

# oh, say it with paving stones!

The last fifty years has witnessed a tragic and paradoxical cultural shift: from the Old — the emergence of a powerful movement encompassing the vastness of cultural, political and social innovation — to the New — a digression to the very base of a conservative conformity the old attempted to destroy.

What we perceive today as Culture, and the way we respond to this as individuals, has changed dramatically since the 1960s. What was once an *emerging* Culture — a powerful collective response to archaic and oppressive institutions — has today become a series of bathetic products void of meaning, which represent nothing but the expression of capitalism's drive for profit.

Ultimately there is perhaps a plethora of reasons for this deterioration of modern culture, but the one that resonates most tragically with me is the departure of radicalism from the youth scene. At the beginning of the 60s young people, and more importantly students, made up the catalyst of social, cultural, and political innovation, and they did so, emerging as the new generation; bursting out of the 1950s and its post-war apocalyptic nightmare. The youth of the sixties, sick and tired of the patriarchal, preconceived morality espoused by their parents, realised instead that they truly did have a world to win — youth, students, kids, broke out of their Christian ways, and began forging a vision of a new world; often with violence, but usually with music, art, drugs and love. The Vietnam war gave young people the basis for opposition to the 'establishment', and from it an egression of movements which challenged every core value and cultural appreciation in western society: the way we listened to music, wrote books, had sex, and organised our time.

The most prominent moments of this cultural radicalism came at events like Woodstock, which exemplified the collective belief that culture represented something new. The hippie scene in San Francisco and the creation of thousands of communes (an expression of all these different political and philosophical ideas) were a convergence between youth and radicalism.

For me, as an anarchist, the most profound

example of the culmination of this radicalism were the 1968 Paris riots, in which students at the Sorbonne, angered at the closure of the Nanterre University convened to organise a series of strikes. This small action of solidarity between students quickly became a national event of ten million striking workers; battles in the streets, between the police and the students, typified the defiance of youth globally. Since that moment, the emergence of a *society of the spectacle*, observed by Debord, has become our perceived reality; a world of objects taking form as the definitive concept governing our world. The experimental innovations of the 60s have failed, and consequently culture now refuses to create anything new, pushing to the peripheries any sense of radical expression. Cultural industries no longer feel it beneficial to endorse anything that appears too extreme, relying on a formula that embraces triteness as a cultural remedy. Culture was radical when youth was radical; now, in the age of the Playstation, culture represents nothing more than our desires to be momentarily entertained.

Of course it's not all doom and gloom. Student and radical art movements do still exist, and youth will always be ultimately revolutionary. The problem, I think, is our disillusionment in what defines us, and what better defines us than the culture to which we connect ourselves? Youth needs to understand it has the ability to innovate again; to challenge the world by wresting control from the trite peddlers of everything we love about our lives: music, literature, film, art and time. 'Let us create!' should be our motto.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw an explosion of radical hope burst into the very core of a generation, and it is wholly conceivable that this will, at some point happen again. In any case, and until that time we can all agree that the 1960s and 1970s were a special moment; an ultimate spectacle that, regardless of its failures, gave us an understanding and perhaps even a confidence, hidden as it may seem, to really understand our radical position in a society and history intent on destroying the very essence of our creativity.



**M**ore than a decade ago, drawing on the important writings of David Poole on the anarchist tendencies within the Mexican Revolution (1), I wrote an article on the life and anarchist philosophy of Ricardo Flores Magón (2). It was an attempt to keep alive the memory of an important revolutionary anarchist, at a time when eco-primitivism and so-called poststructuralist anarchism (aka Nietzschean Marxism) were beginning to take centre stage in anarchist circles. For Flores Magón, along with his brother Enrique and Librado Rivera, was an important figure within the Mexican Liberal Party, and his writings and activities had a crucial impact on the course of the Mexican Revolution.

