solidarity and Class War Meet Uptown', p. 4.

[35] I. Bone, *Bash the Rich* , p. 262.

tions of the existing movement were unsure of how to respond to a revival that they could claim little responsibility or credit for.

In the early 1980s it was from within anarcho-punk that so many of the profile events and developments which bore the imprint of the anarchist movement drew momentum — including the celebrated 1982 Zig-Zag squat gig (a large one-day anarchist-punk festival held in a mothballed London nightclub); the series of Stop the City demonstrations held in the financial district of London in 1983 and 1984; the rise of a newly militant animal liberation lobby; the surge of punk activity at 'peace camps' outside nuclear air bases — and from its ranks that so large a percentage of the anarchist contingent of innumerable political demonstrations was rallied. At the same time, principally through the agency of the political punk fanzine, a plethora of new anarchist publications (of a wider variety of punk vernaculars, politics and styles) were produced and distributed through makeshift independent networks. The different communities of anarcho-punk produced a large array of tapes, singles and albums, and self-organised thousands of gigs at venues across the country. But political engagement was as central to the anarcho-punk idea as DIY cultural production. Rimbaud judged that: 'most anarchist punks were just as happy tearing down the barbed wire fences of military bases as they might be going to a gig'.[23]

Anarchism in the early years of Thatcherism

In the early 1980s, a shared agenda of opposition to the prescriptions of the Thatcher government proved sufficient to maintain the (albeit fragile and largely untested) unity of the reviving anarchist movement; or at least prevent a reoccurrence of the fractures of the 1970s. Anarchists of most hues could find common cause in the battles raging over cuts in the social wage, in opposition to increased

[23] P. Rimbaud, 'Introduction', p. ix.

powers for the police and court systems, and through joint struggles on other fronts. Despite the major differences in analysis as to the causes of the renewed nuclear arms race most anarchists could support the anti-militarist logic of the 'peace movement' (through the shared conviction that peace required not just the decommissioning of the nuclear arsenals but the dismantling of the 'war state' itself).

Although the nature of the underlying critiques again differed, anarchists from the syndicalist to the peace-punk wings of the movement shared a hostility to the politics and practice of the contemporary Bolshevik left in Britain. By virtue of on-the-ground political proximity, much critical attention was directed towards what were seen as the manipulative, self-serving 'front organisations' of the Trotskyite left in general, and of the Socialist Workers Party in particular: including the Right to Work campaign, Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League. Anarchists together opposed the party-building pre-occupations which were seen to drive them.

The short-lived London Anarchist Centre (August 1981-March 1982) based in the Docklands area of the capital provided another example of political cross-over between different wings of the movement, but put into sharp relief many of the tensions and conflicts which hampered efforts at collaboration. Start-up funds for the centre had been provided through a joint Crass and Poison Girls benefit single, but relations between the anarchist punks, the London Autonomists group and others remained fraught and, although the venue hosted many gigs and a number of political events, the centre closed within a year.[24]

Division and disunity still afflicted sections of the anarchist movement, but the upturn in the current's fortunes and the volatile political context of early Thatcherism continued to keep

[24] A. Martin. 'Autonomy Centres, Riots and the Big Rammy', *Smile* 12, (1994); G. Berger, *The Story of Crass,* pp. 191–3; P. Rimbaud, *Shibboleth,* pp. 121–4.

Class War was a militant anarchist newspaper (and later organisation) originally set up by Ian Bone and other activists in 1983.[29] The initiative had its origins in Swansea, Wales, developing out of the work of a group of activists who produced local paper *The A larm* , which focused on strong 'community newspaper' issues such as corruption within local government and invidious police practices. Bone suggests that the paper was distinguished by its willingness to 'name names' and print detailed evidence of its allegations (with little concern for the legal risks), and by its mischievous humourist style; approaches which would later find echoes in the pages of *Class War.*[30]

