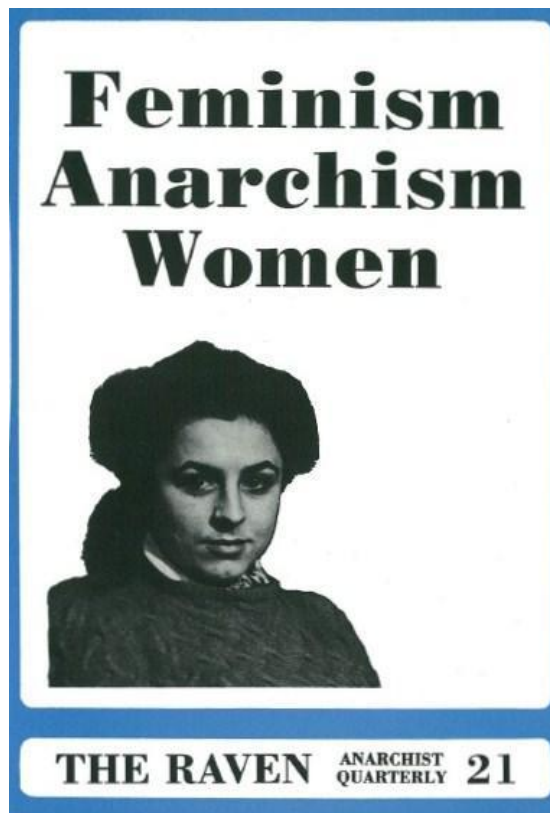


# The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly 21

Feminism, Anarchism, and Women

Various Authors



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## Publishers' Note

Some six months ago we thought an issue of *The Raven* on Anarchism and Feminism would be a valuable addition to our growing list of *Ravens* on specific topics. And Silvia Edwards, who had produced a varied and interesting *Raven* on 'Health', undertook to contact potential contributors. Up to a month ago the response was nil; promises, but no manuscripts.

Now just three contributions from women, one of which, Mary Quintana's, was originally meant for publication in *Freedom*, and all at the last minute! So it is not surprising that this issue of *The Raven* is not what our comrade Silvia Edwards was hoping for.

Nevertheless we think the first half should provide much food for thought and discussion in the pages of *The Raven* (perhaps so-called 'feedback' is more difficult with a quarterly, but since a large proportion of *Raven* subscribers also read *Freedom*, that journal would welcome reactions to this 'burning' topic from some of our comrades).

The second half deals with anarchist women — we have included Agnes Burns Wieck who probably did not consider herself an anarchist, but our excuse for including her is that she produced a son who is, and who has written the book under review!

Three of the women included here were very much involved with *Freedom*. Charlotte Wilson was one of its founders in 1886. Lilian Wolfe's association started in World War I and she was still busily involved in the day-to-day essential activity of Freedom Press many years after World War II. Marie Louise Berneri came to this country in 1937 when she was 19, and was involved in all Freedom Press activities until her untimely death in 1949 shortly after her 31st birthday. Writing of her contribution, Reg Reynolds had this to say in *Peace News*:

[In 1937] Marie Louise, then a girl of nineteen, was already an experienced and able worker for the cause to which her whole family had devoted itself. In the twelve years that followed from her father's death until her own, this heroic young woman packed so much work that most people would have been reasonably proud had they lived the normal span of years and achieved even half as much.

One tentative suggestion as to why the response from anarchist women to Silvia Edward's appeal is that *they haven't time* in that, unlike Marie-Louise Berneri's generation, most women now have jobs and contribute to the family income and required 'standards' as well as having children and running the home. Marie Louise took a job only when her companion was in prison (for sedition in wartime). Otherwise, she did not feel diminished at not being a wage earner. On the contrary she was able to be a full-time unpaid worker for Freedom Press. Surely, she must have felt more liberated in what she was doing than had she been condemned to a 9-5 job in an office in order to be financially independent from her chap?

One woman we had planned to include in this *Raven* but who will only be represented by a photograph is Emma Goldman. The excellent study 'Emma Goldman: A Voice for Women?' by Donna Farmer was really too long for this *Raven*, but it will be published in the next few weeks by Freedom Press supplemented by a number of E.G.'s articles.

# *Zero Collective*

## **Anarchism/Feminism**

### **Feminism**

Of all oppression the most fundamental is that of patriarchy, the domination of men over women.<sup>(1)</sup> This domination expresses itself everywhere. As women we are sex-role typed from birth into a subordinate social position. We are taught passivity and domesticity - anything that will crush our real selves and turn us into wives and mothers. We are brought up to meet and marry Mr. Right, have his family and live happily ever after. This nuclear family is the economic basis for capitalism. Each isolated family having its individual house, car, Hoover, mixer, television, adds up to create the false consumption of superfluous commodities. The nuclear family doubles capitalism's main means of socialisation. We come to internalise the concept of property, not only commodities, but also children. We learn to accept the sexual division of labour where women cook and clean but men 'go to work'. Within this family women are the sexual property of men, and as such are subject to the exercise of absolute power to the level of physical violence and rape. Because society denies women economic independence, women cannot readily escape this situation. When women do work outside of the home, our earnings are generally less than men's which makes it impossible for most women to support a family on our own. At the same time as the family serves as a refuge in which all otherwise outlawed emotion and affection is invested and isolated, its institutionalised roles grimly mirror the basic power structure of society: the man as master, the wife as servant and the children as property. Everywhere, too, the idea is advanced of women as sexual objects: draped over cars in motor shows, stripped in films, selling aftershave on television ... everywhere women are objects of property, show pieces, status symbols, rather than people in our own right. Even on becoming involved in left groups we are frequently reacted to as potential sex rather than potential activists and friends. These are the reasons why we are fighting as women. Feminism is women joining together in a shared consciousness of our oppression to struggle against the male dominated capitalist society that thrives on our exploitation. To be a feminist is to be a revolutionary, because to live freely necessitates revolution. Feminism, in fighting against patriarchy, means fighting all hierarchy, all leadership, all governments and the very idea of authority itself. It sees politics as not only being out there but in our minds and relationships too. 'There will be no revolution without women's liberation. There will be no women's liberation without revolution.'

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<sup>(1)</sup> This editorial is from the issue of an anarcho-feminist journal published in 1970 which unfortunately was short-lived.

## Anarchism

We live out our lives subject to the triple reign of patriarchy, capital, and state. This sexual, economic, and political subjugation, which we experience at every moment, has at its heart a common principle: authority. That is, the illegitimate exercise of power and our obedience to it. Every form of relationship of twentieth-century society is characterised by this prevailing pattern of domination and submission. Living is reduced to alienation, activity to consumption, thought to contemplation. Everywhere one thing is demanded of us above all else: our submission. Everywhere we are conditioned to fear expression, and obey. Anarchism is the construction of a free society in the face of this. Anarchism is the creation of a society where people have taken over the organisation and determination of their own lives. Anarchism is the rejection of all hierarchical and dominating forms of relationship and their replacement by cooperative forms and collective organisation.

Contrary to common misconception, anarchism does not reject, but is *about* organisation. Anarchism is simultaneously both a critique of authoritarian forms of organisation which foster manipulation and passivity, and a theory of free organisation. Forms which are organised from below rather than above, from within rather than without. The basis of such organisation is the autonomous group formed on the basis of common locality (collective), activity (affinity group) or trade (syndicate). These groups federate with each other to form increasingly comprehensive networks without losing their autonomy. Such organisation is decentralised and non-hierarchical, being based on the equality of a network and not the inequalities of a pyramid.

The consequence of recognising that behind patriarchy, capital and the state lies the same authority principle, the power/submission relationship, is the conclusion that sexual-social revolution will not exist as long as authority cannot be destroyed by any movement which is in itself based on authority. That patriarchal, capital, and state power can never be overthrown by organisations that are themselves hierarchical and authoritarian. Instead, revolutionary organisation must mirror the organisation of the future.

Both anarchists and Marxists believe in the same ultimate society, free communism. But it is the anarchist insistence that there is an intimate connection between organising to achieve a free future and the way that future society is organised that characterises the point of divergence of the left. Whereas many socialists call for the seizure of power to form a working-class government, anarchists believe in the dissolution of power, because wherever the state exists, that existence is one of self-perpetuating oppression. History shows that unless power itself is destroyed it is merely transferred to a new group, and authentic revolution becomes political revolution: Russia, China, Cuba... For anarchists the means is the end not only because wherever means and end are divorced the end becomes diverted, but because for anarchists revolution is a continuous process in which the terms 'means' and 'ends' lose their separate meaning. Revolution has no finite beginnings other than in every moment of history where rebellion has taken the place of submission. And no end since free society will change and develop inexorably according to its own dynamic. Because the means of revolution is revolution, revolutionary activity consists of realising revolutionary society now. This is the basis of the anarchist insistence on living a revolutionary lifestyle, and direct action, that is, self-managed struggle.

## Anarca-feminism

'Feminism practices what anarchism preaches. One might go so far as to claim feminists are the only existing protest groups that can honestly be called practising anarchists.' (Lynne Farrow. *Feminism as Anarchism*.)

The revolutionary feminist perspective is essentially anarchist. Not only because revolutionary socialism is implicit in revolutionary feminism but because feminism is anarchist in both its theory and its practice. In its rejection of authority, hierarchy and leadership, feminism follows anarchist theory. Nevertheless, it is at this point that feminism transcends anarchism because feminism shows authority, hierarchy and leadership for what they really are, structures of male power.

But it is in organisation and action that women have spontaneously come closest to anarchism. 'All across the country independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders, and other factotums of the male left, creating independently and simultaneously, organisations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and locales. No accident either.' (Cathy Levine. *The Tyranny of Tyranny*.) The emphasis on the small group as the basic organisational unit, coming together in a federal way for campaigns and conferences, the belief that decisions should be collective, the commitment to direct action, the concentration on the way we live our everyday lives, the need for groups to be supportive and develop love and trust are all examples of the degree to which women have of their own accord arrived at an anarchist position. 'Feminism has been since its inception unconsciously anarchist. We now need to be consciously aware of the connections between feminism and anarchism.' (Peggy Kornegger. *Anarchism: the Feminist Connection*.) Anarca-Feminism is about becoming consciously aware, expressing, and realising our anarchism within the women's movement. Anarca-feminism consists in recognising the anarchism of feminism and consciously developing it.

In spite of the fact that anarchists have in the past stressed the central importance of sexual politics, anarchist men remain little better than men elsewhere in their oppression of women. Confronted with feminism the Marxist left have, for the most part, responded by seeking to account for women's oppression through an extension of Marxist analysis. Reproduction is seen as a form of production, defining women's oppression in terms of a traditional class analysis. In this way feminism is co-opted to the class struggle. In fact, women's oppression cuts across class. In this subordination of feminism Marxism discloses its theoretical limitations and fundamental incompatibility with feminism. On the other hand, feminism and anarchism are theoretical counterparts. Being a theory based on self-management and direct action, anarchism has no motive to subsume feminism and respects and supports the autonomy of the women's movement. But while theoretically feminism can be seen as an extension of anarchism, practically anarchist consciousness of feminism is way behind that of the left as a whole. The contradiction is a double one. Not only have anarchists largely failed to recognise the anarchism going on all around them, revolutionary feminism, but the anarchist movement remains resiliently sexist and male-dominated. Even simple fundamentals, such as organising creches, sitting back at meetings and allowing women to come forward, confronting sexism in language and ensuring that women with children are free to attend meetings, are not observed in any serious way by the majority of anarchist men. How has this contradiction come about? In two critical respects the answer seems to lie in the extent to which anarchists have been able to justify their sexism by misinterpreting their own theory, rather than come to terms with it. While anarchism, being generalised, has

indisputably always been about the liberation of people *anarchism is not feminist*. Nevertheless, the attitude that the implications of women's liberation can be ignored because anarchism is people's liberation is prevalent. The second way by which anarchist men have ideologically reinforced their own sexism consists in confusing political assertion with masculine assertiveness. The justification of sexist behaviour in terms of anarchist individuality and even the support of anti-feminist articles on the basis of free speech are familiar.

Anarchist practice contradicts its own theory by not being actively feminist. Anarchism must recognise in feminism a radical extension of its own politic, beyond its critique of capital and state to include patriarchal oppression, and must base all future practice on this recognition.

**We want nothing less than complete freedom - sexual-social revolution. The creative destruction of the triple domination of patriarchy, state, and capital. As of this minute anarchism has no choice but to become consciously and actively feminist - just as anarca-feminism consists in consciously anarchist feminism - or cease to exist.** 'What we ask is nothing less than total revolution, revolution whose forms invent a future untainted by inequality, domination or disrespect for individual variation - in short, feminist-anarchist revolution. I believe that women have known all along how to move in the direction of human liberation; we only need to shake off lingering male political forms and dictims and focus on our own anarchistic female analysis.' (Peggy Kornegger. *Anarchism: the Feminist Connection*.)



## *Brian Morris*

# Socialism, Feminism and Ecology

Books about ecology - in all its aspects - are coming off the press fast and furious these days. They vary a lot in quality and substance. Some are simply recycling ideas that have been around a long time. Some are just media stunts, cobbled together to meet an expanding market. Many indicate a sustained attempt to convince us that a green perspective can happily be combined with the market economy, the current euphemism for capitalism. One of the doyens of the Green Party, Richard Lawson, has recently advocated a 'green philosophy of the market', suggesting that ecological principles can be welded to the capitalist economic system only if it is 'guided' by 'creative' taxation and state regulations. It is all pie-in-the-sky, for the present ecological crisis has its very roots in a market system that is geared to profits and exploitation, a system that is bolstered by repressive state institutions and underpinned by modern science. Mary Mellor's recent book *Breaking the Boundaries* (Virago Press, 1992 £8.99) takes a very different stance to that of Lawson, offering a much more critical and searching approach to the current situation than the one espoused by the Green Party theoreticians.

Mellor is a sociology lecturer and feminist, and has earlier published work on the British Co-operative Movement, and is thus aware of the radical potential of working-class movements. *Breaking the Boundaries* is an excellent study, though it is written essentially from a gynocentric standpoint, and one often gets the impression that Mellor assumes the reader is a woman. Although Mellor is described by Hazel Henderson - whose inspiration she in turn acknowledges - as 'an important paradigm changer', the book is a modest one, and free of such pretensions. In fact, no attempt is made in the book to offer any 'eco-philosophy': instead, it consists of a series of sociological 'ramblings' as Mellor thoughtfully and critically explores the current literature on ecology. It lacks any real historical perspective, and hardly explores the kind of world view that is necessary to counter the hegemony of current mechanistic science. It is however highly readable and well researched, and carries an essential message that is sustained with passion throughout the book. That message suggests the necessary integration of socialism, feminism and an ecological (green) sensibility. Such a message, of course, is neither new nor original: it has long been advocated by anarchist and libertarian socialists - as different as William Morris, De Cleyre, Kropotkin and Carpenter. But Mellor gives the synthesis her own distinctive flavour. Her book is sub-titled 'Towards a feminist, green socialism' and she strongly argues that the choice we have before us is 'socialism or survivalism', and that without a socialist perspective both feminism and the green movement lack an effective politics of social justice. The social perspective she therefore advocates must necessarily be *feminist* (acknowledging the centrality of women's life-sustaining work), *green* (in endeavouring to regain a balance between human needs and the biosphere) and *socialist* (recognising the rights of all the people of the world to live in a just and equitable society). But the socialism she advocates is an eco-socialism, informed in turn by feminist and green principles.

The book is focussed around four key themes.

The first centres on eco-feminist writings, and the equation often made between women and nature, an equation of course that stems from the androcentric perspectives of Christianity and mechanistic science. Mellor argues against so over-stressing the alleged spiritual identification of women with nature that the material oppression and exploitation either gets ignored or obscured. Making a distinction between affinity (spiritual) and social eco-feminism, Mellor tries to mediate between them, but while stressing the need for developing an earth-based spiritual consciousness she warns against the inherent tendency of such spirituality to move towards mysticism, hierarchy and authoritarianism, or to crystallise around cults led by male gurus. She denies that the biology of men and women create in them particular dispositions, and tries hard to steer the analysis clear of essentialist thinking, fearing that the feminist perspective might be lost in the celebration of the 'feminine'. But this does not prevent her - usually in quoting people like Vandana Shiva - of misleadingly *identifying* the male gender with such phenomena as mechanistic science and capitalism.

A second theme (Chapter 3) entails a very thoughtful survey and critique of deep ecology. She explores the anti-humanism, the Malthusian orientation and the sexist and racist bias that has long been associated with deep ecology, using Bookchin's social ecology as a corrective. She then turns on Bookchin himself, suggesting that under the term 'hierarchy' he oblates several types of domination. It is clear from what she writes that while she is critical of racism, sexism and class exploitation, the 'centralised state based on representative democracy' is seen to be unproblematic. In fact, throughout the book governments have only a marginal existence, and are not even in the index.

A third theme is to challenge the romantic attitude many greens have towards what she calls clan societies. Early pre-literate communities are seen by such greens, Mellor writes, as once living in peace and harmony with each other and with the natural world. Disillusioned with the present world these greens, she suggests, search for a lost 'innocence', and have a nostalgia for a past Golden Age. Although it has been eco-feminists and spiritual ecologists that have been prone to such nostalgia, and to uncritically glorify such clan societies (even adopting their rituals), it is rather surprisingly towards anarchism, and particularly towards Bookchin, that Mellor focusses her criticism. Clearly influenced by the Marxist complete misrepresentation of Anarchism, she makes a false division between anarchism and socialism, oblivious to the fact that most anarchists have been socialists (but of a libertarian kind) and have never yearned for a sacramental past. By tending to focus on the most violent, aggressive and sexist of clan societies, she indicates that there is plenty of evidence to show that male dominance is one of the oldest forms of oppression and exploitation. She acknowledges that perhaps the examples she cites do not imply that every clan society is violent and warmongering, but she is clearly plugging the old male dominance theme, relying heavily on the work of Peggy Sanday. Although she makes some important criticisms of Bookchin's work, she clearly ignores the fact that it is Bookchin himself who most stridently criticised the greens and the feminists for idealising and imitating preliterate communities. Generalisations about tribal communities, as they were once called until the term took on such negative connotations, are about as productive as generalising about other social categories, including that of men and women. The notion of a universal male dominance is an old theme in anthropology, and of course has been stressed approvingly as a universal norm by many anti-feminist male writers, particularly ethnologists and sociobiologists. The important writings of Eleanor Leacock and Karla Poewe, not mentioned by Mellor, give a more balanced

assessment of gender relations in clan societies, emphasising their diversity. In this discussion Mellor's gynocentrism comes to the fore, as she seems to ignore the fact that the early critiques of the 'man-the-hunter' bias in anthropology came largely from male anthropologists who highlighted the important role that women's food gathering played in hunter-gathering societies - long before feminists like Sanday and Dahlberg whom she cites. Mellor also unfairly ignores the fact that Bookchin also stressed the important role that women's food gathering played in clan societies, stressing the hunting aspect only in order to try and explicate the origins of hierarchies. It is of interest that Mellor nowhere questions that other romantic notion about clan societies, namely that they lived in harmony with nature. Although their cosmological attitudes may have implied this, archaeological evidence suggests that humans have always attempted to 'control' the natural world, and this has led in certain circumstances to widespread deforestation - long before capitalism.

Although wishing to avoid an essentialist perspective, Mellor seems to accept the 'myth' (common among Melanesian men) that men fear and envy women's procreative power, and therefore seek to emulate them. If this fear and envy is so 'deep seated' and men do indeed feel the need to 'emulate' women - why on earth aren't men (outside foraging societies) more involved in childcare?

The final theme of the book - and one clearly addressed to her ecofeminist friends - is a sustained and cogent critique of the capitalist economic system. In the chapters appropriately entitled 'The Profits of Doom' and 'Challenging the Market' Mellor stridently outlines the adverse effects of capitalism - the undermining of local production and self-sufficiency through share-cropping; the emergence of a casino economy under which multi-national companies are offered tax-havens, cheap labour, and unregulated free-trade opportunities to make huge profits; the growing resort of governments to military oppression in order to suppress trade union activity; the deforestation of tropical forest areas; the increasing debt crisis. Mellor stresses that it is women and the poor who are most adversely affected by the market system. Capitalism, she writes, 'stalks the globe like an international terrorist, threatening the livelihood of anyone who does not obey its command' (165). Mellor's book in fact provides a good counter-argument to Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of History' thesis, for whereas Fukuyama emphasises the positive aspects of capitalism, explaining away the poverty, the ecological degradation, and the repression as 'problems' still to be overcome, Mellor highlights its negative aspects - inequalities, one billion people living in absolute poverty, and an arms spending programme that amounts to a trillion dollars a year. The only answer to this, Mellor contends, is not 'green capitalism' or the 'Bazaar socialism' of disillusioned Marxist intellectuals, but a reconstructed socialism, a socialism that draws on the insights offered by feminism and ecology. Mellor seems at times to equate socialism with its Marxist variant and has very little discussion - apart from critical references to Kropotkin and Bookchin - devoted to anarchist thought. She does not stress that what is needed in the present crisis is not socialism, but libertarian socialism.