In the bookshops now is a splendid collection of Ricardo Flores Magón's writings (3), mostly compiled from the periodical *Regeneración*. This periodical first appeared in 1900 as a law journal but later became a radical newspaper, openly espousing anarcho-communism, that is, revolutionary class struggle anarchism. Edited by Chaz Bufe and Mitchell Verter, "Dreams of Freedom" is offered as a "Ricardo Flores Magón Reader", and provides for English-speaking radicals, not only a comprehensive collection of Flores Magón's articles, which appeared in *Regeneración* between 1900 and 1918, but also documents the various proclamations and manifestoes of the Mexican Liberal Party. But unlike many Readers this anthology is blessed by an excellent and informative introduction to the historical background in Mexico, and to the life and struggles of Flores Magón. This introduction, written by Verter, takes up some eighty pages; it is thus substantive. It is also well-researched, engaging, and at times illuminating. The Reader also has a useful chronology of events relating to Mexican history and Flores Magón's own biography, as well as an excellent and comprehensive bibliography.

A century later we may perhaps debate the validity and appropriateness of armed struggles against political tyranny and economic oppression. Even so, no one reading Flores Magón's forceful and often poetic writings can be other than inspired and moved by his passion for social justice, his revolutionary struggles for a better world, free of tyranny and exploitation, and by his lucid vision of anarchy. How different from the obscurantist musings of the poststructuralists, those academic mandarins who have appropriated many of



## flores magón and the anarchist vision of freedom

By Brian Morris

the ideas of an earlier generation of anarchists, with little or no acknowledgement, whilst dismissing them in elitist fashion as naïve romantics. Unlike these poststructuralists, Flores Magón was concerned with the progress of humanity, with the importance of truth, and with the transformation of those "three beautiful words" (as Flores Magón describes them) – namely, liberty, equality and fraternity – into social institutions wherein the free association of human beings and human solidarity would be possible and sustainable.

Influenced by Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, Flores Magón was an "apostle of anarchism" who taught that economic misery and degradation was not something "natural" but produced by "the thievery of the rich, the manipulation of religion, and government repression" – as Verter succinctly puts it. Indeed, Flores Magón spent his life fighting against all forms of oppression, challenging what he describes as that "dark trinity" – capital, authority (government) and the clergy. Harassed all his life, Flores Magón died in Leavenworth

Penitentiary in Kansas in November, 1922. It was alleged that he died of a heart attack, but according to Librado Rivera, he had been murdered by the prison authorities. He was but forty eight years old. It was a life dedicated to the anarchist cause. The writings of Flores Magón are not only a source of inspiration for the two editors of this commendable "Reader" but for all libertarian socialists and anarchists. The publishers, AK Press, are to be congratulated for supporting this project. "Land and Liberty" is still a rallying cry for many people in Mexico.

1. DAVID POOLE *Land and Liberty: Anarchist Influences in the Mexican Revolution* Sandy: Cienfuegos Press 1977.
2. BRIAN MORRIS *Flores Magón and the Mexican Liberal Party. Anarchy 1994 in "Ecology and Anarchism"* Malvern: Images 1996 pp162-170.
3. CHAZ BUFE and MITCHELL VERTER (Eds) *Dreams of Freedom: A Ricardo Flores Magón Reader* Edinburgh: AK Press 2005. £12.00.

# albert camus and the anarchists

## Organise! looks at the life and work of the great existentialist writer Albert Camus.

Born in French Algeria into a poor family in 1913, Camus lost his father in the Battle of the Marne in 1916. He was raised by his mother, who worked as a charlady and was illiterate. Winning a scholarship, Camus eventually began a career as a journalist. As a youth, he was a keen footballer as well as being a member of a theatrical troupe.

From his time as a goalkeeper, Albert Camus always had a team spirit. He had a generous, if sensitive nature, and always sought the maximum unity, seeking to avoid or bypass rancour. Many intellectuals writing about Camus have obscured his support of anarchism. He was always there to support at the most difficult moments of the anarchist movement, even if he felt he could not totally commit himself to that movement.

Camus himself never made a secret of his attraction towards anarchism. Anarchist ideas occur in his plays and novels, as for example, *La Peste*, *L'Etat de siège* or *Les Justes*. He had known the anarchist Gaston Leval, who had written about the Spanish revolution, since 1945. Camus had first expressed admiration for revolutionary syndicalists and anarchists, conscientious objectors and all manner of rebels as early as 1938 whilst working as a journalist on the paper *L'Alger Republicaine*, according to his friend Pascal Pia.