After abortive experiments with standing *Alarm* candidates for the local council, and a short-lived involvement with the Welsh Socialist Republican Movement, Bone relocated to London. Bone approached the London Autonomists group and a decision was reached to produce a tabloid-style anarchist newspaper which would reach a wider audience, and be particularly aimed at young anarchists, including anarcho-punks.[31]

From its first issue, the *Class War* newspaper displayed a strong affinity with punk sensibilities, but expressed these in the context of a tabloid style newspaper which revelled in the celebration of working-class violence against authority; combined humour, self-consciously outrageous text and imagery to celebrate assaults on the police; picket line violence; inner-city revolts; and to pour scorn on what it derided as the timidity of 'middle-class left'.[32]

[29] B. Franks, *Rebel Allian ces,* p. 75; Class War, *This Is Class War: An Introduction to the Class War Federation* (Stirling: AK Press, 1989); for I. Bone's own account of *Class W ar*'s history, see I. Bone, *Bash the Rich: True-life Confessions of an Anarchist in the UK* (Bath: Tangent Books, 2006).

[30] A. Brown (interviewer), 'Sound and Fury', *Solidarity,* 13 (1986), pp. 10–13.

[31] A. Murphy. 'Class War: A Serious Business', *The Heavy Stuff,* 1, December (1987), pp. 4–10.

[32] See I. Bone, A. Pullen and T. Scargill (eds), *Class War: A Decade of Disorder* (London: Verso, 1991); Class War Federation, *Unfinished Business: The Politics of Class War* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992); and I. Bone, *Bash the Rich.*

centrifugal pressures in check. At the large CND rallies in London in the early 1980s (such as the 250,000-strong march in October 1981) activists from around the country would gravitate together to form impromptu 'anarchist blocks', identifiable from afar by the black and black-and-red flags waving above them. To the frustration of march organisers (and many of the other marchers nearby) this anarchist contingent showed itself determined to barrack and heckle platform speakers from political parties and other organisations judged as antithetical to the anti-militarist struggle. By the time of the June 1982 rally, this assemblage of anarchists was subject to additional marshalling by a combination of police and CND stewards. Frustrated by the lockdown, a breakaway group of around 300 anarchists marched towards London's Oxford Street where their demonstration was swamped by police and 48 arrests were made.[25] A defence campaign rallied cross-movement support.

Joint efforts in shared arenas of struggle notwithstanding, key lines of political fracture still stressed the British anarchist milieu. The politics of contemporary anti-fascism were one such sharp dividing line. In the context of the resurgence of the National Front and other formations of the British far-right, large sections of the anarchist movement rallied around the long-standing 'no platform' policy, which sought to deny fascists the ability to organise in public. While some questioned whether the threat posed by the far-right merited the level of opposition many in the movement were prepared to commit to the anti-fascist struggle, others went further, arguing that the 'the politics of anti-fascism' were a disabling political cul-de-sac for the movement. Perhaps unexpectedly, anarcho-punk's rejection of the prescriptions of the anti-fascists drew them into close alignment with that current on the class politics wing of the anarchist and left-communist movements which saw the 'fascist threat' as a chimera. What did distinguish the anarcho-punk

[25] 'Anarchists Attacked', *Freedom* , 12 June 1982, pp. 1–2.

While Poison Girls continued working until 1989, Crass ceased operations in 1984 (as the band had always pledged). In their first full statement on their dissolution Crass explained: 'We felt no compulsion to continue gigging. We were no longer convinced that by simply providing what had broadly become entertainment we were having any real effect. We'd made our point and if after seven years people hadn't taken it, it surely wasn't because we hadn't tried hard enough.'[27]

Their disbandment signalled a key turning point in the history of the original anarcho-punk wave. Political differences within Crass over the band's future political orientation had been growing for some time, and the winding up of the band meant that hard-fought debates over future strategy were left unresolved. Rimbaud suggested that the logic of the Crass's later work was the advocacy of an increasingly clandestine campaign of unattributed actions by punk militants. The pronouncements of the 1984 *You're Already Dead* single were not cast in orthodox class terms, but spoke clearly of the need to confront the entrenched power and military might of capitalism and state directly and (it was increasingly implied) through whichever uncompromising political actions were required. Speaking to *Maximum rocknroll* magazine in the autumn of 1983, Crass suggested that: 'the class thing is gonna become central over the next five years. The struggle between the people as one class and the elite as another class'.[28] It was though as anarcho-punk's first wave began to peak that new agencies promoting revolutionary class-based anarchism again began to make the political running within the movement, exemplified by the group which coalesced around a new provocative tabloid.