Although providing important discussions of socialism, and critical of Garret Hardin's individualism, Mellor seems unsure about the possibility of a decentralised society. Nation states, private property, and the capitalist system do not, she writes, see the natural heritage of the planet as a common resource for all humankind, but nevertheless she suggests that an ecologically sustainable human community will need to be both 'locally and *centrally* administered' (238). There is no real critique of the state in the text. If we take as a maxim the rallying call of the French revolution, though Mellor emphasises fraternity and equality in defining socialism,

there is little mention of liberty. Freedom, and the autonomy of the individual, because of its association with men, is hardly mentioned in the book — and when it is, it is deliberately de-valued, although of course, such a notion is implicit in the feminist critique of patriarchy.

In the final pages of the book Mellor, drawing on the writings of feminists Charlotte Perkins Gilmore and Carol Gilligan, sets up a dualism between two modes of being, which she calls the 'ME-world' and the 'WE-world'. The first, inherent in capitalism and mechanistic philosophy, 'is a world that liberates some men and a few women at the expense of the rest of humanity and the planet' (259). The ME-world implies egoism, separation from others, control, individualism, achievement in the world, and a distancing from life and biology. The WE-world, in contrast, implies the capacity to nourish others, relationship, altruism, life-affirmation. Mellor denies that there are inherent gender-based modes of being or thinking (though the life-ways of men and women may be different) but she goes on to argue that only an emphasis on caring, on nurturing, and on altruism - the WE-world - provides the necessary politics for feminist socialism. She recognizes the problems of an 'imposed altruism', but what is needed surely is neither 'egoism' nor 'altruism' (the latter being based on a dependency relationship) but rather a world where reciprocity and mutuality prevail. Neither the ME-world nor the WE-world suffice - though both of course have aspects that have to be sustained, for we need to stress the autonomy of the individual *and* caring for others, freedom *and* equality, liberty *and* fraternity as anarchists have always argued. A gynocentric perspective is one-sided, and the boundary we really need to 'break' is that between women and men.

Mary Mellor attempts to piece together the fragments of our lives, torn asunder by capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and the Prometheon ethic. It is a searching, rambling, thoughtful kind of book, one that tries to build bridges, and to stress the intrinsic links between ecology, feminism and socialism. It is a book that has a lot to offer (male) anarchists many of whom, though perhaps not as misogynist as Johann Most, are still prone to dismiss feminist ideas, or to marginalise women's concerns and experience. (Witness the fact that the essays in David Goodway's excellent collection *For Anarchism* are all written by men, and that women are barely mentioned in the text.) Mellor's book provides a refreshing counterbalance to this, even though it lacks an explicit libertarian perspective.

## *Emily Johns*

# **Women and the Peace Movement**

This essay comes out of a discussion that was held for a small but very active non-violent direct action group called ARROW (Active Resistance to the Roots of War) which is based in London. We are a mixed group, men and women, broad range of ages, races, religious (or not) leanings. Three of the women from the group were at the weekend women's peace camp at Aldermaston recently. As we were sitting around the fire talking about actions and arrests, one of the older women said to us something along the lines of "Why are you in a mixed group? Leave the men and join a women's group, it's much more relaxed and easy-going working alongside women, you don't have all those male problems to deal with on top of saving the world." We defended our membership of ARROW, but went home pondering our role as women in the peace movement and what distinguished the nature of our activities within the Women's Peace Movement from the broader sphere of the mixed-gender peace movement and ARROW in particular. My enthusiastic suggestion that the women in ARROW do women-only actions when appropriate was not met with great sympathy by a majority of women.

When you go to a women's peace camp, the hearth will be the focus. There between a road and a fence will be a pot of tea whether the sunshine is dancing through spring leaves or it's chucking it down on to a tarpaulin. To have exhaust pipes rushing past on one side as you sit at pushchair level on the ground, and missile silos or runways or soldiers on the other, really does illuminate the sanity of humanly sitting and drinking a cup of tea. Strangely, in such primitive circumstances it is empowering to make domesticity important, enjoyable, fun. It feels like the reclamation of housewifery, a woman's power to create life in whatever circumstances in the most life-damning spots of the country. It's a use of the very first skills of *Homo habilis* against the very latest. The simple acts of cooking and washing up and living make a significant 'place' almost instantly and establish a threat to the military complex with very little effort at all. But once there is an attempt to uproot this place, the other side of the simplicity emerges: that is the tenacity of women to remain, to be able to create and recreate a resistance through their existence when up against evictions and violence and the logistics of getting water and food and wood year after year, of keeping dry and coping with illness. It is interesting to note how the state regards the living of lives by women to be as much of a threat against its military as actions with boltcutters. The threat is that the kitchen that kept women too busy for anything else has emerged as a power on the edge of the runway, it has not remained a device to keep them within four walls. That traditional sphere of women's power has been radicalised through feminist philosophy, and radicalised through the women's peace movement. The use of domestic imagery and a homely slant in actions is enormously widespread. In military and nuclear bases all over the country there have been picnics and tea parties and girls' school outings. There is a lovely Greenham tale of women taking a sofa, a coffee table, and a cardboard television through the fence into the base,

and settling down for a good night in, watching the box. When the MoD<sup>(2)</sup> cops eventually came along, the women insisted on waiting for the end of the programme before they accompanied the police to the station. All these actions are carried out with a sense of lightness, freedom, and humour. These are qualities which seem to me to be most important in counteracting the mind-numbing tentacles of a military society. To act on serious, heavy understandings about the nature of our society one needs a certain amount of freedom from the inbuilt social mechanisms that are designed to prevent one from objecting to the mores of that society or even observing them. Fear of authority, embarrassment, humiliation, are all very powerfully instilled in us, and it takes all sorts of methods and skills to extricate ourselves from their power. One of these forms of resistance is to use humour, and song and dance, and a celebration of life, a power greater than that of anti-life. This most particularly is the way used in the women's peace movement.

However, frightening it is to challenge the state and the army and the police with direct action against them, the performance is a most liberating and cleansing act. Just as the military recognises the power of women living their lives and witnessing, I think they recognise and fear the freedom of mind that is a product of direct action. I remember when I was at school, I used to get a physical pain in my throat when I wanted to say something out loud in front of the teacher and the class, and voice my opinion. For ages I thought this was a symptom of shyness, and that this sensation was the feeling of fear. Then one day I discovered that if I spoke out, the pain disappeared instantly. It was as if the words had always welled up and strained to get out of my throat and I suffered terribly from not allowing them to. An act of resistance has this same feeling; one's voice struggles up through a sea of untruths, of barbed wire, of police, and finally emerges in the air to be heard.

In many, many ways the women's movement as a whole has aided the peace movement. The philosophy of individual empowerment, of affinity groups, of the personal being political, of listening, of creating a new language to describe old truths (is it history or herstory, nuclear or newkiller), all these have fed into the peace movement. These are processes that have been developing throughout the history of the Women's Movement, as women's voices bubbled up through the treacle of their male-described history. They allowed thoughts and lives to be changed, and enhanced women's ability to resist militarism. To a large extent these methods of group organisation have filtered through to the Non-Violent Direct-Action movement. Mixed groups such as ARROW are often leaderless, official-less, use consensus rather than voting to make decisions, and have the famous 'Go Round' in which each person can speak their mind in turn uninterrupted. It was largely due to the women's movement and feminist philosophy that groups began functioning in a way that accords with anarchist ideals.

The way in which groups operate and individuals relate is itself something that has to be examined by peace groups, especially if the idea that the "personal is political" is taken on board. Groups need to examine their own formal or informal power structures truthfully if their purpose in existing is to tackle the might of bigger powers in the world, for what is the point of putting wrongs right out there only to discover that their causes are fully intact right here? Part of this problem is that of tackling sexism and racism within the peace movement. Within ARROW both of these issues have been discussed but perhaps not deeply addressed as a root of war. The reason that was mostly given by those that were black and those that were women for not wanting to make these important issues within the group were that it wasn't worth being divisive and that

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<sup>(2)</sup> Ministry of Defence

it was too painful to talk about. This allows power to sit where it is above one, and to present the pain as a way forward however difficult. So, to tackle this impasse I offered to facilitate a discussion on woman and the peace movement. It is an old problem, and one that has been practically and philosophically tackled by the development of a separate women's peace movement. For if you are denied the voice of your own truths in a male society, and find that the peace movement is itself too much part of that society to give you your space, then it is true that you are making life harder for yourself, and perhaps the problems of a patriarchal society and militarism are one and the same, and the place to stand with your lever is somewhere on the outside.

The history of women resisting war is a very long one, sweeping from the sex strike of Lysistrata to the present day in Yugoslavia. But considering recent history I think one can trace a descent of Non-Violent Direct Action from the suffragettes at the beginning of the century. The suffragette movement was divided in its attitude towards war. During the First World War there were both pacifists, those that argued that the war was an aspect of imperialism and should not be supported, and those that were gung-ho and eager to produce munitions and hand out white feathers. This was presumably because the movement had a very broad political and class following. They also used a lot of military imagery in their organisational structure and campaigns, particularly the Emmeline faction. However they were unified in their use of direct action. They had a version of 'by any means necessary', which saw all actions that drew attention to their lack of political power as valid except for the destruction of human life. It appears that even Emily Wilding Davison's death was not intended. The willingness to be arrested, to risk life - for women did die as a result of police brutality and to create their own imagery, and their own resistance, did leave a legacy. There was an exhibition on recently at the Museum of London about the suffragettes' campaigns that was awe-inspiring. The forms of action, such as women chaining themselves to the Houses of Parliament, are repeated by Miners' Wives and Greenham women today. Their use of drama and spectacle has its legacy in dances on missile silos, weaving gates closed, planting flowers on bases. Their power of organisation was phenomenal.

Likewise, the women's peace movement has had a very powerful influence on the country. A friend told me a story of how she became aware of the peace movement. As a teenager with Conservative parents, she was reading the *Daily Mail* one day. It had a front-page piece on the smelly, lesbian, monster Greenham women. This teenager thought 'What's this about, I want to know more'. Unwittingly the *Daily Mail* nurtured a future Peace Activist, not understanding the power of the idea it presented. Now in the newspapers we have stories of pit camps at the collieries. Here the Women Against Pit Closures protest against the closure of the mines, and remain to witness the crimes against their communities: here is a direct seeding of the Greenham idea. In 1984 the lives of the women of the mining communities changed dramatically. Not only were they supporting their striking husbands as they had always done, but they began taking the initiative, creating huge support networks, and creating a new kind of women's community for themselves. Links were forged with the Greenham women which radically changed the philosophies of the miners' wives and politicised them in a new way. They had been marginal to union politics although the unions depended upon them, and through the strike they began to find their own basis for expression. Enormous changes took place in the relationships within the community which by force of circumstance and appreciation of the women's actions, the men had to accept. It is significant that nearly ten years later the 'Miners' Wives' have become 'Women Against Pit Closures'.

On *Woman's Hour* a few months ago, there was a piece about the 'Raging Grannies', who did NVDA at bases in Canada. The fact that they were all grannies was significant to the group. Grannyhood is motherhood with a consciousness of generations, there is a vista of lives that opens out before a granny. From the aspect of themselves that was the creator of life they were acting to save life. In terms of the symbol that they present to the world as grannies, they are quite safe. The role of a granny within society and the family is still unmanipulated. Woman and more particularly mother has always been used as a symbol of peace by the state and the military. The image has been contorted into every meaning possible; she is the tranquil dove-bearer, mildly representing a state of existence that the population desire; she is the noble producer of warriors, sending babies off to fight for everlasting peace in an everlasting war; she is winged victory gazing upon peace at the expense of her enemies. If a woman can symbolise so many diverse images of peace, why could a man not be used to represent it? I suspect that the key to his image is the passivity of the woman. The women are not engaged in the creation of peace, they are merely witnesses to states of war and not war. Moreover, the institutions that have used these images are not recommending that pacifism may be a way to overcome war because that is the women's realm and women are not involved in the peace-making process. This is why there is something so powerful about women's active pacifism, they threaten and overthrow the notion of women's passivity.

The grannies and mothers, childless women and girls act against this insulting use of their image which attempts to bind them to their appointed role. Just as the suffragettes were branded non-women, unnatural mothers, ugly, stupid, mad, evil because of their desire to define what it was to be a woman and human for themselves, so we get the same thing over again culminating in the blossoming of Greenham. Again, this same rage at women defining themselves and defining what they consider to be womanly qualities and womanly nature and more importantly acting upon them. Luckily for grannies they seem to be allowed to be the grannies they want to be, at least for the moment, and will rage if they want to.

Another difference between the broad peace movement and the women's that has arisen out of women's consciousness of themselves as women is a diverging spiritual basis. A large part of the peace movement has taken its inspiration from various religions such as Christianity and Buddhism which advocate nonviolence. However, these religions are antipathetical to the way in which many women would understand themselves, and moreover fully bound into and appropriated by patriarchal states and societies. Perhaps most significantly they are cerebral, sky religions which express none of those images which are empowering to specifically women. Even the Madonna mother conforms to the passive female of the state, non-active even when conceiving. The need for a system of images and a philosophy that are rooted in a real world of earth, growth, physicality, matriarchy, motherhood, sexuality has led to an adoption of the Great Goddess, an earth mother, by parts of the women's peace movement. This seems to be an expression of the creativity of these women, that not only new ways of life, and new societies, be formed, but new channels of thought and resistance.

Well, these were the outlines of thoughts that I suggested to the discussion group. I felt that whether or not the idea of doing women only actions was taken up by the women in the group, at least the whole group should increase its consciousness of the women's peace movement and the role it has had in the movement as a whole; moreover, why it was important for women to act on their own. That leaves the question of why the women in the group were so reluctant. During the course of the history of the group the active members have turned out to be predominantly



women in a ratio of 2 to 1 (coincidentally? similar to the membership of national CND<sup>(3)</sup>). When the group was formed six months before the Gulf War there was a solitary woman, now there are about 18. Many women have found their activities very empowering, but it is true that there was a period of time when the men chaired the meetings, instigated actions, acted as spokespeople, and it was only through conscious challenges and changes that we created a more egalitarian group. She may well have been right 'you don't have] all those male problems to deal with on top of saving the world'. Perhaps recently we have been changing the structure of a little world. Maybe the fear of divisiveness will change with a recognition of the situations in which women-only actions are a necessary tool.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

# *Peter Geiger*

## **Men are Human Beings Too!**

### *Open Letter of Reply to John Cohen*

The printed version of my letter of response to Chris Booth (*Peace News* No 2353, April 1992) has obviously become a subject of grave misunderstanding and misrepresentation on the part of Jon Cohen, whose response in return is actually very superficial, and therefore necessitates some detailed amendment and further qualification; particularly because my intention is to place this issue in a wider context of related issues.

Let me briefly mention that my letter to Chris was more detailed than the version that actually appeared in *Peace News*, and was supplemented by a bunch of materials I had collected over the years to support the points made. I do realise, of course, that it could not appear in its entirety in the Letters section, let alone the materials. But I will include this in my line of argument now since my feeling is that Jon, and others like him, do offer a very narrow-minded and dogmatic analysis. It is especially ironic to find that a *man* like Jon poses as one of the most ardent defenders of a rigid dogma like feminism through his patronising, infallible and perfectionist attitude, while the highly critical attitude of two most outstanding *women* I have made explicit reference to in my letter, namely the anarchist Emma Goldman and the psychotherapist Alice Miller, lends support to my findings that it is not only women who are oppressed but men, too. This seems to have escaped Jon's notice.

Indeed, as readers will discover, my observations and analysis are not nearly as short-sighted as Jon would have them, and can be confirmed in everyday life.

To begin with, however, I would like to say that over the past decade, and particularly in conjunction with my research on the pacifist movements in Britain, I have increasingly come to the following conclusion: namely, that the three major movements of our times that have deemed themselves ever so progressive, are in fact *not*, for they are hindering, if not paralysing, true progress and revolutionary, that is, radical, fundamental change. They are:

1. Marxism - as distinct from anarchism/libertarianism;
2. Feminism - as distinct from women's liberation;
3. 'Nuclear pacifism' - as distinct from grassroots anti-militarism, pacifism and non-violent direct action.

In fact, none of those three have ever used a holistic approach; on the contrary, they are rigid, one-sided dogmas that do not challenge the existing power structures and patterns dominating society. Marxism does not question the power of the state, it merely wants to replace one ruling class with another, and its purely mechanical scientific theory will not break down the *hierarchical* pyramid upon which society has rested from time immemorial. All this clap-trap about the

'withering away of the state' (at some indeterminate point in the future) must inevitably lead to a dead-end. For the Marxists themselves are hopelessly bourgeois elitists. To verify this, one has only to look at Emma Goldman's and Alexander Berkman's accounts of their experience in Lenin's Russia.

In like manner, feminism, by its adherence to the patriarchy theory, does not seek to abolish the power structure. As will be shown further below, there are small patriarchies and matriarchies dominating our lives, not *the* patriarchy, and these together make up the overall institutional system called *hierarchy*! Indeed, by seeing women only as victims without any responsibility, feminism ultimately *disenfranchises and devalues* them and upholds the old value system, though under different auspices: the 'patriarchal' system is to be replaced by a 'matriarchal' system. In a letter to the London anarchist fortnightly *Freedom* (March 1982), one Cliff M. Poxon illustrates this point when criticising the Greenham Common women for prohibiting men to stay at the camp:

... is another example of how women can get away with sexism (under the guise of the Women's movement' and can continue to make the most absurd generalisations about 'male violence'. The women's peace camp at Greenham Common ... is an appalling example of sexist matriarchy. As libertarians we should be against patriarchy and matriarchy.

How can this be reconciled with a group of women who prohibit men staying at the camp because they feel 'that they (women) have a distinct contribution to make against the violence which is created mainly by men'? This kind of matriarchal clap-trap really annoys me, as a male.

It's not my fault that I am of the same sex as Haig and Brezhnev and most of the other dog-droppings that have got us into this mess ... the peace camp isn't an action at all. While we applaud women for their great 'fortitude and commitment', the silos for the Cruise missiles are being built, camp or no camp...<sup>1</sup>

Again, 'nuclear pacifism' does not seek to abolish militarism and therefore power structures. By campaigning solely against nuclear weaponry, leaving aside conventional armaments, it can be perfectly well absorbed by all those who, even though they don't want war, do not seek to abolish the causes of war. What they want is an armed truce, not peace, which is more than the mere absence of war. Here, as with the above, an establishment is still in control, and perfectly capable of capturing a movement.

In short, if we really want to see fundamental changes for the better, we are desperately in need of some fundamental rethinking as concerns those various interrelated issues. This can only take place if we pick up all progressive thoughts and ideas, and reformulate a new approach rather than stick with single, isolated aspects. In this sense, I hope this outline will serve to clarify the point.

Apart from being totally unsubstantiated, Jon's definition of sexism being 'not discrimination against both men and women but against only women' is simply false. Indeed, one wonders where he has taken his definition from, for the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* says that sexism is the

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<sup>1</sup> *Freedom*, Vol 43 No 5, 20th March 1982, p.7

'prejudice or discrimination against people (esp. women) because of their sex',<sup>2</sup> which should make it clear that sexism works both ways. The fact that 'esp. women' is in brackets is clearly indicative of how everything in society is seen in terms of conventional 'masculine' values: sexism against women in the outside world, that is, the world of (paid) work. But what about all the other aspects of life? Is it really so desirable to be doomed to the dull routine of an eight-hour day because of economic necessity, as they would say? Wouldn't it be far better if the division of labour were truly equal? Is it not the whole work ethic, according to which only paid work in a mechanised routine counts ('the tyranny of the clock', as George Woodcock would say<sup>3</sup>, and where *quantity* not *quality* matters, that makes our society so sick? This is what I meant by saying that feminism uses the yardstick of conventional 'masculine' values: it is precisely because feminism does not tackle the roots of gender division that society at large has been able to capture feminism, just as it has been able to capture Marxism and 'nuclear pacifism'. As Emma Goldman so brilliantly demonstrates in her essays 'Woman Suffrage' and 'The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation',<sup>4</sup> feminism is too narrow a concept since it only focuses on *external* constraints, leaving the very powerful *internal* constraints (e.g., social conventions) untouched.

Just as women have been right in demanding control over their own bodies and lives, so will men have to make these demands and break with conventional patterns, if they are to achieve their liberation, which should be complementary to female liberation.<sup>5</sup> This implies that men demand the right to work less, thus being released from the burdens of an eight-hour day and gaining time to devote their energies to other activities, such as childcare, for instance. Who says that child-rearing is an exclusively female prerogative? Just think of all the nursery schools, kindergartens, and even schools with their over-representation of female educators! And the institution of the home! This is a far cry from men controlling all institutions and an example of patriarchy as a system *par excellence*. Women do support the hierarchy as much as men do, as Emma Goldman shows.