The anarchist Andre Prudhommeaux first introduced him at a meeting in 1948 of the *Cercle des Etudiants Anarchistes* (Anarchist Student Circle) as a sympathiser who was familiar with anarchist thought. Camus also supported the *Groupes de Liaison Internationale* which sought to give aid to opponents of fascism and Stalinism, and which refused to take the side of American capitalism. These groups had been set up in 1947-48, and intended to give material support to victims of authoritarian regimes as well as exchanging information. Supporters included the Russian anarchist Nicolas Lazarevitch, exiled in France, as well as many supporters of the revolutionary syndicalist paper *La révolution Proletarienne*. Camus remained a friend

and financial supporter of RP until his death.

Albert Camus's book *L'Homme Révolte* (translated into English as *The Rebel*), published in 1951, marked a clear break between him and the Communist Party left. It was met with hostility by those who were members of The Communist Party or were fellow travellers. Its message was understood by anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists in France and Pain, however, for it openly mentions revolutionary syndicalism and anarchism and makes a clear distinction between authoritarian and libertarian socialism. The main theme is how to have a revolution without the use of terror and the employment of "Caesarist" methods. So Camus deals with Bakunin and Nechaev among others. "The Commune against the State, concrete society against absolutist society, liberty against rational tyranny, altruistic individualism finally against the colonisation of the masses..."

He ends with a call for the resurrection of anarchism. Authoritarian thought, thanks to three wars and the physical destruction of an elite of rebels, had submerged this libertarian tradition. But it was a poor victory, and a provisional one, and the struggle still continues.

Gaston Leval responded in a series of articles to the book. His tone was friendly, and he avoided harsh polemic, but he brought Camus to book on what he regarded as a caricature of Bakunin. Camus replied in the pages of *Le Libertaire*, the paper of the *Fédération Anarchiste* (circulation of this paper was running at 100,000 a week in this period). He protested that he had acted in good faith, and would make a correction in one of the passages criticised by Leval in future editions.

The general secretary of the *Fédération Anarchiste*, Georges Fontenis, also reviewed Camus's book in *Le Libertaire*. To the title question "Is the revolt of Camus the same as ours?", Fontenis replied that it was. However he faulted him for not giving due space to the revolutions in the Ukraine and Spain, and for portraying

Bakunin as a hardened Nihilist and not giving credit to his specific anarchist positions. He ended by admitting that the book contained some admirable pages. A review by Jean Vita the following week in *Le Libertaire* was warmer and more positive.

These measured criticisms from the anarchists were in contrast to those from the fellow travellers of the Communist Party, like Sartre and the group around the magazine *Les Temps Moderne*. This marked the beginning of Camus's break with that other great exponent of existentialism. The criticisms of this group were savage, in particular that of Francis Jeanson. Camus replied that Jeanson's review was orthodox Marxist, and that he had passed over all references to anarchism and syndicalism. "The First International, the Bakuninist movement, still living among the masses of the Spanish and French CNT, are ignored", wrote Camus. For his pains, Camus was "excommunicated" by Jeanson from the ranks of the existentialists. These methods disheartened Camus. He also received stern criticism from the Surrealists for the artistic conceptions within the book. It looked like the anarchist movement were Camus's best supporters.

Camus marked this break in other ways too. He had made a pledge to himself to keep away from intellectuals who were ready to back Stalinism. This did not stop him from wholeheartedly committing himself to causes he thought just and worthwhile. In Spain a group of anarchist workers had been sentenced to death by Franco. In Paris a meeting was called by the League for the Rights of Man on February 22nd 1952. Camus agreed to speak at this. He thought it would be useful if the leader of the Surrealists, André Breton, should appear on the podium. This was in spite of the attack that Breton had written in the magazine *Arts*, over Camus's criticisms of the poet Lautreamont, admired by the Surrealists as one of their precursors. Camus met with the organisers of the event, Fernando Gómez Peláez of the paper *Solidaridad Obrera*, organ of the

Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT, and José Ester Borrás, secretary of the Spanish political prisoners' federation FEDIP, asking them to approach Breton without telling him that Camus had suggested it. Breton agreed to speak at the meeting even though Camus would be present. Gómez then told Breton that Camus had suggested he speak in the first place, which moved Breton to tears. Later Camus told the Spanish anarchists that because he had not replied to Breton's anger in kind that a near-reconciliation was possible. Camus and Breton shared the podium and were even seen chatting (for Breton and the Surrealists links to the anarchist movement see *Organise!* no.44 ) Camus took a position of the committed intellectual, signing petitions and writing for *Le Libertaire*, *La révolution Proletarienne* and *Solidaridad Obrera*. He also became part of the editorial board of a little libertarian review, *Témoins* 1956.,

getting to know its editor, Robert Proix, a proofreader by trade. Camus, via Proix, met up with Giovanna Berneri (Caleffi) the companion of the gifted Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri, who had been murdered by the Stalinists in Spain in 1937. Camus also met Rirette Maitrejean, who had been the erstwhile companion of Victor Serge, and had been involved in the Bonnot Gang affair and trial. Rirette had been working as a proofreader for the paper *Paris-Soir* for a long time. Camus also became a friend of the anarchist veteran Maurice Joyeux, who was later to remark that of all contemporary literary works *The Rebel* was the book that most closely defined the aspirations of the students and workers in May 1968.

Again in 1954 Camus came to the aid of the anarchists. Maurice Laisant, propaganda secretary of the *Forces Libres de la Paix* (Free Forces of Peace) as well as an editor of *Le Monde Libertaire*, paper of

the *Fédération Anarchiste*, had produced an antimilitarist poster using the format of official army propaganda. As a result he was indicted for subversion. Camus was a character witness at his trial, recalling how he had first met him at the Spanish public meeting.

Camus told the court, "Since then I have seen him often and have been in a position to admire his will to fight against the disaster which threatens the human race. It seems impossible to me that one can condemn a man whose action identifies so thoroughly with the interests of all men. Too few men are fighting against a danger which each day grows more ominous for humanity". It was reported that after his statement, Camus took his seat in a courtroom composed mainly of militant workers, who surrounded him with affection. Unfortunately Laisant received a heavy fine.

Camus also stood with the anarchists when they expressed support for the workers' revolt against the Soviets in East Germany in 1953. He again stood with the anarchists in 1956, first with the workers' uprising in Poznan, Poland, and then later in the year with the Hungarian Revolution. Later in 1955 Camus gave his support to Pierre Morain, a member of the *Fédération Communiste Libertaire* (the *Fédération Anarchiste* had changed its name in 1954 following rancorous struggles within the organisation). Morain was the very first Frenchman to be imprisoned for an anti-colonialist stand on Algeria. Camus expressed his support in the pages of the national daily *L'Express* of 8th November 1955.

Camus often used his fame or notoriety to intervene in the press to stop the persecution of anarchist militants or to alert public opinion. In the final year of his life Camus settled in the Provence village of Lourmarin. Here he made the acquaintance of Franck Creac'h. A Breton, born in Paris, self-taught, and a convinced anarchist, he had come to the village during the war to "demobilise" himself. Camus employed him as his gardener and had the benefit of being able to have conversations with someone on the same wavelength. One of the last campaigns Camus was involved in was that of the anarchist Louis Lecoin who fought for the status of conscientious objectors in 1958. Camus was never to see the outcome to this campaign, as he died in a car crash on 1960, at the age of forty-six.



Albert Camus in the offices of *Le Libertaire*

## A Touch Of Class magazine, Class War, October 2006.

Last October Class War launched its new magazine, A Touch of Class. It was good to see a new magazine coming out, especially as Black Flag didn't make it for the bookfair. The first article is a useful contribution about ethics which is a central part of the author Ben Franks' book Rebel Alliances (see full review in this issue). Its main point is to show that prefiguration - means foreshadowing ends - is a central aspect of contemporary class struggle anarchism, although this should perhaps be a problem for Class War who have traditionally been fond of using the phrase 'by any means necessary' - an ends based perspective which Franks relates to Leninism!