[27] Crass, 'In Which Crass Voluntarily Blow Their Own', republished in *Black Flag*, 28 April 1986, pp. 4–5.

[28] R. Schwartz (interviewer), 'Crass', *Maximum rock n roll,* 9, October-November (1983).

approach was the willingness to accept the attendance at gigs of those who held far-right ideas with the aim of engaging with and challenging their worldview. This was allied with a philosophical rejection of the authoritarianism seen as inherent in the effort to silence (by law or by force) the opinions of others, however objectionable.

The riots which erupted in a number of British inner-cities in the summer of 1981 exposed again many long-standing disagreements amongst anarchists in the UK over the questions as diverse as: the interplay between class politics and questions of race and racism; the utility and legitimacy of recourse to political violence; and the issue of revolutionary strategy itself. Differences in the perception of the centrality of 'the class struggle' were also manifest, in the early 1980s, in the extent to which anarchist militants identified with those strikes in the public and private sector that were called to oppose the early efforts at the neoliberal restructuring of the economy attempted by the first Thatcher administration.

The Falklands War was a defining moment in the modern history of both Thatcherism and the British state, and for the anti-Thatcherite opposition. The iconography and rhetoric of CND and that of the 'peace movement' had, in the context of the early 1980s, appeared interchangeable. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had made little effort to distinguish its narrower unilateralist nuclear remit. In the context of a 'conventional war' to reclaim British 'sovereign territory' in the South Atlantic, CND shed this duality and reasserted its anti-nuclear mission statement. It was a logical move, but one which hobbled independent opposition to the war and deprived a small but vociferous anti-Falklands War movement of any campaign structure or organisation. In the vacuum, anarcho- punk played an important contributory role in articulating anti-war and anti-militarist sentiment, outraging Tory politicians with blunt and 'obscene' anti-Falklands War singles (such as Crass's excoriating *How Does It Feel to Be the Mother of a Thousand Dead?)* and public statements which led to 'questions in the House', and putative legal moves against the band.

New anarchist forces in the 1980s

Military victory in the South Atlantic transformed the electoral prospects of a Thatcher administration which had been beset with the problems of soaring unemployment, economic decline and domestic unrest. The resilience of Thatcherism after her second general election victory in 1983 accelerated the mood of pessimism and self-doubt across all 'progressive' forces in the UK. As the 1980s progressed, and in response to that deepening mood of despondency, the anarcho-punk movement became a more diverse and disaggregated force.

Poison Girls began concerted efforts to position the band as an artistic force within the independent sector of the music business, eschewing much of the didactic 'baggage' (as they now saw it) of their earlier practice, and restyling the band as 'cultural saboteurs', making forays into the territory of the commercial enemy. By contrast Crass, increasingly frustrated by what the band saw as their inability to respond effectively to the political challenges of the hour, came to see their rock'n'roll medium as increasingly unfit for purpose. Their musical releases and live performances became more intense, atonal and politically direct and shorn of the usual punk musical trappings.[26] Anarcho-punk band Conflict were attracting attention from the music press for adopting a more consciously 'street level', confrontational anarchist punk method; one which set aside any associations with a hippy pre-history and which felt in no way bound by pacifist precepts. (Conflict would later collaborate with *Class War* on the 1986 anti-royal wedding single *Better Dead than Wed).*

[26] R. Cross, '"There Is No Authority But Yourself"', pp. 1, 14–15.