Even Herb Goldberg<sup>6</sup> makes an important point here: it is precisely because there are too few (sensitive) male models around that boys suffer from severe identity crises! If not recognised and dealt with properly, these will lead to crime, depression, and all sorts of other (self-) destructive behaviour, according to Swiss psychotherapist Alice Miller.<sup>7</sup>

Imagine everybody, men and women, were to work for four or five hours a day: not only would this bring an end to unemployment, it would also make a true sharing of all aspects of life possible for both sexes without burdening either sex one way or the other. The idea has in fact been suggested by numerous persons, including Bertrand Russell and Erich Fromm.<sup>8</sup>

As for 'dirty' and 'back-breaking' work, by no means did I mean to deny that women do not do it too. Though Jon is right that women do it usually at lower wage scales, he is overlooking the fact that only men are still supposed to do heavy, risky, life-destroying work, regardless of their individual physique: that is the price they pay for higher wage scales and material benefits;

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<sup>2</sup> Sykes, J.B. (ed.) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 7th edition, Oxford 1982 (repr. 1988), p.966, headword 'sex'

<sup>3</sup> Woodcock, George, 'The Tyranny of the Clock' in *Raven No 8 on Revolution* (Freedom Press)

<sup>4</sup> In Drinnon, Richard (ed.) *Emma Goldman: Anarchism and Other Essays*, New York, Dover 1969

<sup>5</sup> 'Woman Suffrage' op. cit. p.202

<sup>6</sup> Goldberg, Herb, *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine 'Privilege'*, New York: Signet 1987 (10th anniv. ed.), p.173

<sup>7</sup> All of Alice Miller's books have been translated into English and are published by Virago, except her third book, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, a treatise on Freudian thought and its fallacies, which is published by Pluto Press.

<sup>8</sup> See Bertrand's Russell's essay 'In Praise of Idleness' and Erich Fromm's book *The Sane Society*.

and not only that, since conventionally they are supposed to be the main if not sole providers/breadwinners to feed the family, this state of things is generally accepted, whereas women's wages are considered a supplement to the family's income.

How does society cope with men who are unable to find work and/or whose partners earn the family's living? Most people pour scorn over these men, calling them names such as 'scrounger', 'lazy bum', 'weakling' or whatever. And how many women, not least feminists, do just that by calling their unemployed menfolk 'lazy do-good-for-nothing'? 'A real man's gotta work, work, work' ... all day long: indeed, one can observe in everyday life that a lot of women, especially those who call themselves emancipated in the feminist sense, are in reality in search of a 'good man', as Emma Goldman would say, "his goodness consisting of an empty head and plenty of money".<sup>9</sup> As of old, men remain under pressure to conform.

And what about the fact that in separation situations it's mostly women who get the custody of the children. Look at the discrimination that single-parent males face!

All this, then, is sexism too, just as lower wages and numerous other disadvantages and discrimination against women is.

The subjugation of men to militarism is most blatantly sexist. Indeed, they are often pushed into military service by women. Let me quote from a book by Bernd Eisenfeld on conscientious objection in East Germany which includes a document on canvassing for the East German Army, among this the following:

'No respect for mother's sons' - 15 girls from the island of Rügen have addressed in a letter all boys in the Baltic Sea area in which they write: '...We are outraged at the fact that some boys are still hiding behind mother's skirt, seeking personal advantages while our best boys are protecting our frontiers and our lives with rifles in their hands. We girls have no respect for boys who shirk to defend our republic. We demand of all boys in our district area to take the honourable shilling of the *Nationale Volksarmee* and to protect our socialist achievements.' (my translation)<sup>10</sup>

This attitude is reminiscent of that of the suffragettes in the First World War. In her book *Most Dangerous Women* Anne Wiltsher shows that Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst actually scorned conscientious objectors, putting their cause aside and dreaming of the wonderful things they would do once they got the vote (sometime after the war), and displayed the most deplorable chauvinistic behaviour as 'good English patriots'.

'When going into battle,' Emmeline Pankhurst had said, 'a general does not take a vote of his soldiers to see they approve his plans. They are there to obey his orders. That is how the WSPU [Women's Social and Political Union] has been run and that is how it will continue to run.' ...In the summer of 1915, the WSPU organised a huge women's demonstration at the request of Lloyd George... The procession ... was an elaborate two-mile long affair marching ... through central London. ... Seven hundred banner bearers carried messages including 'SHELLS MADE BY A WIFE MAY SAVE A HUSBAND'S LIFE'; 'FOR MEN MUST FIGHT AND WOMEN MUST WORK' and 'DOWN WITH SEX PREJUDICE'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'Marriage and Love' in Drinnon, op. cit. p.231

<sup>10</sup> Eisenfeld, Bernd, *Kriegsdienstverweigerung in der DDR: Bin Friedensdienst?*, Frankfurt/Main: Haag + Herchen 1978, Appendix: Documents section

<sup>11</sup> Wiltsher, Anne, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War*, London: Pandora 1985, p.40 and p.180

Now who says that women haven't got any power at all? How true Emma Goldman's statement is that the 'same Philistine can be found in the movement for woman's emancipation'<sup>12</sup> And 'where is the superior sense of justice that woman was to bring into the political field?'<sup>13</sup>

Hanne-Margret Birckenbach, a German peace researcher, makes the same point in her findings of a study carried out on why the great majority of West German boys opt for military service rather than make a conscientious objection or refuse it altogether: it is due to societal gender conditioning and stereotyping, and a great many girls do indeed goad the boys psychologically into military service, thus reinforcing the ideal of a 'real man'.<sup>14</sup>

Yes, contrary to the commonly held view, women are perfectly capable of throwing men on to the battlefield or allowing them to be 'herded like cattle' (Emma Goldman's oft-repeated paraphrase for the military system) and of taking an active part in the militarisation of society. Again, Emma Goldman recognised this about 80 years ago:

This insatiable monster, war, robs woman of all that is dear and precious to her. It exacts her brothers, lovers, sons, and in return gives her a life of loneliness and despair. Yet the greatest supporter and worshipper of war is woman. She it is who instills the love of conquest and power into her children ... who whispers the glories of war into the ears of her little ones ... who crowns the victor on his return from the battlefield.<sup>15</sup>

All this can still be observed in daily life. For example, I remember that in the early 80s the West German government under Helmut Schmidt considered the extension of conscription to women and all of a sudden large numbers of women rallied against this idea. Rightly, of course, but why is it that they have not rallied in vast numbers to the support of those who are working towards ending male conscription in the first place? Instead of the sexes working together, supporting each other in their liberation struggles, particularly feminists very often tend to avoid any unpleasant issue, unless it concerns them directly. But they expect men to jump onto the feminist bandwagon!

Even conscientious objectors have to explain their consciences to a jury at the draft board and are often harassed with tricky questions. And total resisters are threatened with heavy prison sentences and incriminated. On top of that, those who resist in a most indomitable manner may even be threatened with military psychiatric 'treatment'. What must men endure to be recognised as men? How brutalised they can become!

Conscription, then, is the last stage of violence needed to maintain the status quo, says Tolstoy,<sup>16</sup> and indeed one may add that this compulsion (including even the physical at the draft board which, strangely, CO's have to undergo, too) is a form of *rape!* Yes, rape, for semantically

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<sup>12</sup> 'The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation', op. cit. p.218

<sup>13</sup> 'Woman Suffrage' op. cit. p.202

<sup>14</sup> Birckenbach, Hanne-Margret. *besser vorbereitet auf den Krieg: Schiller- Frieden - Bundeswehr (... better prepared for war: pupils - peace - the West German Army)*, Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Jugend und Politik 1982.

A shorter article in English entitled 'The Utility of the Bundeswehr and the Lack of Pacifistic *Jai de Vivre*' is available in the WRI's *Refusing War Preparations: Conscientious Objection and Non-Co-operation*, a paper on the relevant issues discussed at the International Seminar in Brussels (7-10 February 1987) organised by the WRI.

<sup>15</sup> 'Woman Suffrage', op. cit. p.196

<sup>16</sup> Tolstoy, Leo, 'Resistance to Military Service' in Woodcock, George (ed.) op. cit. pp.204-8

and etymologically the word 'rape' means taking by force<sup>17</sup> and this is exactly what happens here: men's bodies are forcibly examined by military doctors.

So, rape is not confined to females – even direct sexual assault. Which brings me to the next relevant issue, that of child abuse. The widespread assumption that men/boys can always fend for themselves, which has never been challenged but rather endorsed by feminism, is also one of the reasons why sexual abuse of boy-children has hitherto been carefully avoided as an issue. Fortunately, it is gradually finding recognition as such. Eugene Porter's *Treating the Young Male Victim of Sexual Assault*<sup>18</sup> seems to be the only book on this subject as yet available. Alice Miller also raises this question, which is why her books are subject to attacks not only from established society but also from the feminist camp. She argues, rightly, that even those men who have become rapists were once helpless victims, and in her latest book makes specific mention of the fact that, according to a study forwarded to her by a (critical) feminist on rapists it transpired that they all had been raped by their mothers in early childhood.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Alice Miller's following statement is only too true:

Unfortunately, it is at this point that the feminist movement ... comes up against its ideological limits. It sees the problem as being rooted exclusively in the patriarchy, in the male exertion of power. This simplification leaves many questions unasked ... since they would threaten the image of the idealized mother. Yet we must wonder: what causes a man to rape women and children? Who made him so evil? In my experience it is not always the fathers alone. ... The feminist movement [in the original German text she speaks of the women's movement] will forfeit none of its strength if it finally admits that mothers also abuse their children. Only the truth, even the most uncomfortable, endows a movement with the strength to change society, not the denial of truth ... young children, male as well as female, can become victims of adults of *either sex*.

When sensitive, non brutal woman (and men) are incapable of protecting their children from the brutality of their partner, one must attribute this inability to the blinding process and the intimidation experienced in their own childhood.<sup>20</sup>

Given this, it's really no wonder there are so many violent males around. Boys are usually subject to more severe punishments, as Leila Berg observed in her book on Risinghill school:

But - 'Never caned the girls so much,' said the boy. So, a feeling grows up among the boys, which they take with them into adult life, that girls lead boys into trouble and boys suffer for it, and the girls get off (with the addendum: so make the girls suffer whenever you can; it's getting your own back). And among the girls a dreadful anxiety grows ... and a terror of witnessing another's violence and another's suffering - or else an acceptance of the role of sly causer of pain.

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<sup>17</sup> Sykes, J.B. (ed.) op. cit. p.857, headword 'rape' and Hoad, T.F. (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford 1986 (1991), p.388, headword 'rape'

<sup>18</sup> Porter, Eugene, *Treating the Young Male Victim of Sexual Assault: Issues and Intervention Strategies*, Orwell, Vermont 1989 (2nd rev. ed., 3rd printing 1991)

<sup>19</sup> Miller, Alice, *Abbruch der Schweigemauer*, Hamburg, Hoffman und Campe 1990, preface p.14 (English trans. available as *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence*, London, Virago 1991)

<sup>20</sup> Miller, Alice, *Banished Knowledge*, London, Virago, 1990, p.76f

... Later on these same children talked about marriage, and the boys said they wouldn't ever help their wives, because women have everything easy, don't they.<sup>21</sup>

We must rid ourselves of the widely held notion that boys are naturally more prone to displaying unruly behaviour. In reality this is a result of socialisation, and boys are indeed under great pressure here. Feminism has appallingly ignored this aspect by adhering to the conventionally held view.

In his book *Children are People Too* Peter Newell reveals that mothers tend to be harsher with their sons than with their daughters:

Mothers' reliance on physical punishment was measured at the time their children were 7 and 11 by studying the answers to a series of questions ... but again differences according to the child's sex are far more significant, with 40 per cent of 7-year-old boys overall having mothers who rely heavily on corporal punishment, compared with 23 per cent of girls.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, though Peter Newell still seems to adhere to the patriarchy theory, he makes mention of Suzanne Steinmetz, whose special field of study is familial violence. The self-same Suzanne Steinmetz also published an essay on battered males in 1977-8 in which she argues that the reason why so much attention is given to wife-beating and so little to husband-beating

... is the relative lack of empirical data on the topic, the selective inattention both by the media and researchers, the greater severity of physical damage to women making their victimization more visible, and the reluctance of men to acknowledge abuse at the hand of women.

... The data ... suggests that women are as likely to select physical violence to resolve marital conflicts as are men. Furthermore, child abusers are more likely to be women, and women throughout history have been the prime perpetrators of infanticide ... While it is recognized that women spend more time with children and are usually the parent in a single parent home (which makes them prone to stress and strains resulting in child abuse); and that fathers in similar situations might abuse their children more severely, these findings indicate that women have the potential to commit acts of violence...<sup>23</sup>

Far from ignoring male violence, Suzanne Steinmetz's plea is for a more comprehensive study of familial violence within the broader context of our basically violent society. We can ill afford to turn a blind eye to that other side of the coin, female violence, if we want to change society's attitudes.

Violence, male as well as female, is by no means confined to physical violence. Psychological violence is just as bad. Once again, Emma Goldman makes the following point:

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<sup>21</sup> Berg, Leila, *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1968, pp.17-18

<sup>22</sup> Newell, Peter, *Children are People Too*, London, Bedford Square Press, 1989, p.56

<sup>23</sup> Steinmetz, Suzanne K., *The Battered Husband Syndrome* in *Victimology: An International Journal*, Vol 2, 1977-78, Nos 3-4, Washington DC, Visage Press Inc., 1978, pp.504-5



[The feminists] could not excuse my critical attitude towards the bombastic and impossible claims of the suffragists as to the wonderful things they would do when they got political power. ... Always on the side of the under dog, I resented my sex's placing every evil at the door of the male ... if he were really as great a sinner as he was being painted by the ladies, woman shared the responsibility with him. The mother is the first influence of his life, the first to cultivate his conceit and self-importance ... from the very birth of her male child until he reaches a ripe age, the mother leaves nothing undone to keep him tied to her. Yet she hates to see him weak, and she craves the manly man. She idolizes in him the very traits that help to enslave her - his strength, his egotism, and his exaggerated vanity. The inconsistencies of my sex keep the poor male dangling between the idol and the brute, the darling and the beast, the helpless child, and the conqueror of worlds. It is really woman's inhumanity to man that makes him what he is. When she has learned to be as self-centred and as determined as he, when she gains the courage to delve into life as he does and pay the price for it, she will achieve her liberation, and incidentally also help him become free.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, for neither sex can be free without the freedom of the other. That is what the original idea behind women's lib (the true women's liberation movement) was and, complementing this, a men's lib movement should have sprung up ... but instead feminism has become a static and narrow ideology that does not allow of any criticism. Just look at how feminism has paved its way into established society without effecting an iota of major change. On the contrary, it has upheld and consolidated the established system. Has our world become any better or less violent, then? As of old, wars continue to rage (though the scenario has been shifted predominantly to Third World countries); violence in general is on the *increase* not decrease; and militarism is rampant as ever; rape still continues not merely because of the existing violent structures but also thanks to feminism's denial of sexism working as much against men as against women. Feminism seeks only to remove the *symptom* while leaving the *cause* untouched.

So do Marxism and 'nuclear pacifism'! Thus, for instance, militarism and other kinds of oppression could still rage on in Russia after 1917 and in Communist countries that have become totalitarian dictatorships, with a different class of capitalists in government, that is, state capitalists. Curiously, these maintained they had achieved equality! Why did George Lansbury and Clifford Allen fall prey to such an illusion? Simply because they allowed the wool to be pulled over their eyes. It isn't for nothing that Bakunin once sarcastically noted that the Marxists have one foot in the bank and the other in the Socialist movement. Just read Emma Goldman's witness's account of what happened in Russia under Lenin.<sup>25</sup>

Where are those 'millions of women leading more independent, fulfilled, and abuse-free lives'? No doubt there are women who do, but they are more of the Emma Goldman type rather than feminists: they aren't man-haters, they don't want to trade in one hierarchy for another in order to gain personal privilege and power. Abuse-free lives? Meanwhile rape continues and may, in fact, hit even these women any time simply because the cause has so far not been tackled. How many women can go fearlessly through the streets after dark? And what about women becoming abusers themselves - be it child abuse, verbal abuse, etc.?

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<sup>24</sup> Goldman, Emma, *Living My Life* (Autobiography), Vol 2, London, Pluto Press, 1988, pp.556-7

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* pp.727-928 (Chapter LII)

True equality and gender justice entail a sharing of all aspects of life for both sexes, with no human being ruling over another. But that is precisely what the adherents of feminism in their narrowness have prevented.

Sexism against men, too, can be traced throughout history. There is ample evidence in European medieval literature in which chivalry expected from males by females is a recurring *leit-motiv*: thus, for instance, in duelling sports where women as spectators will always choose the most valiant man, the hero-victor, 'the real man', for a partner. The same chivalry expected from men can be found among feminists, as June Statham reveals in her *Daughters and Sons* about non-sexist child-raising.<sup>26</sup>

Two examples of the damage done to men by feminism were given in a supplementary magazine to the *Guardian* earlier this year. The article therein, called 'What did you do in the sex war, mummy?' examined the effects of feminist upbringing in the 70s on the sons of feminists. Although the majority of the men interviewed did not question but praised the wonderful 'achievements' of feminism (where has the world become less violent?), there were nevertheless two critical voices.

One of them was a 23-year-old student whose mother, having left her husband, had brought up her children alone:

I was taught not to question feminism. My mum only ever showed me one point of view ... and I'm sick of it. ... As it is, I have never been in a decent relationship. I don't know how to relate to women ... never saw my parents relate to one another...<sup>27</sup>

The other, David Thomas, former editor of *Punch*, said:

As a student, I found discussions about feminism stultifying, totalitarian and oppressive... Fact is, men feel tremendous anger and hurt. Women need to understand that. You can't just bash men indiscriminately... Women want to have it both ways, but I think they should accept responsibility for themselves... Women are the new chauvinists. An entire generation of men has grown up in the same circumstances that women did in the fifties and sixties - having to swallow a whole lot of one-sided ideology.<sup>28</sup>

Jon says that 'only men of colour, gay men, working class men, can be and are oppressed'. Aside from the untruth of this, as I've shown above, Jon here uses Marxist rhetoric *par excellence*. Of course, men can be and are oppressed simply as men! Just look at those who refuse to be stereotyped and want to opt out. And, as much as men can become oppressors, so can women! An increasing number of sensible men and women are, hopefully, becoming aware of this.

Assuming, then, as feminism does, that women would 'succeed in purifying something which is not susceptible of purification, is to credit {them} with supernatural powers. Since woman's greatest misfortune has been that she was looked upon as either angel or devil, her true salvation lies in being placed on earth; namely, in being considered human, and therefore subject to

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<sup>26</sup> Statham, June, *Daughters and Sons: Experiences of Non-Sexist Childraising*, Oxford /N.Y., Basil Blackwell, 1986, p.13

<sup>27</sup> Supplement to *The Guardian*, 9 January 1992, *Elle/Guardian*, Men and Women, p.20

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p.21

all human follies and mistakes,' said Emma Goldman about 80 years ago, speaking against the 'absurd notion that woman will accomplish that wherein man has failed. If she would not make things worse, she certainly would not make them better.'<sup>29</sup>

Feminism has forged new fetters *because of* its narrowness and lack of vision. If we really seek to work for a truly non-violent and nonhierarchical society we will have to break these fetters and tread the path towards true liberation, equality and justice rather than help consolidate the iniquities so prevalent in the world at large simply by not adhering to static dogmas and ideologies. We need to be dynamic and open to a new way of thinking. Men, women and children are oppressed in different ways, so let's break this vicious circle of violence and power structure by taking a critical look at our cultural history, including our own individual histories, and then embark upon our quest for the whole truth, as Emma Goldman did and Alice Miller (and a few others) are doing, and become empathetic and responsible human beings. This is true grassroots activism.

For men, this means rediscovering their male feelings and tendernesses that they have lost in childhood, and demand the right to fully live with these, thereby actualising their creative potentials, just as women have been doing. Even seemingly trivial things like the length of one's hair, where women are generally allowed more scope, should be considered here.

I do realise that most of what I have written here is in a somewhat academic fashion, but if you come up with new insights and ideas they will at first have to be substantiated by providing the evidence. However, all this is also based on observations and experience in everyday life and not on mere theory which the adherents of ideologies like to resort to. We need heads and hearts! We can't afford to ignore essential issues just because they do not fit in with a theory. Even the majority in the dynamic, libertarian movements seems to have allowed itself to be carried away by the complacency of the mainstream 'progressive' views. They would do well to reconsider this and rethink those values in order to become a truly effective force. Thus, by refuting the existence of the Oedipus complex, Alice Miller has dealt the Freudians a harrowing blow, but it's a necessary one if we are to make progress. And her advocacy of the rights of children go hand in hand with this, since children, being the weakest members of society, are the most oppressed people in the world.