Apart from this, the sniping at 'other' anarchists in the rest of the magazine is really tiresome. For example, the public order policing article will be useful for many activists, but why do the editors feel the need to criticise other anarchists for only having had a ' cursory glance' at this. Have they forgotten about the work people were doing only recently to defend G8 arrestees, which stems from accumulated knowledge of legal monitoring and advice about police tactics on demonstrations and actions? Over the years we have all had to learn about Section 60s and yes we need to spread the message wider, but there seems to be no justification for a holier-than-thought attitude.

In the next article, the magazine complains

about the current anti-war movement which is obviously not stopping the war. Fair comment, but the SWP stranglehold on the Stop The War coalition was perhaps only able to succeed due to a lack of a decent anarchist 'no war but the class war' position about NATO bombings over Kosovo - that is, before Sept-11 and the war on terror (and before Bush). The truth of the matter is, Class War seemed to have nothing to say about this at the time (see Organise! 52). Then, local anti-war groups were less dominated by one party and some even managed to oust the Alliance for Workers' Liberty for their support of the Kosovan Liberation Army who were calling on NATO 'actions'. Members of the Socialist Workers Party were there but they couldn't always dominate. The point is it is a bit ripe for CW to have a go at others for attending what might look like ineffectual demonstrations when they don't seem to have any alternative ideas. Acting together, the AF and Solidarity Federation probably managed to reach 5-10% of the September 2006 Manchester anti-war march with anarchist/NWBTCW viewpoints on the war. Young 'Asians' were queuing up for anarchist leaflets and bulletins and we can only hope that more people will become influenced by some of this rather than the viewpoints of radical imams. What does CW think we should be doing to build an anti-war movement?

Then there is a reasonable piece on CCTV

cameras, especially on the facial recognition threat, but the self-importance comes across again in dispelling ID card propaganda as 'verbiage' compared to the more important issue of CCTV, in Class War's opinion. But there is nothing in this article that gives an idea about what to do about it. At least anti-ID campaigners are coming up with tactics as well as information and analysis. Local groups are meeting and working hard to produce information in order to help empower local people and are organising actions. In any case, anti-ID activists continually mention CCTV and ASBOs as part of the problem and are aware of the potential use of ID databases for law enforcement through facial recognition. A much more interesting criticism, if you wanted to make one, would be of parts of the environmental movement who are very in favour of national expansion of congestion charging in cities (mentioned in the article) and also road pricing which could involve the creation of a digital camera network across the UK. Finally, Class War shouldn't get too excited about the BNP's apparent success for a small organisation, as they state in their editorial. They have a right-wing tabloid press backing up their racism that reaches millions of people a day. If CW thinks a 'repositioned' anarchist magazine is going to make a huge dent in that on its own, then we think this is mistaken. Solidarity please, comrades!

A Touch of Class no.1 is at:

[www.londonclasswar.org/A\\_Touch\\_of\\_Class.pdf](http://www.londonclasswar.org/A_Touch_of_Class.pdf)

## Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchisms by Ben Franks, AK Press, October 2006.

This is a really worthwhile read, especially for those who are interested in the ideas influencing present day anarchist organisation in Britain and the recent history of the class struggle movement, and the past, present, and hopefully future members of these organisations. Through the idea of a 'consistent archetype', the early part of the book makes a successful attempt to unify class struggle anarchism in Britain without losing the diversity of thought, strategy and tactics. The ethics part of the book is likewise plausible and unifying. If these things help

bring comrades in different organisations closer together that will have been a job well done, and also it will hopefully be a useful antidote to the 'post-left' view that lumps class struggle anarchists in the with rest of the Left.

A nice number of quotes from Anarchist Communist Federation (ACF) material are included! The ACF's major (we think!) contribution to bringing an ecological viewpoint into class struggle anarchism in Britain was one big omission. Likewise with the Poll Tax since the ACF was the only national organisation that was heavily

involved with the twinning initiatives that helped exchange knowledge, and warning of Militant's tactics, from Scotland to England and Wales. The AF is also less adhered to Georges Fontenis's Manifesto of Libertarian Communism than you might glean from Rebel Alliances, to the extent that we call it 'flawed', especially on the subject of vanguards.

