

The Wee Man is Dead!

An obituary of Robert Lynn

Stuart Christie

1996

Robert Lynn has snuffed it. In the heart of Glasgow – the Calton – hundreds of people are genuinely mourning the loss of one of its best loved sons.

Born in the Calton in 1924 Robert went on to be educated at St. Mungo's Academy. Leaving school at 14 years of age he took up an engineering apprenticeship in the shipyards. Already possessing an awareness of class consciousness he was swept up in the maelstrom of political activity which was occurring during the war years in the British shipyard and engineering industries. In 1943 the strike on Tyneside, which saw Jock Haston and Roy Tearso imprisoned, quickly spread to the Clyde where many shipyards were brought to a halt. Robert worked in Yarrows as an apprentice and became actively involved in the struggle to better the wages and conditions of his colleagues – a battle that had to be fought and refought in ensuing years.

During the second world war the Communist Party dominated the influential shop stewards' committees but their policy of subordinating the workers' interests to those of Soviet Russia drew a withering fire from anarchists, Trotskyists and non-Communist Party socialists alike. This experience had a profound effect on Robert and it was then he began to nurture the beliefs of Bakunin and the industrial strategy of syndicalism.

In the post-war years Robert's influence in shipbuilding became increasingly irritating to both employers and communist-led union officials, so he was "blacklisted" with the approval of both. Unable to get work he then joined the Merchant Navy as an engineering officer and spent some years seeing the world and its peoples. He devoured libraries and enveloped the beliefs of syndicalism and Stirnism (Max Stirner conscious egoist).

Returning to Glasgow in the early fifties he threw himself into everything; politics, marriage and trade union activity. He became an active member of the Glasgow Anarchist Group which consisted of Frank Leach, Jimmy Raeside and Eddie Shaw, who were already well-respected names in anarchist circles. As George Woodcock expressed: The Glasgow Anarchist Group is the only group in the world where the egocentric philosophies of Max Stirner took root and were given popular expression. The anarchists held an open workers forum in Renfrew Street, Glasgow where anarchists, CPGB, nationalists and Trotskyists debated – sometimes physically.

In an open air arena ordinary working class men and women discussed passionately the ideas of Feurbuch, Clara Zetkin, Bakunin, Kropotkin and many, many others. Robert Lynn revelled in this, what he called the University of Life.

In the late fifties, with the death of Raeside and the departure of Leach and Shaw abroad, the Glasgow Anarchist Group disintegrated and the task of reorganisation was left to Robert. This he did by immersing himself in his local community of the Calton. He and Jean, his constant companion, became well-known, well-respected and to many, myself included, well-loved characters.

Robert again went back to industry and worked at Howden's engineering plant in the south side of Glasgow. There he promoted his ideas of syndicalism and libertarianism. Sadly, thanks to trade union officials who immediately recognised the threat to their power, Robert's views did not meet with any great success.

However it was the Glasgow Anarchist Group of the early seventies which was to prove the most fruitful for Robert's ideas. There became a massive blossoming of literature and direct action which exploded on the scene. The publication of booklets such as *Practical Anarchy* and *Why Vote?*, all bearing Robert's signature, appeared and were avidly read by many people who, being disillusioned with political parties of all shades, were becoming attracted to the ideas of anarchism.

A great number of events were initiated by Robert especially the Glasgow Anarchist Summer School which is now becoming a tradition that attracts libertarian socialists from all over Britain.

His death on August 16th, was a blow to his family, his many friends and comrades, and even also to his political opponents. He was generous to a fault and although he did not suffer fools gladly he rarely had a bad word to say about anyone, even the worst of us.

Robert is survived by Jean and daughters Jean, Joan and Betty.

Loved deeply, missed sadly.

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