The new society we should be working for would be a *wholesome* society that allows each member equally to grow physically, mentally and spiritually from early childhood through adulthood up to old age. Violence and war would have no place in it; however, that doesn't mean a complete absence of conflicts: these would be resolved in a humane and peaceful way.

This is, of course, the ultimate end, which at present may sound too idealistic. And we are faced with far greater difficulties than ten years ago, when we peace activists were actually at a crossroads in the face of the massive rearmament programmes of governments and the military-industrial complex. But again, the majority in the peace movement was focussing almost exclusively on the nuclear issue rather than on the uprooting of militarism, and has therefore failed. But there may still be a little hope left today. Again, as Emma Goldman said, it's 'the non-compromising determination of intelligent minorities' that will lead the way.<sup>30</sup> And these shouldn't be prevented from acting upon their insights. In fact, in her lifetime Emma *was* much reviled, not only by the establishment, but also by her own ranks.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Woman Suffrage', op. cit. p.198-9

<sup>30</sup> 'Minorities versus Majorities' in Drinnon, op. cit. p.78

In view of all this, yes, I will tell you again and again that men, too, are oppressed. Sorry Jon, but people like you, just like the conventionally-minded, are the worst stumbling-block to true progress!

## *Lisa Bendall*

# Anarchism and Feminism

So, I am here to speak tonight on the subject of anarchism and feminism.<sup>(4)</sup> This title sounds as if I am supposed to be giving some vast and comprehensive survey of the history of each of these movements in relation to each other, analysing this relationship (or lack of relationship), categorising the responses each has had to the other with reference to individual theorists and generally presenting a decent picture of all that might come under this heading of anarchism and feminism.

Well, that all sounds very impressive, but I had absolutely no intention of doing all that research; so, what I am going to talk about instead, with as little reference to major theorists as I can manage, is precisely my own concept of anarchism and feminism. Why am I happy to be called an anarchist? Why do I consider myself a feminist? What, if any, is the relationship between the two movements? What have they to say to one another, and how useful is it? (Again, from my own perspective.)

For me, anarchism and feminism are essentially the same doctrines with varying shades of emphasis. Their fundamental principles (as I understand them) are similar, if not virtually identical. They are both concerned with creativity and freedom, and they both mount critiques of society which call for massive restructuring. They each have a markedly different agenda, to be sure, but what I am going to argue tonight is that: whatever the methods and emphases, their utopian views are actually remarkably similar and are capable of being very usefully combined to create a framework promoting the realisation of the sort of change that I believe both would like to see implemented.

So why do I consider myself to be both an anarchist and a feminist? When I question myself to discover what it is that I most fundamentally believe in, I find that what is most central to my thinking is the concept of human rights. Human rights violations in all their forms are what most readily move and outrage me. But what are human rights? One can compile lists of them — the right not to be tortured, the right to eat, the right to free speech and expression, etcetera, etcetera — but what characterises all of these? What is the connection between them? In an effort to devise a formulation of the essential human right from which all others can be derived, this is what I come up with: the right to live and develop in whatever way desired by and to whatever extent possible for an individual human, the desire and the extent being based only on the individual's own choice and recognition. This is not precisely the anarchist formulation, but it is certainly in keeping with it.

My concept of human rights emerges from my concept of what humans are. Humans are inherently creative beings. Creation is a word which has been largely co-opted by god and by artists, but *all* humans are creative. Using language is an incredibly creative activity, even if the

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<sup>(4)</sup> Talk presented at a meeting of the Anarchist Forum, February 5, 1993.

speaker may not be saying anything particularly interesting. Thought is creative, even if one is simply thinking about what to have for dinner, or how long it is before we go to the pub tonight. Acting in the world is enormously creative — the world is transformed every time I walk down the street or redecorate the room I live in. In deciding to do a thing and then doing it, I have created, for I have wrought change, made what was not before into what is now. Creativity is one of the things that most essentially defines us as human beings, and it is in the effort to enact and to develop our creative potential that we are most truly human and most truly free. This is, I believe, why Bakunin maintained that freedom was to be found *within* society and not isolated from it. Humans require interaction with other humans to develop their creative potential. Our freedom and creativity, the quality of our lives, is enhanced, not restricted, by the freedom and creativity of others.

Anarchism deeply affirms the right of individuals to creatively live their lives and to be free. It despises the State because it is the function of the State to limit and restrict — if not to outright destroy — an individual's creativity — his capacity to freely interact with the world. Nor does anarchism get caught up in the liberal trap of seeing the State as a somehow necessary prerequisite in order for individuals to be able to participate in the world. Liberal philosophers such as Rousseau (I will use for example) cannot get away from the idea of the State because for them to live in society is not the natural human condition. For Rousseau, humans are naturally free, but they are able to truly enjoy this freedom only in isolation from other human beings. If humans wish to associate, they can do so only by sacrificing some of their freedom — by making a contract of mutual restriction, by subjugating themselves to a government, to the State.

The anarchists are far luckier than this. By maintaining that society is the natural condition within which humans live, they get to have society and freedom too. Society, being the natural condition does not need to have the State to come along and organise it. It organises itself. In fact, the State is inimical to its organisation. The State, far from being the only thing which allows society to exist, is, in actuality, actively engaged in its dissolution. The State attempts — and must by its very nature attempt — to break natural human bonds and realign them to serve its own dominatory purpose. It destroys human beings in the process.

So this is more or less why I am an anarchist: because I believe that human society is natural and self-organising, because I believe that human beings actualise themselves through freedom and creativity (which I identify with each other), that freedom and creativity can function only through the natural interaction of humans with each other and with the world, and that the State must necessarily attempt to prevent human beings from realising this function by generally restricting their freedom and poisoning the atmosphere within which they flourish.

I am a feminist for basically the same reasons, but I would phrase it all a bit differently. Feminism, too, is concerned with freedom and creativity. One of the first cries feminists raised and one of the first battles they fought was for women's right to education. Taking education in its finest sense, not as a means of indoctrination, but as an opportunity to develop the self and explore the world, education is an essential component of human creativity. Even if it doesn't happen in the schools (where, unfortunately, it often doesn't happen at all), to learn is an innate passion in human beings. I cannot imagine having had to live in a society where I was told that I was incapable of learning to read and write or of engaging in abstract thought because I was a woman. How frustrating! And it *is* somewhat different from being told that you are unable to study because you are poor or have the wrong sort of background — these are great outrages as well — but they do not erode the soul in quite the same way. They are external factors and, though they seek to

limit, they cannot touch the inner spirit. But to be told not merely that education is unavailable to you, but that you are actually incapable of it because of your gender — this is to attack your inner reality. And, if all society supports such a notion, -how difficult it is to fight against it! It is not merely a matter of fighting for a right to education— you are required to defend your very viability as a human being. This is a lot of what feminism is about and a lot of what it has had to fight for — the recognition of women as human beings with the same capacity for freedom, intelligence and creativity that all human beings are possessed of.

But anarchism wants everyone to be creative and free — to live as they see fit — so why are women not simply included under the anarchist aegis? 'Why be a feminist as *well* as an anarchist?

There has always been a lot of talk in anarchist, socialist and communist circles about whether a separate feminist movement was necessary at all and whether it didn't really just function to decrease solidarity and serve as a general distraction. (Here again, I note, women are being required to defend their very viability.) The general statement is, or was, that anarchism, socialism and/or communism are seeking to change the situation for everybody and that only after the revolution when free society is implemented will the situation of women improve. Therefore, women should sit tight, join the revolution and stop trying to bring forth issues which are divisive and cannot be dealt with for the time being.

There are a number of reasons why this general statement has never been satisfactory. One is that the relegation of the problem of sexism to the back burner has left the issue largely unaddressed in left-wing circles, meaning that where it is present — and it is very pervasive — it goes largely unchallenged. Many women have opted out of anarchist groups and left-wing groups in the past and chosen to work in exclusively women's groups, not because (as many seem to believe) they hate men, but because it really is virtually impossible for a woman to function as an anarchist, a revolutionary, or even simply a human being, where sexism is present but not addressed. I was reading an essay on the SPD<sup>(5)</sup> recently and it was really shocking what women had to put up with in that movement. Women were openly vilified in the SPD press. One man even stated eventually that, had women been left to go around as insultingly and maliciously attacking men as a gender as men had been left to attack women, he would simply have been forced to extricate himself from the movement. Many women felt the same and, in the end, despite their revolutionary spirit — or, indeed, because of it — did have to dissociate themselves from it.

Even in supposedly free-thinking anarchist groups women have met with similar experiences. I remember an anarchist group I was in in the early eighties where we were asked one day by a visiting woman why so few other women were involved in it. I did not venture my opinion at the time because it was my general experience in that group that every time I did so, it was either ignored or despised, but the fact that this was so, was precisely the reason why so few other women were present. (I eventually left the group myself for the same reason and because I had learned — such are the lessons of youth — that my approved role in that group was to sit quietly and bolster their egos by listening attentively to the men.)

The fact is that if you are a woman who has become politicised — or even radicalised you want to work constructively just as everyone does, and if you come into a group and find that you have to put up with the same type of problem that you get from men elsewhere (who at least do not try to *claim* to be enlightened) it is incredibly, incredibly frustrating. You cannot work

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<sup>(5)</sup> Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (in Germany), *not* the Social Democratic Party (in Britain)!

effectively because you are being constantly obstructed, so eventually you simply take yourself and your work into another group — one with a feminist consciousness, no doubt, at this point — where you can actually get something done.

That men and women with similar aims should be unable to work together in a mixed group is unfortunate and even somewhat ridiculous. But this situation will persist until people in left-wing groups start to live up to their ideals across the board, part of which means ceasing to regard sexism as a peripheral issue to be sorted out later. You cannot be regarded as fighting for freedom if you are concurrently involved in the perpetuation of oppression.

Another reason why it is not satisfactory to put feminist issues on the back burner is that the oppression of women really does have a different character from the oppression of the poor and the working classes. It is somewhat closer to the nature of racism because racism is also concerned with degradation and denying the viability of human beings — in Western culture, of human beings who are not 'white'. But there is still a difference because of the strange way in which women are separated from, yet still contained within, every society. Sexism cuts across all class and ethnic boundaries. It attacks from within.

It is simply not true that in the wake of the revolution sexism would spontaneously vanish from society. One problem I always had with the idea of an anarchist revolution is that it is all very well to do away with the government, but if you have not managed to fundamentally restructure the society, destroying the government will merely create a power vacuum which will eventually be filled by some other government. The government is not simply a group of people — the individual people who sit in Westminster — those people come and go, but the government remains. Government is a *concept* which pervades every aspect and every level of society. Government is an expression of the way this society is structured: it is structured hierarchically. To change anything — to change everything — it is this hierarchical structure which must be changed. But the hierarchy is everywhere — even in people's minds. Even, alas, in the minds of many anarchists. We think and function in this society in a hierarchical way and it takes an enormous amount of effort not to do so. But it is only in this effort that real change can take place. The revolution is a good thing to keep working for because it is necessary to keep the tension going on every level of this stratified society in an effort to eventually make all the levels collapse into each other. But the internal struggle and the struggle in the sphere of one's immediate contacts must be kept up as well for anything in the long term to be achieved.

Sexism is a symptom of the internalisation of hierarchy. The issues surrounding it must be addressed *now*, not later. They are central, not peripheral, to the interests and concerns of anarchism. Feminism is not a women's issue it is a societal issue. Its ultimate aim is nothing less than the complete restructuring of society along egalitarian and non-hierarchical lines. This is something in which anarchists ought to be deeply interested.

When I speak of feminism here, I am speaking again of my own concept of feminism, but it is a concept which is shared by a majority of particularly the avant-garde of modern feminists. Hierarchy has been much talked about in feminist circles, particularly since the 1980s. Feminism itself began because women wanted the simple right to be free and to explore their creative potential — to live as human beings. It is true that much of feminism has been concerned with gaining access for women to the fruits of public society wealth, power, education — often without attempting to change that society significantly. I find it difficult to criticise these efforts too strenuously because I have myself benefited enormously from them — only 50 years ago, for instance, it would have been very difficult for me to go to university. But the integration of women into the dom-



inant social structure is not the ultimate aim of feminism, and as women have achieved greater access to education, public groups and public presses, they have become increasingly well able to articulate and to explore just what that ultimate aim is. For why does sexism occur at all?

It occurs because this society in which we live is based on the principle of domination. It occurs because society is organised hierarchically. It is not enough for women to integrate themselves into this hierarchical structure; ultimately the structure is such that it can *never* accommodate women in the same way that it can accommodate men (though, I note, it is not very good for men either!) The structure itself, then, must be changed. Much of present feminist writing is being directed at investigating practical methods of bringing about a profound and comprehensive alteration in the structure of society. The ultimate aim of feminism is to bring about something very like the anarchist utopia – a self-organising society, based on free interaction rather than domination.

Anarchism has failed to explore its full potential by confining itself to critiques of government and not looking profoundly enough at the structure of society as a whole. Many modern anarchists have begun to move away from the idea that 'the revolution' will fix everything. The idea is, in any case, inadequate. The anarchist criticism of the State is excellent but, as I remarked before, the State does not simply exist in the ministries and bureaucracies of the present – or any – government. The State is a function of the way this society is organised. For the anarchist revolution to be achieved and to be successful, to be lasting, society must be fundamentally reorganised, and individuals must fundamentally reassess the way in which they operate. I am not – just to make it clear, for it is often charged that feminists think this – claiming that if sexism is addressed then everything will follow from that. What I am saying is that the struggle for change must take place on every level – not just in politics, demonstrations or whatever, but also in the sphere of one's personal relations with other people. Feminists have always been very good at addressing issues on many different levels and in many different aspects of society. This sort of multi-dimensional approach is very necessary and very effective. I propose that anarchists would have much to gain from paying greater attention to it. It is absolutely an anarchist concern to attempt to break down hierarchical structures in society wherever they exist. This is largely what anarchism is about. But the most useful and practical work on this attempt is currently being done by feminists. Anarchists and anarchism would benefit considerably from becoming more involved in it.

I have one last thing to say on the subject of reorganising society in general, and the way in which anarchists have more traditionally envisioned this process. The traditional anarchist idea has been more or less that you have to destroy the present society – do away with the government, etc. – before you can replace it with something different. Anarchists have consistently pointed out that it would be useless and arbitrary to presume to formulate the exact structure of a postrevolutionary society before the revolution because it is impossible for us, as trammelled individuals, to know how it is that free individuals would see fit to reorganise themselves – and in any case, their organisation must arise from their concerns and realities at that time in which they then live. I agree with this, but I do not agree that it is necessary therefore – or even possible – to wait until after the revolution – whenever that will be! – to begin organising society differently. A utopian society and the society of today are not static entities such that now you have one and then – bang, revolution – suddenly you have the other. Society, particularly a utopian society, is not a static structure – it is an organic and changing process. A society which is naturally self-organised and within which individuals are truly free will maintain its integrity and

freedom by constantly *reorganising* itself. It will exist in a state of change which is permanent. This is another reason why it is impossible to formulate at present what an anarchist society would be like because, as a process, it will be like many *different* things, and will be constantly altering.

Likewise, for it is true of all societies, even those which try to resist change, the society we live in now is a process. It is an important part of the function of government to attempt to inhibit the process of change within our society. But change *is* possible and necessary (indeed, it is inevitable) to whatever extent we can at present achieve it. We increase the viability of the revolution by living *now* according to anarchist – and feminist – principles, no matter what our surrounding situation is. *Live the revolution* is, I believe, the catchphrase.

I do not believe that change takes place by destroying and *then* creating. Destruction and creation are a single moment. To create something is to simultaneously destroy something else. To transform the present societal structure, we must destroy it by simultaneously replacing it with a new societal structure created from within. Every thread that we currently weave into the tapestry of a new image disrupts the traditional patterning and it is this continual process which will cause the old patterns to eventually give way. If there does, at some point, come some crucial and decisive moment of substantial change, it will have been brought about by an infinitude of non-crucial and indecisive moments that represent the struggle of countless individuals to live freely and to create. A future society would not be predetermined by their multitudinous efforts, but it is from these efforts that the free society will eventually emerge. Anarchism and feminism are both conceptualisations which are necessary to and capable of bringing about such change.

## *Mary Quintana*

# For a Women's Page in Freedom

I do not intend to allow this proposition of a women's page in an eight-page, male-dominated paper to go into Limbo! I throw down the gauntlet to you, and ask that you should put the suggestion to Freedom's readers. Let all readers who agree or disagree write into Freedom, and then you can make up your minds. I am aware that the vote in politics is meaningless and illusionary, and does not alter for the better the real evils of existence, but in this case, it is necessary, and can do no harm, and could do some good.

A women's page in Freedom could strengthen the voice of humanity in an age that is being driven to utter despair by party politics and party economics. Let us get back to Humanity, and make that our united cause. Men and women united in the cause of Humanity shall succeed, but the first positive move out of this maze must come from Freedom. Give women a start. Give us an offering. Give us a page in Anarchy's most famous newspaper.

I grant that your constant political criticism is valid and necessary, but it is overwhelming, and does not come to grips personally with the miseries and mismanagement of millions of people, especially women. You do not give your loyal subjects any worthy cause in particular to fight for, or show how much you know or can do about their plight. You could do much for women and serve men also by your valuable insights into oppressive systems, manufactured men, and under-developed women. Many women are simply not aware that many men have genuine sympathy, interest, and support to offer them. We would love to hear that all does not rely on beauty, grace and favour, guile, and good fortune. Anarchism has the understanding par excellence of the human dilemma, and should have the courage and conviction to crusade for its other half.

No matter how capitalistic and deplorable the late Randolph Hearst was, nonetheless, he built a mighty empire by making a success of the failing *Chicago Examiner*. He introduced new and much needed features: labour cause; championing the exploited individual against Authority; and most of all a women's page. No matter how limited this page was it was still greatly appreciated by millions of women who had been forced directly or indirectly into ignorance and silence. Whatever humanity the father of the tabloid had was largely due to the influence of his women. No matter how self-interested Hearst's critics have made this gesture in the right direction out to be, it was greatly appreciated by women and rightfully so. The gesture was positive and personal, and showed that somebody was prepared to do something both humanitarian and practical and not merely talk.

No matter how valid *Freedom's* constant criticism of the political scene no doubt is, it is time that it espoused a humanitarian cause to contribute its wisdom to and to fight for with its unique energies. *Freedom* should at least ask its readers whether or not they want to do the same. If *Freedom* goes on failing to attract the support of women, and refuses to fight for their female comrades who are often at the mercy of either predatory men, or any quack that the State puts

up as an authority on human feelings and behaviour, then I fear that *Freedom* newspaper and Freedom Press along with the women's movement will go into an intellectual and social Limbo to be resurrected from time to time by the servants of the State who will see in it any pathological feature that they want to see, or are conditioned by a Statist, middle-class mad society into seeing. *Freedom* preaches excessively to the converted who agree with its doctrines, and also like their misunderstood and persecuted views explained and reinforced. *Freedom* is saying much sense, but is not doing much for humanity especially women, concentrating as it does all its talents to attacking the evils and insanity of the State.

I grant that many modern feminists have an anti-male stance, and a low opinion of men. In many cases they have refused the hand of male friendship and understanding. From bitter personal experience and wide reading, I can only say that male Anarchists would forgive women if they knew personally what being a woman means. Sometimes women are their own enemies. Anarchists with their superior wits, sentiments, and wisdom could surely rise above feminine prejudice as they have risen above all other prejudices. Women and men were made to complement and complete each other. If they do not then it is not the fault of Nature, but the practises and false reasoning of Society.

One of the major and primary functions of Anarchism is the promotion of love, understanding, tolerance, and cooperation over and above hate, competition, greed, and delusion, all of which have made a hell of Earth, and squandered our natural and spiritual resources. Women know this somehow. We as Anarchists can prove it. I still maintain that male Anarchists should fight for women whatever. Therefore, I urge *Freedom* to start this project, and I invite its male readers to support this issue. No matter how much men and women have suffered at each other's hands, it is time for Anarchists to open their minds and hearts and go on the warpath with their female counterparts, or at least on their behalf. As Anarchists we cannot afford the war between the sexes. As humanitarians as well as Anarchists we must not support such a war, or stand idly by. Nature did not delude men over women or vice versa. Political man and his servants in society have done this hellish job. A women's page is an Anarchist beginning to an Anarchist answer to much worldly misery and injustice.