Finally, in terms of 'location in the workplace', we can just about understand Franks putting 'none' in his table if you are meaning an explicit organisational presence - but it's worth noting this is in fact rapidly changing, since many AF members have joined the Industrial Workers of the World and a cross-organisation libertarian/anarchist education workers network is in the making. That'll be a bit of work for the second edition then!

Three reviews of pamphlets published by Past Tense. All Past Tense pamphlets can be ordered via Past tense c/o 56a Info Shop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17 OAE, or via [www.past-tense.org.uk](http://www.past-tense.org.uk)

**Set the people free: the opposition to ID cards in North London, 1950 (and 2006). David King. Past Tense. 14 pages.**

Identity cards were introduced into Britain during the First World War. The government was purely interested in how many men were still available for recruitment. Under the National Registration Bill, introduced in July 1915, personal information on the adult population was compiled in local registers. One the War Cabinet discovered how many men were still available for national service, politicians' interest in National Registration waned. By July 1919 the register was abandoned. During the Second World War ID cards and a national register were brought in under the National Registration Act of 1939. Failure to produce a card when asked by a policeman would result in fines or 3 months in prison. The police demanded to see ID cards as a routine event. As C.H. Rolph, an ex-policeman, noted: "The police who had by now got used to the exhilarating new belief that they could get anyone's name and address for the asking.

If you picked up a fountain pen in the street and handed it to a constable, he would ask to see your identity card ... you seldom carried it, and this meant that he had to give you a little penciled slip requiring you to produce it at a police station within two days."

In a debate in the Commons in 1947 it was pointed out that 20,000 deserters were at large. Despite not having ID cards they were able to obtain food and clothing (rationing was still in place) and so ID cards were of little value. Clarence Willcock, a Liberal, was stopped by police whilst driving and asked to produce his ID card. He refused and then refused to produce it at a police station within 2 days. He was fined thirty shillings. He then appealed and the case was taken to High Court. It was ruled that whilst the appeal was dismissed, no costs would be given against the appellant.

Willcock then started a campaign against ID cards. They were withdrawn in 1952. Willcock's campaign had only a marginal effect on withdrawal, but they did affect the statistics for police arrests and prosecution over ID cards as figures fell, with police becoming more reluctant to prosecute if there were appeals.

This pamphlet examines this history and how ID cards could be resisted in the future. The Government has learnt from the past and realised that the only way that people will keep cards is if they are linked to something they need. WW2 cards were tied to rationing and now the Government is linking it to passports, and are considering linking it to the DVLA vehicle licensing database and using automatic number plate recognition. Plus the police have already tested mobile fingerprinting technology.

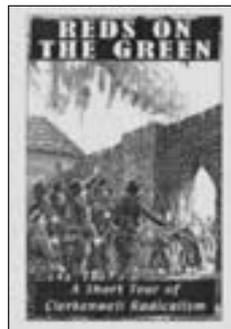
**"A shabby London suburb": a walk around the working class and radical history of Hammersmith. Past Tense. 18 pages.**



Parsons - they're all in this little pamphlet.

A guided walk around Hammersmith and its radical history. William Morris, the anarchist tailor James Tochatti, the New Model Army agitators, the Levellers, Lucy

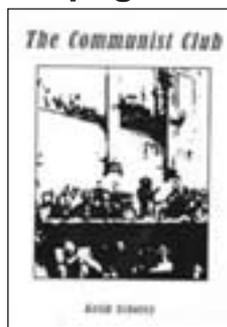
**Reds on the Green: A short tour of Clerkenwell radicalism. Written by Fagin. Past Tense. £2.00. 72 pages.**



Sheppard, the Gordon riots, the Chartists, the Fenians, Lenin, the anarchists Dan Chatterton and Guy Aldred. An enthralling and well illustrated history of the district.