The crimes against women are ancient as the hills, but one look at the nature of modern crime, pornography, medicine, business, and advertising shows that never have such crimes been so senselessly murderous, bizarre, brutal, and trivial as they are in the Twentieth Century. It is a horror story and complete mystery why so many men are risking losing their immortal souls simply to victimise women - any woman, even the old, infirm, poor, and ugly. All women are not potential victims. Children and their happiness and welfare, not forgetting their safety, is alarmingly at risk. The multiplicity of the skills and talents of women are now devalued or exploited. The homes and social/religious citadels or women have never been held in such small esteem and ridicule. The evils of the modern age and the machines it will not dispense with are not only murdering women, but rendering them useless, even defunct. *Freedom* every fortnight spells out the effect of such evils. We need to spell out the causes and the cure.

One cannot expect masses of women to just give up what little security, status, peace, and happiness they have wrung from society's unwilling grasp and adopt the most maligned cause on Earth. More than three-quarters of the population either don't know Anarchism exists, or do not know it for what it is. Women have valuable contributions to make to life as have men. Let us fight each other's battle. I call on *Freedom* to give women a page, or if it will not then I strongly feel that they should consult the wishes of its many readers.

# *Silvia Edwards*

## **Women of the Spanish Revolution**

Despite the numerous books, articles and pamphlets on the Spanish Civil War published over the past 50 years or so, very few have acknowledged the sustained direct action of **Mujeres Libres** (Free Women) – the women’s independent organisation dedicated to the liberation of working-class women from their ‘triple enslavement’.

*Free Women of Spain* is Martha Ackelsberg’s affectionate, committed and long-awaited chronicle of women’s struggle within the social revolution that accompanied the Spanish Civil War<sup>1</sup>. The outcome of ten years of research, her book includes conversations with many former activists and founder members of Mujeres Libres and of the Spanish anarchist movement, together with documented archive material hitherto unpublished.

Ackelsberg’s express purpose here is to

Chronicle the struggles of these women and in the process illuminate our own; to review the theoretical and activist traditions in Spain that gave birth to the libertarian movement; and to understand how and why these women came to believe that an autonomous women’s organisation was necessary.

Mujeres Libres was formally established in May 1936 by working class, anarcho-syndicalist activists, Mercedes Comaposada, Lucia Sanchez Saornil and Amparo Poch y Gascon. The organisation had begun developing two years before out of the concern of anarchism women regarding the small number of women who were active in the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo). Women’s groups within the CNT in Madrid and Barcelona joined to form an autonomous group to raise women’s self-esteem so that they could participate as equals with men to realise the revolution. Throughout its existence, Mujeres Libres repeatedly emphasised that it promoted not individualist or elitist feminism but a social revolution liberating men as well as women.

Recollections in the book by Spanish anarchist women underline the difficulties they encountered at union meetings:

Boys started making fun of the female speakers ... when the woman who was speaking finished, the boys began asking questions and saying that it didn’t make sense for women to organise separately, since they wouldn’t do anything anyway.

Once Mujeres Libres was fully established it was criticised for diverting women’s energies away from the anarchist cause into less significant personal struggles and consequently the organisation was never recognised as having equal status with the CNT, FAI, and FIJL. Ackelsberg

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<sup>1</sup> *Free Women of Spain* Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women by Martha A. Ackelsberg (Indiana University Press 1991 229pp £11.99)

makes parallels here with the experiences of women in the socialist movements and relates the experiences of Mujeres Libres to contemporary North American feminist theory and practice.

So, the founding of Mujeres Libres represented an effort by women to challenge the anarchist movement to fulfil its promise to women, and to empower women to claim their places within the movement and within wider society. Ackelsberg skilfully documents the development of Mujeres Libres' 'Education for Empowerment' programme and explains the distinction between their two separate but related goals; *capacitación* – preparing women for revolutionary engagement, and *captación* – actively incorporating them into the libertarian movement. The primary objectives of Mujeres Libres were perhaps best expressed on a leaflet which was distributed on the streets of Barcelona in 1937:

To emancipate women from the triple slavery of ignorance, traditional passivity and exploitation.

To fight ignorance and educate our comrades individually and socially through simple lessons, conferences, lectures, cinema projections etc.

To arrive at real understanding between men and women living together, working together and not excluding each other.

The direct action of Mujeres Libres, through their educational networks and their periodical, *Mujeres Libres*, reached over 30,000 women and established more than 100 local groups. Classes were set up in elementary education, nursing and midwifery, childcare, technical and business skills, economics, contraception, and sexuality. As women became confident in these subject areas, they went on to become teachers themselves in new schools or to work in hospitals and clinics either at the front or in their *barrio*<sup>(6)</sup>. As the war created more and more refugees, more groups formed and offered extensive educational programmes to serve their needs.

Ackelsberg demonstrates very well that many of the issues articulated by Mujeres Libres have been experienced more recently by many in the larger feminist movement. At a time when feminist thinking appears to have lost its way there is, more than ever, a need for a non-hierarchical approach to social revolution. *Free Women of Spain* is a powerfully written, thoroughly researched book which gives the reader an explanation of events in Spain and welcome documentation of the aspirations and perseverance of Mujeres Libres.

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<sup>(6)</sup> A 'barrio' is a ward, quarter, or district of a city or town in a Spanish-speaking country.

# *Adrian Walker*

## **Agnes Burns Wieck**

This book<sup>1</sup> is an accurately drawn yet affectionate portrait of a celebrated parent painted by her son. In it, David Thoreau Wieck manages, with considerable sureness of foot, to tread the fine line between the hagiographic adulation too often seen in such biographies and its obverse, the 'warts and all' approach which seems to be currently in fashion.

It is possible to understand a great deal about the underlying philosophy by which Agnes Burns Wieck lived her life simply by being aware of her son's forenames, although as Wieck himself points out the sage of Concord invariably preferred to be known as 'Henry' rather than 'David'. It was Agnes's husband, Ed, who introduced her to Thoreau's work, and he was a constant support in all her political activities until the onset of the debilitating mental illness that so shadowed his last years (and by extension, hers).

Throughout her life Agnes Wieck was no stranger to privation and suffering. She was born in Illinois in 1892 at a moment in history when the United States was still undergoing the birth pangs of a too-rapid industrialisation and the resultant depredations of rampant 'robber baron' capitalism. Her father Patrick Burns was a miner and also a member of a trade union, and thus had constant difficulty in finding work. The family was forever on the move - as Agnes herself says, 'like bands of gypsies went groups of coal miners through the coalfields in those years'. Her political thinking seems to have been greatly influenced by the circumstances of her mother's life and death which was not untypical of that of the majority of the urban poor in late nineteenth century America and in the other industrialised nations, consisting as it did 'of an unlovely struggle against grossly unfair odds, followed by a cheap funeral'. It was from her mother too, according to David Wieck, that Agnes inherited the 'managerial talents' that she was to display throughout her long and active life. The other main source of inspiration being of course 'Mother Jones'.

She was very much a product of her time, her sex, and her class. By her own account, at least initially, she was a subscriber to the great American dream of 'betterment' - perhaps even embourgeoisement rather than radical reform of the entire system. Brought up, in her youth, in the Baptist faith she quickly decided that 'more important than religion is social and economic reform'. She was an idealist with a deeply-felt belief in the part formal education could play in freeing the exploited and the oppressed, perhaps with Victor Hugo she felt that 'one more school equals one less gaol'. In any event, at the age of sixteen, she was a teacher of grade school (primary) children, earning the princely sum of \$32 a month and taking summer courses in the school holidays at a nearby university.

While still working as a teacher she became active in the Labour movement, organising the miners' wives in Williamson County, Illinois. In 1914 when she was twenty-two, she left her teaching post and fired by the massacre at Ludlow of striking miners, their wives and children

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<sup>1</sup> *Woman from Spillertown: A Memoir of Agnes Burns Wieck*, by David Thoreau Wieck. (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1992.)

by militiamen acting on behalf of the Rockefeller family, she embarked on her career as a political activist. Henceforth until her death in 1966 two months short of her seventy-fifth birthday she was involved in a series of campaigns to strengthen the Labour movement in the mining industry through the greater participation of women, to democratise the unions and to roll back the encroaching tide of corporate power in the USA. She also worked tirelessly to gain the acceptance of women into the general political life of the country. All this she did by every means at her disposal: public speaking, private debate, journalism, and personal example.





*Charolette Wilson (1854-1944)*



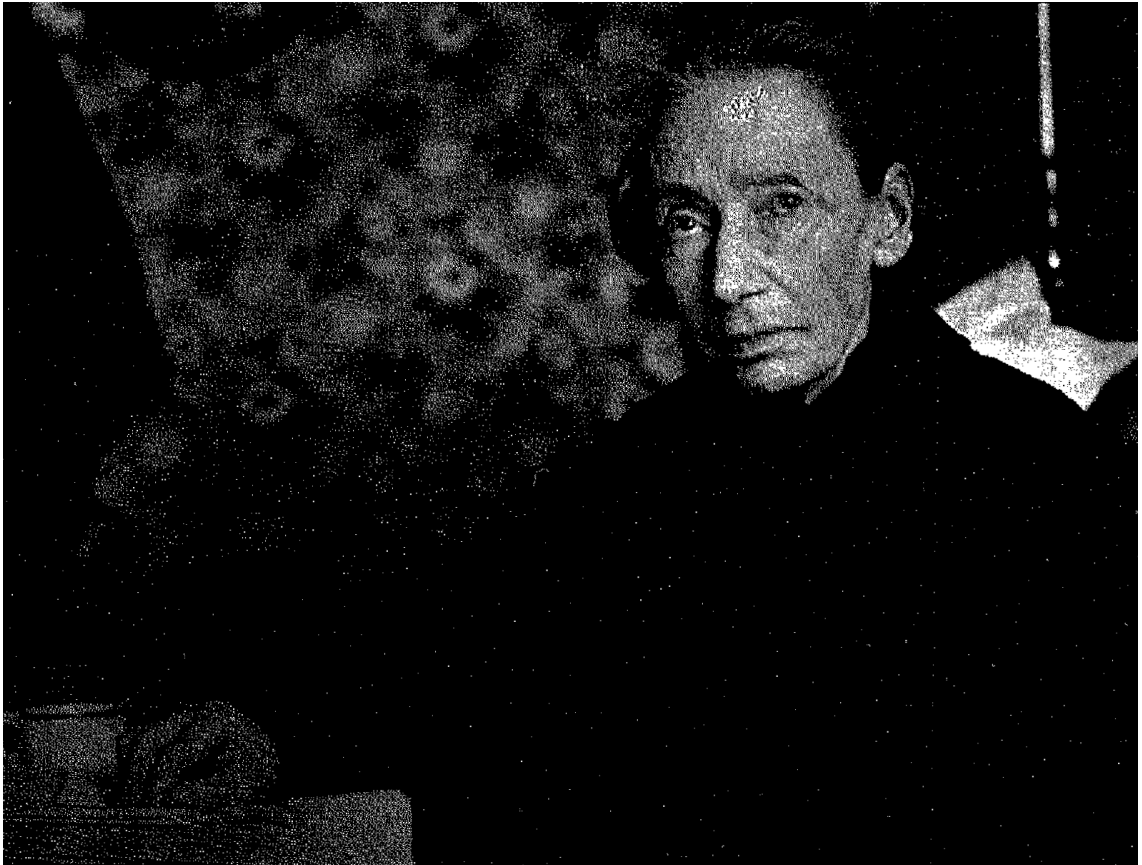
*Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912)*



*Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)*



*Louise Michel, drawn from life, 1880*



*In old age Louise Michel (1830-1904)*



*Agnes Burns Wieck (1892-1966)*



*Lilian Wolfe (right) with Tom Keell (1866-1938) in Harlech 1915*



*Lilian Wolfe (1875-1974)*





*Lilian Wolfe cutting the cake at Whiteway's 50th Anniversary celebrations.*



*Emma Goldman (1869-1940)*



*1945 Marie Louise Berneri addressing Glasgow workers*



*1946 M.L.B.*



*1948 Marie Louise Berneri (1918-1949)*

Throughout her life Agnes was an anti-militarist. She consistently opposed her country's involvement in both world wars and in Vietnam, not least because of the misery such wars gave to the wives and families of soldiers serving overseas. Interestingly there appears to be no reference in the book to her attitude towards the Korean War (1950-1953). Her anti-war stance was reflected by that of her family - in 1943 David himself was imprisoned for three years, because he would neither serve in the armed forces nor register as a conscientious objector. Although Agnes would have perhaps been happier had he pursued the latter course and despite the suffering his imprisonment undoubtedly caused her, she gave unstinting support to her son throughout this difficult time. Perhaps she had in her mind the statement of his illustrious namesake: 'Under a government which imprisons any unjustly the true place for a just man is also prison.'

If we place the life and work of Agnes Burns Wieck in an international context, it is interesting to speculate on what different paths she might have trodden had she been born in Britain or one of the other industrialised European states. It seems to me that a woman of her calibre who was born in this country at the end of the last or the beginning of this century might well have become an activist with very specific political aims (e.g., the Pankhursts) or have been a trade union organiser in an industry where the labour force consisted mainly of women, like the famous Bryant & May 'match girls'. Her role as an organiser of women's auxiliaries may have been an early reflection of the American tendency to pay lip-service to an ideal (in this case feminism) while making quite sure it is effectively sidelined.

Sadly, Agnes appears to have suffered from strong feelings of disillusion and even failure in her later years. In 1950 she wrote to Edmund Wilson indicating that she and her husband were no longer sure about anything in the strange new world that had arisen from the ashes of the Second World War. On a more personal level, perhaps there was an element of disappointment regarding the direction her son's life had taken. With disarming candour David Wieck says: 'Agnes had invested quite naturally, too much hope in my future ... to [her] the name "Thoreau" meant "rebel", but she had enlisted Thoreau into a Labour movement that had never quite existed.'

Nonetheless Agnes Burns Wieck's life was by most standards a full and successful one dedicated to the 'betterment' of others, and this clearly written and well organised biography provides an interesting insight into the role of radical political activists in the USA in the first half of this century.



# *Voltairine de Cleyre* Mary Wollstonecraft

The dust of a hundred years<sup>(7)</sup>  
Is on thy breast,  
And thy day and thy night of tears  
Are centurine rest.  
Thou to whom joy was dumb,  
Life a broken rhyme,  
Lo, thy smiling time is come,  
And our weeping time.  
Thou who hadst sponge and myrrh  
And a bitter cross, Smile, for the day is here  
That we know our loss;-  
Loss of thine undone deed,  
Thy unfinished song,  
Th' unspoken word for our need,  
Th' unrighted wrong;  
Smile, for we weep, we weep,  
For the unsoothed pain,  
The unbound wound burned deep,  
That we might gain.  
Mother of sorrowful eyes  
In the dead old days,  
Mother of many sighs,  
Of pain-shod ways;  
Mother of resolute feet  
Through all the thorns,  
Mother soul-strong, soul-sweet,-  
Lo, after storms  
Have broken and beat thy dust  
For a hundred years,  
Thy memory is made just,  
And the just man hears.  
Thy children kneel and repeat:  
"Though dust be dust,  
Though sod and coffin and sheet  
And moth and rust  
Have folded and molded and pressed,  
Yet they cannot kill;  
In the heart of the world at rest  
She liveth still.

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<sup>(7)</sup> Anarchist Poet Voltairine de Cleyre, Cobden Press, San Francisco, Philadelphia, April 27th, 1893



## *Brian Morris*

# On Mary Wollstonecraft

Early in 1796, William Godwin's personal life took a sudden turn. He was invited to tea, along with Thomas Holcroft, by a friend, and there, he met Mary Wollstonecraft. They had already met some five years before at a dinner party given by the publisher Joseph Johnson. They apparently did not hit it off, as Godwin found her incessant conversation irritating as he had come to listen to Thomas Paine. They met again several times after that but appear to have generated in each other only a mild mutual dislike. But in 1796, things turned out differently. Godwin, aged forty and still a bachelor was then at the height of his fame, having three years before published his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Wollstonecraft was thirty-seven and her life over the past decade had been one where she was continually confronted with personal crisis and economic instability.

Like Godwin, Wollstonecraft was a professional writer, and after early employment as a governess for wealthy families, had established herself as a writer of distinction. She had travelled widely meeting Babeuf, Madame Roland and many of the Girondins in France and was actively involved in the circle of radical intellectuals that gathered around the publisher Joseph Johnson. Besides Godwin, the circle included Paine, William Blake and Joseph Priestley, the famous chemist and radical. In 1792, she published her famous *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. This study is widely recognised as the first major feminist text, and according to Godwin was written hastily in six weeks. It has been described as something of an 'extravaganza' and as lacking any logical structure, but Wollstonecraft's passion and energy clearly vibrate through its pages. Though influenced by Rousseau, much of the work entails a refutation of Rousseau's theories about women, for the philosopher saw a state of dependence as being natural to women. Her biographer Claire Tomalin sums up the content of the study in the following:

The theme is this: that women are human beings before they are sexual beings, that mind has no sex, and that society is wasting its assets if it retains women in the role of convenient domestic slaves and 'alluring mistresses', denies them economic independence and encourages them to be docile and attentive to their looks to the exclusion of all else. (1974; 136)

But within the study Wollstonecraft also made incisive criticisms of monarchy and aristocracy, of standing armies – which she argued were incompatible with freedom – and of the Church.

After an unsatisfactory relationship with a Swiss painter named Fuseli, Wollstonecraft had gone to Paris at the end of 1792. There, she met an American army captain Gilbert Imlay, with whom she fell in love. They lived together for a while and she was called 'Mrs Imlay', though they never married. They were tragically incompatible, and Imlay soon deserted her, although they were together when she gave birth to their daughter Fanny, who was born in May 1794 in Le Havre. Imlay left for London, and Wollstonecraft, along with the baby, soon followed only to

find that he had set up house with another woman. Wollstonecraft was distraught, and in October 1795 attempted to commit suicide — for a second time — by leaping into the Thames from Putney Bridge. Somehow she was rescued. Only three months later, she renewed her acquaintance with Godwin. This time a warm friendship developed, and though both were clearly hesitant and uncertain at first, they eventually became lovers. By the end of the year, Mary had become pregnant again, but feeling apprehensive and unable to face ostracism of continuing to be an unmarried mother, she asked Godwin to marry her. Although marriage was seen by Godwin as an 'affair of property' and he thought too close attachments as unjust, he nevertheless agreed. They were thus married in March 1797 at old St. Pancras Church. Although they were very different in temperament their marriage seems to have been a happy one. But it was tragically short-lived, for Mary Wollstonecraft died in September shortly after giving birth to their daughter Mary. Her last words were about Godwin: 'He is the kindest, best man in the world', she said. Godwin never really got over the loss of his first and greatest love. He was heart-broken. He shortly afterwards wrote a frank, honest, and sensitive portrait of Mary as *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Women* — which acted as a consolation and a catharsis. In the *Memoirs*, he indicated the enormous emotional and intellectual debt that he owed to Wollstonecraft. Peter Marshall has stressed that many important changes that he made to the subsequent editions of *Political Justice* were largely due to Wollstonecraft's influence — the importance of feelings as a source of human action and the central place of pleasure in his ethics (1984; 193). Godwin's attempt to tell the truth about his wife with sympathy and honesty only led to further abuse regarding his character. But Wollstonecraft's important contribution not only to feminism, but also to the anarchist cause should not be overlooked.

For important studies of Mary Wollstonecraft see

Flexner, E. 1972 *Mary Wollstonecraft* New York, Coward McCall

Nixon, E. 1971 *Mary Wollstonecraft: her life and times* London, Dent

Tomalin, C. 1974 *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* Harmondsworth, Penguin

## *Gillian Fleming* **Louise Michel**

Louise Michel was born on 29 May 1830 at the chateau of Vroncourt in the Haute-Marne. She was an only and illegitimate child. Her mother, Marianne Michel, was a servant of peasant origin; her father was probably the owner of the chateau, or the owner's son, a family of liberal lawyers with noble rank.

Her childhood was unusually free for a girl. She describes herself in those days as 'tall, thin, prickly, wild and reckless, burned with the sun and often bedecked with rags fastened with pine needles'. Her impressions of the bloody-mindedness of rural life were to have a deep effect on the development of her republicanism, just as her experience of the Commune was to move her on towards anarchism.

She rejected two offers of marriage from 'old crocodiles', as she calls them, and after the death of her grandmother she and her mother were turned out of the chateau. She trained as a schoolteacher, gaining her diploma in 1852, the year Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* brought in the Second Empire. She opened a girls' school, got into trouble with the local préfet for her republican activities and settled later in Paris.

In 1868, towards the end of the Empire, she established her school at 24 rue Oudot. cannot say,' remarked a cautious Clemenceau, 'that this school was absolutely correct, in the sense in which it is understood at the Sorbonne... New methods were taught there randomly but at any rate it was teaching.' Indeed, Louise Michel's methods were new and well ahead of her time. The school in rue Oudot was not only republican in spirit but, at least where her own classes were concerned, libertarian also, with little or no enforced discipline. There were animals, there was a moss garden, and an emphasis on visual techniques. She believed it was possible to teach the most backward children, and that 'idiocy' or madness did not, or need not, exist.

Schoolteaching was then about the only pursuit open to young women of independent spirit and ambition, and in her writings Louise describes with feeling the hunger for knowledge and the unrecognised talents of those 'obscure bluestockings' who were her companions at that time.

Her own inexhaustible intellectual curiosity drew her to the study of mathematics (particularly algebra), music and science, the writing of poetry and novels and even the occasional opera. She kept up a regular correspondence with Victor Hugo and also took an active part in republican and women's rights groups.

The major turning-point in the life of Louise Michel came with the Paris Commune of 1871. The greatest urban insurrection of the nineteenth century, it managed to keep the Versailles-based National Government of Thiers at bay for 72 days, between 18 March and 28 May, and though this was too short a time to allow the *communards* to carry out any lasting measures of social reform, its ideals and achievements were to inspire successive generations of socialists, communists, and anarchists.

One of the most striking features of the Commune was the active role taken in it by the women of Paris. Louise's interest in feminism had already been awakened by her experience of the cultural oppression of her fellow schoolteachers, as well as by her wide-ranging studies and rejection of religion. In her history of the Commune, she dedicates a chapter to 'the women of 70', seeing in them some of 'the most implacable fighters who fought the invasion and defended the Republic'.

However, although she took part in and influenced them, her own role in women's activities during the Commune was not as prominent as that of contemporaries such as Elisabeth Dmitrieff, Nathalie Lemel, Elisabeth Retiffe, Beatrix Excoffon or many others in the Union of Women for the Defence of Paris, Care of the Wounded, and similar groups. Louise saw herself primarily as a soldier, and she fought with the men of the 61st battalion of Montmartre. The Commune saw her as a Joan of Arc figure, a warrior of exceptional strength and energy who had a 'strange influence' over her brothers in arms. Watching her one day, Clemenceau did not understand how she managed to survive even for a few hours.

During this time Louise became closely associated with the Blanquist and deputy police chief of the Commune, Theophile Ferre, who was to be executed after its fall. The details of the relationship between them remain obscure. She herself, unlike the police files of the time, was silent about it. The only really clear thing about her feelings for Ferri was their sublimation in her love of Revolution itself - a love which many saw as fanatic and mad, but which she interpreted herself as an aesthetic, almost sensual love of danger and adventure as well as of the ideals with which they were connected.

This intense romanticism can at least in part explain the extraordinary *anti* defence which she conducted at her trial on 16 December 1871 before the Versailles war council. She had given herself up to the authorities in order to secure the release of her mother, who had been taken hostage. Despite her continual taunting of the judges and passionate demands to die, as Ferré had done, her life was spared and she was sentenced to deportation in 'a fortified place', in other words, to the island of New Caledonia in the South Pacific. With a number of other deportees, Louise set sail on an old wreck of a frigate called the *Virginie*, and her long conversations during the voyage with her fellow *communards*, Nathalie Lemel and Henri Rochefort in particular, were crucial to her political development as an anarchist. In New Caledonia, a small anarchist group was formed, and it was only among the members of this group, to which Louise belonged, that any real sympathy was shown for the rising of the native Kanaks against the French colonists which took place during this time.

Ever passionately curious, Louise began to study the Kanak language, their legends and music, and gave them lessons not only in algebra, which she felt more suited to them than arithmetic, but in direct action and sabotage.

Despite her openly agitational activities, Louise Michel's sentence was commuted to *déportation simple* (10 years' banishment) in May 1879. Campaigning in France led to the granting of a pardon, but she refused to return until the declaration of a total amnesty of deportees in July 1880.

With five of her oldest cats - her Caledonian strays - she sailed home at last, eight years later, a convinced anarchist, something of a natural historian and an expert on Kanak culture. She returned to a rapturous welcome and, much to the chagrin of the government, at once began addressing political and feminist meetings. For the rest of her life, she was under constant police surveillance. On 9 March 1883, less than three years after her return from the South Pacific, she

was arrested for taking part in a demonstration of unemployed workers, some of whom had en route pillaged a baker, crying 'Bread, work, or lead!' Louise Michel was charged with instigating the looting, and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Though torn apart with grief and anxiety over the imminent death of her mother, to whom she was devoted, she refused to appeal. She was pardoned in 1886 - against her will, because the others remained in prison.

Prison itself, she commented, was less hard to bear than the efforts of her friends to release her, in the sense that 'a male prisoner has but to fight against his situation; a female prisoner not only has to bear the same situation, but also the complications [caused by] the interventions of friends who ascribe to her every weakness, stupidity and folly'. Virtually forced out of prison, she resumed her subversive activities and in 1890 escaped further harassment by departing for London, where she remained for five years. During this time, she set up a libertarian International School for the children of political refugees and, among others, met Peter Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta and Emma Goldman. On leaving England she embarked upon an unceasing round of European capitals, preaching the social revolution. On 22 January 1888 at Le Havre, she was several times shot by a Breton named Pierre Lucas, for whose acquittal she worked as generously as Voltairine de Cleyre would later do for *her* would-be assassin. On 10 January 1905, at Marseille, while in the middle of a speaking tour, she died. Her funeral was attended by 100,000 people. It happened to take place on the same day as the massacre of St. Petersburg, which marked the beginning of the first Russian Revolution.

It has been said of Louise Michel (as of Emma Goldman) that her life was a work of art. Yet, if this is meant as a compliment - and both Hugo and Verlaine wrote poems about her - it could also be taken to imply a lack of intellectual substance. Few people, when they mention Louise Michel, refer to anything beyond the image of the exalted mystic, the 'transcendant' revolutionary, the fiery 'petroleuse with the heart of a forget-me-not' (to quote *Le Monde*). Has her contribution to the anarchist and feminist movements been unjustly neglected or simplified, or was she too romantic, too melodramatic even, to be taken seriously?

Louise Michel, it is true, lacked an analytical mind, a critical intelligence. She never really shed all trace of Blanquism. her history of the Commune is disappointing from an anarchist viewpoint in that it makes no attempt to grapple with the development and implications of the conflict between the Jacobin/Blanquist 'majority' and the more libertarian socialist 'minority' within the Commune, or to describe in any detail the social experiments which the Commune carried out. Her conversion to anarchism is described in terms of poetry, and tends to mystification. While in later life she gave unqualified support to the classic principles of anarchist communism (as outlined in the Anarchist Manifesto of Lyon, which she reproduces in her memoirs) she is also drawn both to nihilism and to syndicalism, while her writings lack coherence, being above all the product of impulse and veering between the prosaic and the surreal.

But if she is not a theorist, she is most certainly the exponent of one single and supreme idea: that freedom is the most important aim of revolution, and that it is indivisible. 'The fact is,' she said, 'that everything goes together.' And if this is hardly an original thought, rarely can anyone have lived or expressed this conviction more thoroughly, or with such integrity. It meant that as a revolutionary Louise Michel was what most *communards* were not - an anti-racist and a feminist; and it also meant that as an anti-racist and a feminist she was (unlike most of us still) an animal liberationist too. These various vanguard positions were linked to her quite extraordinary imaginative powers.

Louise Michel was, in all probability, the first woman of any significance to link women's liberation with anarchism. In the declining days of the Second Empire, she took the name of Enjolras to join with other women in fighting the anti-feminism of Proudhon, Michelet and other progressives of the age. In later years, after becoming an anarchist, she was able not only to challenge the Proudhonian view of woman as domestic animal, but to stress the danger of the belief that liberation would come to women through the conquest of political, cultural, and economic rights, as opposed to the achievement of libertarian communist revolution.

Louise Michel had long been concerned with the problems of working women and with the aim of helping them live by the fruits of their own labour. The feminist struggle against prostitution (which she believed that women were forced into, but from which they alone could deliver themselves) was a particular concern of hers and her 'heart bled' for the many prostitutes who not only fought (and died) on the barricades of Paris but had to fight for the *right* to fight because of their 'uncleanness' in the eyes of the male revolutionaries.

She was full of admiration for the women of the Commune who 'did not ask whether something was possible, but whether it was useful, the succeeded in doing it' - in contrast to the interminable wrangling of the men. She refers to the women's ambulance work, their vigilance committees, their workshops and soup kitchens, as well as to their fighting on the barricades. On her return from exile, she continued her feminist work, involving herself in the League of Women, advocating women's strikes for equal pay and a shorter working day, while at the same time warning of the danger of believing that the right to work in a factory instead of a home would of itself free women more than it had freed men. Her anarchism came in, on one hand, in her intention of arousing awareness of feminist ideas through a structure of federated but autonomous women's groups throughout France, and on the other, in her insistence that such ideas could not be separated from the wider context of antimilitarism and anti-state revolution.

Louise Michel saw women as a 'caste', the word conveying perhaps a more radical and more profoundly cultural separateness than the word 'class'. 'Man, whoever he is,' she writes, 'is master; we are the intermediary beings between man and beast whom Proudhon classed as housewife or courtesan. I admit, always with sorrow, that we are a caste set apart, rendered such through the ages.' But, though man is master, he is basically as much a slave as woman. And since he cannot give what he himself lacks, how is it possible for woman to demand it of him? Woman has to bring about her own freedom, even though, in the circumstances it requires a hundred times more courage of her than of him; even though 'Today, when men weep, women must remain dry-eyed'. And if she can't obtain it from man because man is a slave too, the only solution is to overthrow the main instrument of slavery itself: the state.

As an anarchist and feminist, Louise Michel refused to stand as a woman's candidate in the elections, although nominated. 'Politics,' she writes, 'is a form of stupidity.' Universal suffrage is a 'prayer to the deaf gods of all mythologies'. She continues, 'I cannot oppose the women's candidates in that they are an affirmation of the equality of men and women. But I must ... repeat to you that women must not separate their cause from that of humanity, but take a militant part in the great revolutionary army.'

Thus, it is clear that, like Emma Goldman, Louise Michel was no separatist and I think that she would have been appalled at Marian Leighton's statement that '...anarcho-feminism's primary commitment is and should be to the radical feminist movement with only marginal participation in anarchist movement politics...' (see her *Anarcho-Feminism and Louise Michel*). But beyond the rejection of the separateness of these movements, and beyond her espousal of anarchist commu-

nism in general, what is the Revolution for Louise Michel? What is the uniqueness, if any, of her view of it?

Louise the charismatic firebrand is only one aspect, for, just as importantly, she is the aesthete and the (albeit desultory) scholar.

Seek in her work what revolution means for her, and time and again it is to be found expressed in terms of art and science or science fantasy; a revolutionary artistic and scientific experience which, freed from the shackles of State power and political and economic exploitation, stripped of its contemporary inessentials and abuses, will develop, and multiply forms which we can barely comprehend.

Today only her autobiography and her history of the Commune can be easily obtained (and these are still untranslated into English). Most of her novels and plays, if not lost entirely to the four winds, are buried in the depths of the *Bibliothèque nationale* and other libraries and museums; her musical compositions have undergone a separate fate; her poems express a passion and romanticism long out of fashion. Yet it is in this lost work that one finds a part of her rarely mentioned, a very dark side, a pervasive sense of violence and cruelty which is at least as important an element of her attitude to revolution as her millenarian optimism; and which is an essential part of the liberating process.

Her opera, *Le Rêve des Sabbats*, provides an example. It is no less than the story of the destruction of the earth in an infernal war between Satan and Don Juan for the love of a druidess. In the process the planet crumbles, and mind is assimilated into matter to the orchestral accompaniment of harmonicas, flutes, lyres, horns, guitars, and a devils' choir of 20 violins! Placed on the valley floor, surrounded by mountains, the audience is a part of this cosmic experience.

Louise Michel was well aware of the 'monstrosity' (her word) of this and similar works and she describes them in her memoirs with obvious humour, yet it is in terms of such an opera that she sees the Revolution - a whole, terrible, exhilarating and aesthetic experience, brought out of the concert halls and theatres into real life. She herself always acted to the full, to the point of Dadaism, and not without amusement and self-mockery, a role in one of these bizarre, fantastical creations. She is, yes, the mystic, but also and above all the artist, because of the power of her imagination, because of the sudden flashes of sheer beauty in the tangled undergrowth of her work, because these are what are most important to her. Far more in fact than the mystic, Louise Michel is the *aesthete* of Revolution. 'They say I'm brave,' she writes, 'the fact is, that in the idea, the setting of danger, my artist's senses are entrapped and charmed...' Or 'It was beautiful, that's all; my eyes served me like my heart, like my ears charmed by the cannon...' Or again, 'I loved the incense as I loved the smell of hemp; the smell of gunpowder as I loved the smell of the lianas in the Caledonian forests'.

She is always gambling, playing games with the danger from which she draws nourishment. Just as, one night, she had turned on the man who was following her (she describes his shadow in the light of the street lamps as that of a 'fantastic bird' perched on tall heron legs) and terrified him into flight by chanting, like swearwords, the letters of the 'Danel method of notation' (D,B,L,S,F,N,R,D) so too, during the Commune, she plays a symphony of revolution on some half-broken organ in some half-ruined church in the midst of bursting shells, terrifying and angering her companions.

Everything for Louise is an experience with its own poetry - even the procession to likely death at Satory, even the voyage of deportation - as important for the beauty of its images as for the fact of her conversion to anarchism, or the distinct probability that she would never again

have seen those she loved: her mother, Marie Ferre. The passages on the New Caledonia are sheer prose poetry - among the most splendid and memorable of their kind that exist about the place. It is from this time that her concept of the new, anarchic world began to form, a concept inseparable from her physical experience of the world of the South Pacific. It is a world of living poetry, of science fiction turned fact, when fleets cross the sky and seabed, among submarine and sky-cities like the severed space-cities of late 20th century futurology. Even if it's only a legend that it was Louise Michel who gave Jules Verne the idea for the *Nautilus*, the legend itself is significant!

In the following extracts from her writings, I have tried within narrow confine to give as broad a view as possible of an extremely rich and complex personality. None of these pieces has the usual character of the political tract because, inevitably, the rambling, urgent, lyrical style characteristic of her does not allow it. But I have tried to show the main facets - the feminist, the anarchist, the poet, prophetess and artist of revolution - Louise whose most important contribution to our movement was, I think, both to unite it with the women's *and* animals' liberation, and to remind us that politics, science, and technology should never be separated from the poetic imagination.



## *Nicolas Walter*

### **Charlotte M. Wilson, 1854-1944**

Charlotte Wilson, the best-known of the group of middle-class intellectuals who played an important part in the emergence of the British anarchist movement during the 1880s, was the main founder and the first editor and publisher of *Freedom*, and the leading figure of the Freedom Group during its first decade.

Charlotte Mary Martin came from a professional family. She was born on 6 May 1854 at Kemerton, a village near Tewkesbury on the Gloucestershire-Worcestershire border. She was the only child of Robert Spencer Martin, a doctor and surgeon from a prominent local family, and of Clementina Susannah Davies, from a prosperous commercial and clerical family. She received the best education then available to girls, going to Cheltenham Ladies' College (where she was very unhappy) and then to Cambridge University (where she was very happy). From 1873 to 1874 she attended the new institution at Merton Hall which later became Newnham College (not, as has often been said, Girton College); she took the Higher Local Examination (roughly equivalent to the later GCE Advanced Level) at a time when women couldn't take university examinations or degrees at Cambridge.

In 1876 she married Arthur Wilson (a distant cousin, who was born in 1847, went to Wadham College, Oxford, and became a stockbroker in 1872), and they lived at first in Hampstead. After a process of political development which remains obscure, they both adopted progressive views. At the end of 1885 they adopted the fashionable 'simple life' by moving to Wyldes, a cottage in what was then open country at North End on the edge of Hampstead Heath, and she refused to live on her husband's earnings. She took part in the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, which was inspired by the Russian revolutionary exile Stepniak, and in the Men and Women's Club, which was organised by Karl Pearson to arrange frank discussion of sexual problems. But above all she took part in the socialist and anarchist movements. One of the elements in her political development was the mass trial of anarchists at Lyon in January 1883, at which Peter Kropotkin and dozens of French comrades were sent to prison, and which was widely reported in the British press. During the following year she became a public advocate of socialism and anarchism.

Her first known public political action was a letter about women workers which appeared in March 1884 in *Justice*, the paper of the Democratic Federation (later the Social Democratic Federation). But her progress on the left was extremely rapid. In October 1884 she joined the Fabian Society, which had been formed in January 1884 as a group of progressive intellectuals with ambitious ideas but no particular line, and she was the only woman elected to its first executive in December 1884. Her fellow members included such people as Annie Besant, Hubert Bland, Sydney Olivier, Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, and Sidney Webb, and she had no difficulty in holding her own with them. In the later memoirs of early Fabians, she is remembered mainly as a hostess, like Edith Nesbit, but she was in fact a leading member of the society for a couple of

years. Also, in October 1884 she formed a study group which met at her house to read and discuss the work of Continental socialists such as Marx and Proudhon (which was not then available in English) and the history of the international labour movement, and which provided much of the early philosophical and factual background for the lectures and pamphlets which became the main Fabian contribution to socialist propaganda.

Her particular contribution was to inspire an anarchist fraction within the Fabian Society. As Shaw put it with his customary exaggeration in the first of his unreliable histories of the society, when she joined 'a sort of influenza of Anarchism soon spread through the Society' (*The Fabian Society: What It Has Done and How It Has Done It*, 1892). In fact, the fraction didn't have much influence, and it didn't last long, but for a time it was significant. In November 1884 she gave a talk on anarchism to the Fabian Society which was the basis of four articles signed 'An English Anarchist' (*Justice*, 8 November - 6 December 1884). This was one of the first English-language expositions of anarchist communism at a time when virtually none of Kropotkin's writings had appeared in English.

During 1886 she published three important essays: 'Social Democracy and Anarchism', another talk given to the Fabian Society during 1885 and published in the first issue of *The Practical Socialist*, the short-lived paper of the Fabian Society (January 1886); 'The Principles and Aims of Anarchists', a talk given to the London Dialectical Society in June 1886 and published in one of the last issues of *The Present Day*, a short-lived secularist paper (July 1886); and half of a pamphlet called *What Socialism Is*, Fabian Tract number 4 (June 1886). The latter consisted of two parts — a section on 'Collectivism' (i.e., state socialism), which Friedrich Engels was invited but declined to write and which was instead extracted by Bernard Shaw from August Bebel's book *Women Under Socialism* (published in Germany in 1883); and a section on 'Anarchism', which was 'drawn up by C. M. Wilson on behalf of the London Anarchists'. The anonymous introduction (also by her) explained:

In other parts of the civilised world the economic problem has been longer and more scientifically discussed, and Socialist opinion has taken shape in two distinct schools, Collectivist and Anarchist. English Socialism is not yet Anarchist or Collectivist, not yet definite enough in point of policy to be classified. There is a mass of Socialistic feeling not yet conscious of itself as Socialism. But when the unconscious Socialists of England discover their position, they also will probably fall into two parties: a Collectivist party supporting a strong central administration, and a counterbalancing Anarchist party defending individual initiative against that administration. In some such fashion, progress and stability will probably be secured under Socialism by the conflict of the ineradicable Tory and Whig instincts in human nature. In view of this probability, the theories, and ideals of both parties, as at present formulated, are set forth below.

Charlotte Wilson's essay, putting libertarian against authoritarian socialism, ended as follows:

Anarchism is not a Utopia, but a faith based upon the scientific observation of social phenomena. In it the individualist revolt against authority, handed down to us through Radicalism and the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, and the Socialist revolt against private ownership of the means of production, which is the foundation of Collectivism, find their common issue. It is a moral and intellectual protest against the

unreality of a society which, as Emerson says, 'is everywhere in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members'. Its one purpose is by direct personal action to bring about a revolution in every department of human existence, social, political, and economic. Every man owes it to himself and to his fellows to be free.

In all this work she repudiated any claim to originality, and repeated that she was simply translating into English terminology the anarchist communism already developed on the Continent, especially by Peter Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus, and was merely speaking on behalf of her fellow anarchists in Britain. In fact, it isn't clear how far she really spoke for the growing anarchist movement in general. She doesn't seem to have had much contact with the working-class militants in the growing trade unions and socialist organisations. Henry Seymour, a former secularist who had become an anarchist individualist, with whom she collaborated and later quarrelled in 1886, discounted her contact with anyone. When she attended a Fabian Congress in June 1886 as a representative of the 'London Anarchist Group of Freedom', he suggested that she probably did so only in the sense that she had written her contribution to the Fabian Tract 'on behalf of the London Anarchists'; and he commented: 'Unfortunately she admitted in my presence that she wrote on her own behalf only, and without consulting the London Anarchists at all.'

But she was certainly the leader of the anarchists in the Fabian Society. On 17 September 1886, the Society organised a meeting at Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street, where representatives of the various socialist organisations in London debated the question of forming an orthodox political party on the Continental model. A motion to this effect was proposed by Annie Besant (the former colleague of Charles Bradlaugh in the National Secular Society, and later successor of Madame Blavatsky in the Theosophical Society) and seconded by Hubert Bland (husband of Edith Nesbit). William Morris (the leading member of the Socialist League, and the best-known socialist in Britain) proposed and Charlotte Wilson seconded the following amendment:

But whereas the first duty of Socialists is to educate people to understand what their present position is and what the future might be, and to keep the principles of socialism steadily before them; and whereas no Parliamentary party can exist without compromise and concession, which would hinder that education and obscure those principles: it would be a false step for Socialists to attempt to take part in the Parliamentary contest.

The parliamentarians defeated the anti-parliamentarians by a two-to-one majority, and the Fabian Society — and the bulk of the British socialist movement — was set on the course which it has followed ever since. She resigned from the Fabian executive in April 1887, and took no active part in the society for two decades, though she maintained her membership. By that time, she had anyway committed herself entirely to the anarchist movement. She was closely involved in the first English-language anarchist paper, *The Anarchist*, which Henry Seymour produced from March 1885. She helped to start it, got Bernard Shaw to write, for its first issue, his famous article on anarchism. She contributed money and material to it for more than a year, and became the leading member of the 'English Anarchist Circle' which was formed around it. She corresponded with Kropotkin's wife while he was in prison in France, and when he was released in January 1886 he soon settled in England, partly as the result of an invitation from her group. For a time, they continued to work with Seymour, and the April and May issues of *The Anarchist* were produced

under 'conjoint editorship' as a journal of anarchist communism. But the experiment failed, the group parted from Seymour, *The Anarchist* reverted to individualism in June, and he published his attack on Charlotte Wilson in July. Relying on Kropotkin's cooperation and prestige and on Wilson's contacts and ability, the group decided to start a new anarchist paper on the model of Kropotkin's own paper *Le Révolté* (which started in Geneva in 1879, moved to Paris in 1885, and as *La Révolte* and then *Les Temps Nouveaux* remained the leading French anarchist paper until the First World War).

The first issue of *Freedom* was dated October 1886, though it was published in time for the Anderton's meeting, and the Freedom Group eventually became the Freedom Press, which for more than a century has remained the main publisher of anarchist literature in Britain. The most prominent person involved was of course Kropotkin, but Charlotte Wilson was the organiser of the group, the editor and publisher of *Freedom*, and its main supporter and contributor. She was normally responsible for the editorial article in each issue — such as the eloquent article on 'Freedom' which opened the first issue and has frequently been reprinted, and also for most of the political and international notes. She contributed few signed articles, signing herself austere as 'C.M.W.' or 'C. M. Wilson'; the most important of these was a series on 'The Revolt of the English Workers in the XIX Century' (June-September 1889). During her editorship she attracted a remarkable group of contributors, including Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Edith Nesbit, Henry Nevinson, Sydney Olivier, Bernard Shaw, and Ethel Voynich, as well as many obscure but devoted anarchists. She was also involved in establishing discussion meetings in London and local groups outside, and for a few years she was an active lecturer and debater at various kinds of meetings all over the country.

As well as *Freedom* itself, she helped to produce a series of Freedom Pamphlets from 1889 onwards, editing and translating some of them and writing one herself. Freedom Pamphlet number 8 was *Anarchism and Outrage*, a reprint of her unsigned *Freedom* editorial of December 1893, explaining the anarchist view of terrorism at the time of the bomb scare on the Continent (reprinted again in 1909 at the time of the judicial murder of Francisco Ferrer in Spain). She emphasised that homicidal outrage is not part of anarchism, either in theory or in practice, but that it has sometimes been perpetrated by anarchists as by other political groups, and that while anarchists condemn such actions, they do not condemn those who are driven to take them.

In January 1889 *Freedom* was temporarily suspended because of her illness, and when it was resumed in March 1889 it was edited by James Blackwell with the help of 'a committee of workmen'. When Blackwell left, she took over again in February 1891 and continued for another four years, with occasional gaps because of illness, when Nannie Dryhurst deputised for her. In January 1895 *Freedom* was temporarily suspended again because of illness in her family. This time she resigned permanently as both editor and publisher, and when the paper was revived, in May 1895, it was edited by Alfred Marsh, who continued for two decades. She ceased to take an active part in the group, though she kept in touch and continued to contribute money and material for a few years, and in particular she produced the draft for 'A Brief History of *Freedom*', an anonymous account of the paper's beginnings (December 1900).

She took no part in left-wing politics for a decade, during which both her parents died, and when she did resume political activity, she returned not to the anarchists but to the Fabians. In 1905 the Wilsons moved to St John's Wood, and in 1906 she became involved in the Society again. In 1908, at the time of the rise of the militant campaign for women's suffrage, she was the main founder of the Fabian Women's Group, which met at her home, and she was its first secretary.

and most active member until she resigned because of illness in 1916. The group did much research and campaigning work for women. She was again a member of the Fabian executive from 1911 until 1914. She also joined the Independent Labour Party and several other parliamentary organisations.

But by the time of the First World War, she left politics altogether. By then she had settled in the country near Reading; at the end of the First World War, she was honorary secretary of the Prisoner of War Fund of the Oxford & Buckinghamshire Regiment. Her husband died in 1932, and she was looked after until her death by their distant cousin, Gerald Rankin. They went to the United States, and she died in an old people's home at Irvington-on-Hudson on 28 April 1944, a few days before her 90th birthday.

For a decade Charlotte Wilson was the best-known native anarchist in Britain. Her work as a writer and speaker was distinguished by reticence, reliability, and respectability; she always remained very much an intellectual, and very much in the background. She steered her way between the militants and the moderates in the anarchist movement, but she was definitely a communist rather than an individualist, and she later moved from revolutionary to parliamentary socialism. It is notable that when she concentrated on anarchism she showed little interest in feminism, and that when she concentrated on feminism, she showed no interest in anarchism. Her particular contribution to *Freedom* and the Freedom Press was to set them up and to set them on their way as a serious paper and publisher with a solid basis, providing a model which they have tried to follow ever since.

She has been little more than mentioned by historians of British socialism — usually inaccurately — but for a decade she was a familiar figure on the left. She was frequently reported in the socialist and liberal press at the time, and she was frequently remembered in subsequent memoirs of the period. Socialists were generally hostile but respectful, but liberals tended to be patronising as well. A good example is an anonymous report of her contribution to the meeting at South Place commemorating the Paris Commune on 17 March 1887:

... a slender person, bordering on middle age, but on the right side of the border, dressed becomingly in black, and with hair trained forward in an ordered mass to form a sort of frame of jet for a thin thoughtful face. The type is the South Kensington or British Museum art-student, the aesthete with 'views', and Mrs. Wilson quite realised it as to the views. She was decidedly anarchical. ... What she did say was delivered with great clearness of enunciation, with great purity of accent, with a certain appearance of effort, not to say of fatigue, as though the hall taxed her voice beyond its powers, and with the monotonous calm that is perhaps the most common outward sign of the born fanatic. She was quite womanly and lady-like to use the good old-fashioned word. ... (*Daily News*, 18 March 1887)

She also became the model for characters in several political novels. The best-known of these is Gemma in *The Gadfly* (1897), a romantic evocation by Ethel Voynich of the Italian Risorgimento, in which she is an Englishwoman living in Italy who is small and dark, quiet, and calm, and the heart and soul of a Republican group in Florence; but the book says nothing interesting about her true character. (Incidentally, the occasional claim that Charlotte Wilson was the lover of Kropotkin seems to be derived from recollections of Ethel Voynich in old age.) A more direct but very brief portrait appears in *A Girl Among the Anarchists* (1903), a satirical evocation by 'Isobel

Meredith' (the pseudonym of Helen and Olivia Rossetti) of the bomb era of the early 1890s in which the authors were involved. Charlotte Wilson is introduced as Mrs Trevillian, 'an aesthetic, fascinating little lady', but she plays no part in the plot.

The most striking portrait appears in *The Anarchists* (1891), an ideological 'Picture of Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century' by John Henry Mackay, a German-Scottish follower of Max Stirner who was active in the British anarchist movement during the 1880s. The autobiographical hero Auban describes the various tendencies and personalities in the movement, and includes in his account of the meeting of 14 October 1887 at South Place protesting against the impending execution of the Chicago Anarchists the following description of Charlotte Wilson:

Beside the table on the platform was standing a little woman dressed in black. Beneath her brow which was half hidden as by a wreath by her thick, short-cropped hair, shone a pair of black eyes beaming with enthusiasm. The white ruffle and the simple, almost monk-like, long, undulating garment, seemed to belong to another century. A few only in the meeting seemed to know her; but whoever knew her, knew also that she was the most faithful, the most diligent, and the most impassioned champion of Communism in England. ... She was not a captivating speaker, but her voice had that iron ring of unalterable conviction and honesty which often moves the listener more powerfully than the most brilliant eloquence.

More than a century later, that epitaph may stand unchanged.

## Note

Charlotte Wilson's writings have been almost totally neglected. Fabian Tract number 4 was never reprinted, but her own contribution was reprinted as the first Free Commune pamphlet in 1900 and has occasionally been reprinted by the anarchist press since then. All the 1886 essays were reprinted in a pamphlet as *Three Essays on Anarchism* (Cienfuegos Press 1979, Drowned Rat 1985). Charlotte Wilson's life has also been generally neglected. References to her appear in letters, memoirs, or biographies of her contemporaries, and in accounts of the Fabian Society and of British anarchism. There is an unpublished biography by Hermia Oliver, and an academic thesis by Susan Hinely *Charlotte Wilson: Anarchist, Fabian, and Feminist* (Stanford University, 1986). See also 'Freedom: People and Places' (*Freedom: A Hundred Years*, October 1986) and 'Notes on *Freedom* and the Freedom Press, 1886-1928' (*The Raven* 1, April 1987). The present article is a revised and expanded version of the introduction to *Three Essays on Anarchism* and of the article on Charlotte Wilson in *Freedom: A Hundred Years*.

**Vernon Richards**  
**I**  
**Lilian Wolfe**  
**On her 90th birthday**

Few readers of *Freedom* over the past years have not received at some time or other a hand-written communication, or a printed card, bearing the signature 'L.G. Wolfe' or just the initials 'LGW'.<sup>(8)</sup> But how many could have guessed that the hand that guides the steady pen is that of a person who this week, on December 22, celebrates her 90th birthday and that for a half a century she has been associated with the anarchist and anti-war movements and in particular with the work of Freedom Press?

When Lilian Wolfe contacted the Freedom Press in 1914, she was active in the post-office workers' movement (she had been employed in the Telegraphs section for about twenty years and, as she told me the other night, 'hated every minute of it'). She and other friends had in mind a publication, anarchist-inspired, but dealing more with the day-to-day problems of organised labour than did the monthly journal *Freedom*. Tom Keell was invited to attend their meeting with a watching brief for Freedom Press. Lilian recalls that he remained silent throughout their discussions until just before the end of the meeting when in a few minutes he dealt with all the questions they had been trying to deal with most unsuccessfully, and put them clearly and simply, in fact in 'a nut-shell' says Lilian, and to this day she recalls her reaction which was 'why couldn't he have spoken sooner'! Anyway, the *Voice of Labour*, a halfpenny weekly, made its first appearance in 1914, from the same offices as *Freedom*, and I assume that Lilian's association with the FP dates from then, and was also the beginning of her association with Tom Keell, *Freedom's* editor and printer.

### **Anarchism and the 1914-18 war**

1914 was not the best year to decide to join the anarchist movement! The war not only destroyed the socialist movement and any international links joining the working class, but also created serious problems for the anarchist movement internationally as a result of the pro-war attitude adopted by a minority, among them some of the best-known propagandists, such as Kropotkin, Jean Grave and Cherkosov. Keell handled a difficult and dangerous situation with tact and fairness so far as the pro-war minority faction were concerned. Probably the final break with them followed the publication in *Freedom* in November 1914 of Malatesta's reply to Kropotkin:

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<sup>(8)</sup> Published in *Freedom*, December 25, 1965.

'Anarchists have forgotten their principles' which was, as it were, a last appeal to common sense. According to Woodcock and Avakumovic in *The Anarchist Prince*:

Kropotkin was not moved by this appeal of an old friend, and the other letters exposing his inconsistency merely drove him to fury. In order to try and settle the dispute, Keell, then editor of *Freedom*, went down to Brighton to talk with him. He was received angrily in a room where flags of the allies stood on the mantelpiece, and was subjected to a fierce barrage from Kropotkin, who complained of 'offensive personal letters' in *Freedom* and accused Keell of not having the courage to reject such contributions, and therefore being no good as an editor. Since there was nobody to take his place, Kropotkin suggested that *Freedom* should cease publication ... The dispute over *Freedom* continued and Cherkosov called a meeting to which he invited only the members who shared his and Kropotkin's view on the war. Keell attended as editor, but no other active London anarchist was called ... All the supporters of the war childishly refused to speak to Keell when he arrived, and a very violent discussion ensued. All except Keell wanted *Freedom* to be suspended; he said he would continue it as an anti-war paper until he was censured by a general meeting of active anarchists. Cherkosov then forgot himself so far as to shout: 'Who are you? You are our servant!'

The meeting broke up in disagreement but, as the authors point out, the final result was that *Freedom* went on being published as 'the organ of the considerable anti-war majority'.

In an envelope containing letters Keell received during this difficult period, I found one which I would like to think did more than any other he received to encourage him to resist the anarchist 'patriots'. It is short, to the point and *very* determined:

Dear Comrade,

At the meeting with Kropotkin and Tcherkessoff do please remember that *you* have the backing of those who are 'knocking at the door' and try to forget the slighting things which were done and said — I feel sure they were simply the outcome of their wounded vanity and ignorance of the facts (re *Freedom*) for the past two years.

As to style of writing — yours may not be the *same* as that of Mr. Marsh but I, for one, would be glad of more matter in *Freedom* in your simple and direct language.

Honestly, I think you can afford to sit back and smile.

And you won't, for a moment, entertain dropping *Freedom*, will you? If the old writers throw it over — well, new blood will do it no harm.

So cheer up!

Yours fraternally,

Lilian Woolf.

## **'Prejudicing recruiting and discipline'**

In 1915 Lilian Wolfe was one of the signatories to an *International Anarchist Manifesto on the War*, an uncompromising restatement of the anarchists' opposition to all wars, and which was



issued as a leaflet in several languages. In 1916 she and Tom Keell were arrested and charged under the Defence of the Realm Act 'with making statements likely to prejudice recruiting and discipline'. *The Times* (June 16, 1916) quoted the prosecutor as saying that 'a compositor would say that he had seen Miss Woolf interesting herself in the production of the papers [*Freedom* and the *Voice of Labour*] and according to other reports in the *Observer* and the *News of the World* she was concerned with the issuing of 10,000 anti-conscription leaflets, the distribution of which, according to the prosecution, was 'prejudicial to recruiting and Army discipline'. Apparently a 'duplicate letter' addressed 'Dear comrade' and suggesting the 'judicious

distribution' of the leaflet 'anywhere where it would be seen by many people' accompanying the leaflet was signed by our Lilian who, I am delighted to learn from the *Observer* report, was also said to have written a letter 'on April 21 [1916] to a Mr. Malatesta, addressing him as "dear Comrade" and asking him to leave the pamphlets in trains, trams, letter-boxes, waiting rooms, public-houses, factories and anywhere where they would be seen'. Keell, I am sure, for strategic reasons, pleaded Not Guilty. Lilian, and I can just see her, pleaded Guilty. She was fined £25 or two months in prison to which, according to the *News of the World* report, her reaction was that 'she would not think of paying'.

*Freedom* struggled on during the difficult post-World War I years, and though Lilian had meantime moved to Whiteway Colony she still came down to London every weekend to work in Freedom Press office, until 1927 when publications ceased, and Tom Keell moved to Whiteway where he continued the Freedom Press book service and issued occasional *Freedom Bulletins* until his death in 1938. His action was much criticised by some anarchists at the time, and all kinds of accusations levelled at him and Lilian over a number of years. I do not propose to go into the details, and if I have introduced the subject, it is not in order to revive incidents long dead and buried but because in fact it adds to the significance of Lilian Wolfe's contribution to anarchist propaganda in the second phase of her political life as well as to her stature as a person.

## The Spanish War and anarchists

The Spanish revolution in 1936 inspired a resurgence of anarchist hopes and propaganda. If I introduce a personal note here it is to underline one of Lilian's outstanding qualities as a propagandist: her encouragement of young people to express themselves, to act, to make mistakes *but to do something*. I felt passionately this way in 1936 and I now record with pleasure that of the four people to whom I revealed my intentions, three were the 'barbus' — the French slang for the 'old boys' — of the movement as I saw them at the time: Max Nettleau, Tom Keell and Max Sartin, editor of the halo-American weekly *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*. All three showered me with encouragement, their collaboration and their contacts, and never did they make me aware of their years of activity and experience in the movement.

Lilian Wolfe, to this day, is the spokeswoman for the young, an active supporter of the Committee of 100, and for all initiatives that spring from the efforts of young people. She is, rightly, more tolerant of their mistakes than she is of those of adults. She obviously hopes that the young will be less stupid, more imaginative, more daring, more unconventional than their elders. This is the only positive, forward-looking approach. To assume otherwise is to condemn mankind to stagnation and to invalidate all progressive thought, including anarchism.

But to return to my main subject! After Franco's military victory in 1939, several hundred refugees landed on our shores. A number of them went to Whiteway and Lilian was involved in the arrangements, and in raising the funds required for their keep. A few months later World War II broke out and Freedom Press again proclaimed its opposition to wars between nations with the publication of a duplicated monthly journal *War Commentary* at the end of 1939 which, in view of the immediate success it enjoyed, was printed as from the second issue. Lilian from Whiteway was watching, encouraging, and helping. She was still, in her late sixties, working for a living and cycled every day to Stroud where she ran a Health Food store. Then in 1942 (?) we received a letter from her at Freedom Press (we may yet find it) the gist of which was that she thought we must be overwhelmed with office work and that if we wanted her services, she was prepared to sell her business and come to London and work in the office. We welcomed her offer, and this was the beginning of what I consider to be Lilian's most important contribution to the work of Freedom Press.

## **The sheet anchor**

For twenty years Lilian was the sheet anchor of Freedom Press's administration. Popular history is unfair in that it analyses and notes what the writers write and say, but overlooks what the inarticulate (that is, the non-writers) actually *do* and *contribute* to a movement. During those twenty years you will not find Lilian's name among the contributors to *Freedom*; for the historian she does not exist. Yet she has in that time written thousands of letters, notes, postcards, and acknowledgements, which have made some kind of personal contact with the people to whom they have been addressed.

For family reasons she had to return to live in Cheltenham about three years ago and it seemed that this long active association with Freedom Press had come to an end. But not at all: as soon as she was free from her family commitments, Lilian was back on the Cheltenham-London coach, and has been coming to London every week since, giving two valuable days' work in the office.

On behalf of all of us at Freedom Press, and comrades, readers, and friends throughout the world, I extend to our dear friend and comrade the warmest greetings and the expression of our admiration for her courage, her tenacity and her example to others, on this, her 90th anniversary. We wish her many more years in good health and spirits and if I may quote from her letter to Keell more than 50 years ago 'And you won't for a moment entertain dropping *Freedom*, will you?' Our love to you, Lilian!

## II

# Remembering Lilian 1875 - 1974

When Lilian Wolfe came to London in 1943 to help us at Freedom Press deal with the growing volume of propaganda we were engaged in and the growing requests for our literature, it is hard to realise that she was already then in her 68th year.<sup>(9)</sup> In order to join us wholeheartedly she handed over her Health Food shop in Stroud to the person who had been her assistant there and in due course arrived at Belsize Road where we had a first floor flat with three large rooms and a kitchen; one room was fitted out for lecture meetings and for literature sales, another was the office and stock room and the third was the 'library' and also accommodated some of the stock. We offered Lilian the library for her personal use, but she would not hear of it and insisted on having the divan bed put in the small kitchen. And when we tried to discuss money matters with her, we were cut short by her assuring us that there was no problem. With her pension she could manage, adding 'I have budgeted to live until I am 80!'

These are only two out of many examples I would cite to illustrate Lilian's attitude to material things and the comforts of life. Long before her retirement from paid work she had settled for herself what were her material needs in life. Her approach, unlike that of the affluent society, was not 'What can I do with?' but 'What can I do without?'. For her, freedom was *time*, and the smaller her material demands the less time would she have to spend making the money to buy those things and the more time to do the things she wanted to do – including working for no money!

It is significant that in her working life – she started working at 17, as a telephonist for the GPO (General Post Office) – she seems always to have changed jobs when she was either due for promotion or had actually been promoted! As she put it to the Head of the department at the GPO – 'money does not mean much to me'.

Many comrades who met Lilian, especially when Freedom Press was in the Red Lion Street premises – a real slum property – must have considered her way of life too spartan, too uncompromising. I understood the secret of Lilian's ability to ignore her surroundings when she disliked them and could do nothing about it, for I had also seen with what real pleasure she would welcome congenial surroundings, and appreciated kindnesses shown to her by friends and hosts. Lilian lived her long life without a telephone of her own (though she worked for more than 20 years in telecommunications!), without a refrigerator, without a vacuum cleaner or a motor car. She must have written some tens of thousands of letters without a typewriter. When she ran the office at Freedom Press of course she used the telephone there; and until quite recently there was nothing she enjoyed more than a car-touring holiday here or on the Continent with her son, Tom. But when there was no phone, life went on just the same and she would simply write more

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<sup>(9)</sup> Published in *Freedom* 11th May 1974.

letters; and if there were no car, she would go on a coach holiday. And when she hadn't the means she didn't think of coach holidays and went for long walks instead.

Lilian was an avid reader, more of good literature than of anarchist texts. Her anarchism was in her heart more than in her head. She has said of herself 'I think I was born an anarchist, and events in my life just enabled me to realise that that was what I was'. I think it explains why she never contributed articles to the anarchist press but did what she could do, and did it as well as, if not better than, anybody has ever done it at Freedom Press: running the office and maintaining that vital and necessary contact between the publishing, propaganda group and its readers and supporters.

Today the radical and revolutionary movements teem with would-be editors, writers, publishers, and printers while very few people are prepared to engage in what are considered mundane administrative tasks. Yet it is the human contact between readers and propagandists which distinguishes our Press from the mass media and the commercial distributors. Lilian realised this clearly and her absence from the columns of *Freedom* was more than compensated by the hundreds of correspondents with whom she was in personal contact over the years, and the satisfaction she got from this work was enormous.

Before we can hope to set the world to rights, we must get our own values right. Lilian is one of the rare people I have known who did. Her long life was all of a piece.

# *John Hewetson*

## **Marie Louise Berneri: her contribution to Freedom Press**

At the time of her death, April 13, 1949, at the age of 31, Marie Louise Berneri had already won for herself a high place among present-day theoreticians of the anarchist movement, and exerted an influence usually attained only by much older comrades.<sup>(10)</sup>

This influence was the product not only of her mastery of a number of subjects, but also of her exceptional personal qualities, which lent to her writings, her public speaking and her private conversation a special distinction that drew immediate attention. These qualities caused her opinions to be regarded with respect also in circles which do not share her social and political views. Her personal beauty reflected her serene and generous nature, and made her an outstanding figure at any gathering.

Her loss to the anarchist movement cannot be measured, for it is not simply that of an outstanding militant; lost also is all that she would have accomplished in the future, in the growing maturity of her powers. And the world in general is also the poorer, for such rare and exceptional individuals enrich human life and make of the world a better place.

M.L.B.'s character and personality had a compelling effect upon those who came in contact with her, communicating a confidence in human nature and in life, simply by her bearing and her approach to problems. She herself was quite unconscious of this, for the modesty which was so natural to her always made her underestimate her own influence over others.

This influence was not limited to the circles reached by *Freedom* and its predecessors. Many writers and intellectuals — for example, those who met her through a common interest in the problems of the Spanish struggle — found themselves profoundly stimulated by her ideas, her exceptional powers in discussion, and her vitality. M.L.B. was not content to confine herself to the literary work of anarchist publishing, being quite unsparing of herself in the routine work of the movement — office work, correspondence, street selling, contacting potential sympathisers, lecturing to the movement's meetings and to outside organizations. She was at the centre of all the manifold activities which go to make up a movement's life. Her general grasp of international affairs was informed by a profound internationalism of feeling, her sympathies being with the oppressed peoples of the world, and she was utterly incapable of that narrowness of outlook that is called patriotism.

Marie Louise Berneri was a member of a distinguished anarchist family which has influenced the movement directly in Italy, Spain, France, and the English-speaking countries. Her father, Camillo Berneri, was a leading theoretician of the Italian movement and an outstandingly original thinker. He was assassinated by the Communists during their counter-revolutionary putsch in

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<sup>(10)</sup> First printed in *Marie-Louise Berneri 1918-1949: A Tribute* published by the MLB Memorial Committee London 1949. John Hewetson (1913-1990)

Barcelona during the May Days of 1937, when at the height of his powers. Her mother and sister are prominent in the movements in Italy and France, respectively.

Born at Arezzo in 1918, she went in early childhood into exile from Italy when her father refused to accept the demands laid upon the teaching profession by the Fascists. In 1936 immediately after the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution her father went to Spain. After a short period of active fighting on the Aragon front, he took up residence in Barcelona in order to edit the paper *Guerra di Classe*, the most far-seeing and clear-sighted revolutionary anarchist paper to come out of the Spanish Revolution. Marie Louise Berneri went to Barcelona for a short visit in the autumn of 1936, and kept up a close correspondence with her father. After his death she came to live in England.

Her interests were not confined to general political matters. Although her university studies in psychology were interrupted by her departure for England, she remained a keen observer of human individuals and their motives, among her special interests being child psychology. And, as always, her great qualities informed her discussion of them. When she spoke on Reich's work and the sexuality of children to an Easter Conference of the Progressive League some years ago, many of her hearers spoke afterwards of the remarkable impression this young and beautiful woman made by her calm and penetrating discussion of matters which the majority even of intellectuals fear to think about. And all this with a charm and levelheadedness which disarmed hostile criticism.

Throughout the war she was continually beset with anxiety for friends and relatives in occupied territories, some of them in Fascist prisons and concentration camps. Only those who were closest to her understood the depth of feeling which lay behind her serene bearing. With the same courage she bore tragedy in her own life.

M.L.B. was an inspiring and greatly loved comrade. But for the present we must leave more personal accounts to others and concern ourselves with her work as a militant in the anarchist movement. Her spirit infused every activity undertaken by the Freedom Press since 1936. Her influence was ubiquitous, and her personality coloured all our work. Here we can only try to speak of her contribution in general terms.

Her work for the anarchist movement in Britain began before she came to live here. Before the first issue of *Spain and the World*, came out in December 1936, she had discussed every aspect of its launching with her companion and her father, had collected funds to cover the first five issues, and had made the necessary contacts among comrades able to send information and articles. After 1937, when she came to live in London, she took an active part in the production of each issue, even down to despatching and street selling. She always retained a delight in seeing the whole production through from start to finish, and in 1945, writes to her companion, then in prison: 'I am writing from the Press as I am waiting for the second forme to go on the machine. I like being here, rushing up and down, seeing the paper take shape. I think this issue is good and more lively than the last one ...'

As well as the editorial work for *Spain and the World*, there was the *Spain and the World* colony of orphan children at Llansa, in Gerona. For these 20 children, later increased to 40, she collected funds and clothing. Later on, in 1945, when over a hundred Spaniards who had spent the war in the German forced labour brigades in France, were brought to England and treated as enemy prisoners-of-war, she not only visited them and organised relief parcels for them, but effectively brought their condition and the injustice of their detention to the knowledge of circles in a position to exert pressure on the government. In due course, and, in no small measure as a

result of her work on their behalf, they were released either to stay in this country or to go back to France.

When Spain was finally crushed by Franco's victory, disillusionment and the imminence of another world war reduced support for *Revolt!* (as *Spain and the World* had been renamed) and the paper ceased publication after June 3rd, 1939. Many comrades and former supporters seemed to disappear, but M.L.B. was always seeking ways to start a new paper, and a small group of comrades issued the first issue of *War Commentary* in November of the same year.

It is not easy to recapture the spirit of those days of gloom and despondency. The complete destruction of the hopes raised in 1936 was enough to extinguish the enthusiasm of most of the comrades; but for M.L.B., although her emotional commitment to the cause of the Spanish Revolution was of the deepest, the situation simply called for the continuation of the work of the movement in the changed circumstances. It was not that her temperament was particularly optimistic, though she was buoyant enough; her resolution in continuing to give expression to the ideals of anarchism sprang from a certain *steadfastness*, a quality which was like a sheet-anchor to her comrades in critical times.

The full command of language she achieved later also made it easy to forget that in those early days she possessed only an imperfect knowledge of English. Yet in the summer of 1940 she conducted the most exhaustive discussions with two English comrades on the history of the Spanish Revolution, and the fruits of this discussion were then embodied in a course of ten lectures given to a small study circle first at Enfield and later in central London. Though the numbers of sympathisers who attended these lectures were small, yet she spared no pains in preparing the material. The anarchist movement had to be built up again, and she went to work wherever the smallest opening showed itself. Later on, in 1941, when the shop in Red Lion Passage had been destroyed by fire bombs, and the Freedom Press offices moved to 27 Belsize Road, she initiated the weekly lectures which have continued almost without interruption ever since. In the discussions which followed these lectures her contribution would always make sure that the specifically anarchist attitude to the subject was fully displayed, and she would unerringly put her finger on the fundamental questions.

She was never satisfied, nevertheless, with presenting a 'party line', but always adopted an independent and critical attitude. This is well shown in an editorial article in *Revolt!* of 25th March 1939, which was jointly signed by herself and V.R. It discussed the reports in the Spanish anarchist press on the events in Central Spain when the Communists were finally eliminated from the government. M.L.B. and V.R. could not regard this as a triumph, for it came too late; the Communists should have been rendered powerless two years before, during the May Days in Barcelona in 1937.

'Thus, viewed in this light,' they wrote, 'we cannot consider the final elimination of the Communists as a victory for our comrades. Rather we must admit that their whole attitude (the C.N.T., more than the F.A.I.) in refusing to make public in Spain and the world at large the nefarious work being carried on by the Communists and other counter-revolutionary elements in general, for fear of breaking up the anti-fascist front, was a serious tactical mistake, partly responsible for the tragic situation in Spain.'

M.L. applied her critical intelligence not merely to events in which the international anarchist movement played a part, but also to the work of our own group and to herself as well.

The following extract is taken from a letter written in 1941 to a comrade who was an outstandingly able outdoor speaker. It shows M.L.B.'s fairness and objectivity, and her sense of purpose; but here we are concerned to stress the frankness of her critical approach.

We are not going to build up a movement on obscure ideas. We shall have fewer ideas perhaps, but each of us will understand them perfectly and be able to explain them to others.

In order to defend your position, you take the example of Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Malatesta — all mystics according to you. But take the example of Malatesta ... Have you ever read his *Talk Between Two Workers* or other dialogues? They are luminously clear. He explains anarchism without mixing it with 19th century philosophy, God, Faith or Knowledge. He knew that if he started introducing metaphysical discussions the workers would not have understood him. No doubt he desired some time to write about these problems, but he had the courage to mutilate his knowledge in order to be understood by the masses. The same applies to Kropotkin. He could have written books bigger than those of Marx around his theories, but he had the courage to write penny pamphlets expressing his ideas in the most bare and simple form. He says himself somewhere that he needed a lot of courage to do that work, he envied the Marxist and bourgeois theoreticians who were not limited by those considerations in their work. But at least he succeeded in being understood by the most illiterate workers and peasants.

You, comrade, want to put all your knowledge, all the ideas you have and all the original thoughts which come into your head in your speeches and articles. You have not learned the modesty, the spirit of sacrifice which must animate the propagandist. We must go to the people ... but do you believe that the nihilists went to the people with the ideas they had just taken from the books of Hegel? You must go to the people with simple, clear ideas. You refuse to make that sacrifice, you think it would mutilate you, you do not see it would make you stronger and more efficient.

This extract also illustrates M.L.B.'s views on the form in which mass propaganda should be cast — views straight-forward enough, indeed, but a glance at progressive propaganda will show how often simplicity is forgotten. It should not, however, be inferred that she advised any kind of vulgarization of ideas for mass consumption. Indeed, the whole spirit of the above letter implies the opposite — the need to express ideas simply instead of in a recondite manner. This is very different from mere sloganizing.

Her spirit of mutual criticism combined with mutual respect helped to develop to the full both the individual qualities of each member of the group, and also the ability to work together in common with complete identification of the individual with the aims of the group. Glancing through the files of *War Commentary*, one is struck by the number of articles to which it is impossible to assign a particular authorship. They were produced after joint discussion; a comrade being delegated to prepare the final script. M.L.'s work extends far beyond the articles over her initials, for she provided an inexhaustible fund of ideas, enriching and fructifying the writing of many comrades on the editorial board. Her hand is thus present in many an unsigned editorial or anarchist commentary. It says much for her influence that our group has developed and worked with such complete harmony and integration.



Since 1936 it has been necessary to build up the anarchist movement in Britain again from the beginning, and the method of building up has therefore borne the imprint of M.L.'s organisational ideas. She hoped eventually to see a numerically strong movement; but she also knew well that weakness is concealed in mere numbers without a clear grasp of anarchist conceptions or resolute character. For M.L.B. the term 'comrade' did not simply mean one who shared the intellectual conceptions of anarchism: it meant someone who also commands respect as a man or woman, who is devoted not merely to the *ideas* but to the *cause* of anarchism, and expressed that devotion in *work* for the movement. For her, the term 'comrade' was also a compliment and a mark of friendship.

It follows from such conceptions that a movement could only be built up by working in common, by the development of mutual respect and trust. Nothing distressed M.L. more than a failure to maintain this trustfulness between comrades in the movement, for she saw in mere mechanical relationships the seeds of dissension and future weakness which become manifest at just those critical moments when steadfastness and solidarity are most needed. Such a method of building a movement must inevitably be slow; but it creates a solid and enduring structure. It requires laborious propaganda and unremitting work: and it must be able to survive innumerable disappointments, for many are tried in the balance and found wanting. But it derives solace from the good comrades who are gained for the cause of anarchism; and strength from the friendship and comradeship born of common struggle. The tributes to her in this brochure bear abundant testimony to that.

M.L. provided for the rest of us (and indeed for all whose contact with her was more than superficial) the soundest foundation for the movement in her love for the anarchist ideal and philosophy. How moving are these lines about the Russian anarchist, Voline, who died a few months after they were written (24.5.45):

Last night when I came home, I found a letter from Voline. He had been gravely ill and was writing from hospital. He described to me the work he had to do and the sufferings he had gone through and I felt sad after reading his letter, sad and ashamed too because during the day I felt a bit fed up and started thinking I should enjoy myself instead of working (you know the mood one gets into sometimes) and then I get Voline's letter and I see that, in spite of all the privations he has endured, his first thought is to get better and to go out to carry on with his good work.

Throughout the war, whether she was in the editorial chair or had temporarily relinquished it to other comrades, she was the principal theoretical influence behind *War Commentary*, and afterwards *Freedom*. (And to say this is by no means to belittle the work of other comrades.) In 1945, she was one of the four anarchists associated with *War Commentary* who were arrested and charged with sedition. In the event, she was acquitted on a technical point of law, and did not go into the witness box. But she had wished to defend herself, and only agreed to this more passive role on the insistence of comrades. They pointed out that it would be madness for all the defendants to go to prison when technical grounds would free her. With George Woodcock, she was more than equal to carrying the main burden of continuing the paper until her comrades were released from prison.

To her work for the paper, she brought a wide knowledge and insight into affairs, while her visits to Spain and her long and deep concern for the problems of the Spanish Revolution had given to her revolutionary views an actual and practical quality which was of immense service to editorial discussions. Her sense of humour — and of scorn — is revealed in the excerpts from the capitalist (and often, too, from the radical) press which for five years she collected as a regular feature in 'Through the Press'. As an editor she always insisted on high standards — not always easy to attain in a struggling minority paper. On many occasions she would herself sit up through half the night preparing material for publication rather than take the easier course of passing inferior articles which were to hand.

In addition, she maintained an extensive correspondence with comrades in Europe, Mexico and South America, throughout the war; and this she extended greatly in the post-war period.

It is natural that we should look for those aspects of M.L.B. and her work which, besides the image that her friends will always carry, will survive. Of her writings, the most important is her *Journey Through Utopia*, which is shortly to be published, and which illustrates her thorough and comprehensive approach.

We are fortunate in having this work, written in the last year of her life, during the calm of her pregnancy, when the beauty of her character, and her face, seemed enhanced by her sense of biological fulfilment. She did not regret those months even after their tragic sequel (for her baby was born dead) and nor should we.

She was the author of what is probably the most influential of recent Freedom Press publications, *Workers in Stalin's Russia*, published at a time when it was not yet a popular role to expose the Russian system, and which ran to two printings, totalling ten thousand copies. It is not a political book in the ordinary sense, but an attempt to sift out from the mass of conflicting and often suspect evidence, the truth about the situation of the Russian people, and to assess it from the standpoint of human values. Always an indefatigable student of Russia, she brought to her study exceptional intellectual integrity and penetration, and the book amply illustrates her humane and ethical outlook. As with her knowledge of Spain, she kept a strictly critical standpoint, and never permitted the demands of propaganda to warp her judgement. This quality lends a special authority to her work. As she said in her introduction:

The destruction of a mirage is an unpopular task. The man in a desert who is trying to convince his exhausted companion that the coveted oasis he sees in the distance is only a dream is likely to be answered with curses ...

But if the illusions about the happiness of the Russian people must be crushed, the belief in the need and the right to happiness and justice for mankind must remain.

The greater part of her written work is to be found in the innumerable articles, editorials and reviews, and in her articles in the foreign press and letters abroad. This work may have been hasty, or fragmentary, but was never superficial. Her knowledge and her integral conception of anarchism prevented that, and she brought the same qualities of generosity and sincerity, which gave her such charm as a person, to her work as a revolutionary journalist. It is as impossible to conceive of her indulging in polemical exaggerations or substituting slogans for reasoning as it is to think of her displaying a lack of honesty in her personal relationship.

Her attributes as a writer are typified in two essays in the magazine *Now*. They take the form of reviews of Reich's *The Function of the Orgasm* and Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth*, but she

contributed so much of herself to her book reviews that they stand in their own right. Her long discussion of Reich's work, the earliest appreciation it received in this country, ends thus:

... To the sophisticated, to the lover of psycho-analytic subtleties, his clarity, his common sense, his direct approach may seem too simple. To those who do not seek intellectual exercise, but means of saving mankind from the destruction it seems to be approaching, this book will be an individual source of help and encouragement. To anarchists the fundamental belief in human nature, in complete freedom from the authority of the family, the Church and the State will be familiar, but the scientific arguments put forward to back this belief will form an indispensable addition to their theoretical knowledge.

Around her examination of Brenan's book, she wove a picture of the history and struggles of the Spanish people which is full of human feeling and understanding. She disagreed with the author's conclusions, but she summed up his work in these words:

Brenan, who lived so long in Spain, seems to have been influenced by its communal institutions, and has written his book in the spirit of the craftsmen of The Middle Ages. Like them he has produced his *chef-d'oeuvre* which is the test of his love for his art and his respect for his fellow men for whom the book is written. *The Spanish Labyrinth* has been created with that painstaking and disinterested love which characterises all lasting works.

The qualities she admired in this work are strikingly revealed in her own writings.

During the last few months of her life, she had projected a book on the unpublished writings of Sacco and Vanzetti, which she had hoped to issue both in England and America, and also in Italian. She had, too, begun work together with George Woodcock on the translation of Bakunin, and was preparing for publication her father's notes on sexual questions. She had also started to collect material for a study of the Marquis de Sade.

The conflict between the desire to express one's own potentialities and the urge to play a part in effecting social change is neither so simply nor so inevitably concluded as is sometimes suggested. For the apathetic or for the narrowly fanatical it does not exist, but for those who, like Marie Louise, are so richly endowed by nature and by parentage, it may present a terrible dilemma. There are some who, while accepting much of our common heritage, offer so little to it, and some who, in their devotion to causes, have extinguished themselves. It may be argued either that he who develops his own attributes to the full, regardless of the world in which he lives, has by that very act enriched society, or on the other hand, that he 'that loseth his life shall find it', but neither of these is wholly true. The ultimate dissatisfaction of the ruthless individualist and the frustration of the completely selfless propagandist spring from the same root — the inability to *balance* the needs of the person as such, and as a member of society. Marie Louise was able to achieve this balance. Her serenity and repose were the outward signs of this inner poise. She was not unconscious of the struggle between the continual demands of the movement with which she was so closely associated, and the need for creative self-expression, a need that in a nature like hers must have been very strong, but her life was a witness to the success with which she resolved this conflict.

For her friends and comrades, the sense of loss is overwhelming. It is impossible to convey an adequate impression of her influence on the intellectual and personal development of the members of the Freedom Press Group, and there are many others who owe her a similar debt that can never be repaid. We are conscious of the inadequacy of these cold lines to convey an impression of the part M.L.B. played in our group's life. Yet her warm, vivid and truthful personality remains as a part of each one of us.

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