And on to Clerkenwell with a more substantial pamphlet. A fascinating tour, featuring Wat Tyler and the Peasants' Revolt, the notorious rookeries (slums), the London Mob, the master thief Jack

**The Communist Club. Keith Scholey. Past Tense. 20 pages**



Chartism, utopian socialism, the First International, early anarchism, and the first Marxist groups in Britain. Its fascinating story is told in this little pamphlet. The anarchists Frank Kitz, John Neve, Johann Most and Errico Malatesta feature in its history.

The Communist Club was founded by German émigrés in London in 1840. It played an important role in the radical politics of London and Europe during the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It linked

## letter to the editors

Word is getting out that the people of the United Kingdom have a cause to celebrate - 200 years since the abolition of slavery! But how can the abolition of slavery be celebrated when slavery hasn't been abolished? Let me make a point in which to remind ourselves of the system that we are forced to survive in - the capitalist system is a system based on exploitation, a system where a majority of people are condemned to servitude for a minority of people who are lavished as the recipients of global profiteering. Capitalism not only protects this minority, it encourages them to pursue more profit without a justice system to discourage or stop them. For a system like that to thrive - slavery is a vital component.

Many people will shake their heads on this and think: what are you talking about, we have wages? Wages for what? People on the Minimum Wage are on a rate of pay issued by employers and backed by a State that is driven by this system. Marx warned workers about this in the Communist Manifesto over 150 years ago! The employing class buy from their employees a labour value which is publicly declared as rock bottom. As a consequence, workers survive on the barest of subsistence.

Workers who save frugally may be carried through to the next week, before it's back to work to save up and buy some more basic food. Such workers take part in the economy, therefore we all have a right to benefit from other areas of the economy so that our lives can be improved. Has anybody heard of an award wage? A wage where people can not only afford to buy the barest of essentials, but they can also buy nice things to eat from the local delicatessen, they can go to the theatre, they can buy brand new products instead of constantly buying secondhand ones, to save money for future things like travel, a deposit for a house, etc. These are impossible goals for those working full-time under the minimum wage.

Even buying top quality daily essentials are not an option. Locally produced foods are out of the question for people on the minimum wage because they are often more expensive than food bought from ASDA, yet these workers are contributing to the economy just as much whilst being treated as second class citizens. This is outrageous and it's time for working people to take action - with unified action, workers can

create change - without action, the system remains in place. So why has slavery not been abolished and relegated to history?

When the word 'slavery' is mentioned, people like to give it some distance from the times in which they live in today. It is far easier to conjure up images of African people shackled inside the wooden hold of a ship, suffering sickness and utter misery while being sent off to the plantations of the New World. This is not to put that important aspect aside, nor is it intended to forget the disgusting and despicable nature of slavery within that context. We need to remind ourselves that slavery is much more insidious and far reaching than many people want to admit - and racism plays a part in this.

History is chock full of situations where one group of people manipulate and exploit another group of people for economic reasons. In the past, and right up to the present - white people have enslaved black people, black people have enslaved black people, white people have enslaved white people and, believe it or not, black people have enslaved white people. This occurs in most parts of the world where capitalism is given free reign. The superficial reasons for slavery are often depicted through a person's colour, ethnicity, religion - but these aren't the only reasons for it, the underlying reasons are rooted within the rigid hierarchy of capitalism. Today this country's radio and television stations, ruled by big business and whose interests they serve, constantly generate topics of racism and racial discrimination. Quite often, the racial abuse inflicted is on minor groups of people, vulnerable people, people who can be more easily exploited than other larger groups. People who may have a colour that is different to them, people who may have a religion that is different to them, people who speak English as a second language. Ethnic minorities are often the target of this abuse. Through bombarding minorities with this hatred, the discriminating group seek to undermine the basic human rights of these other fellow citizens whom they are abusing, to try and disempower them while attempting to garner support from others. One issue at the moment is workers who are coming in from other European Union countries to seek work. Often overseas workers are motivated to come to the UK with the idea of providing some financial assistance for their loved ones back home -

loved ones who are struggling to survive in their native country (this is also often due to exploitation from their system back home). Some workers who are born in this country see this as a threat to their labour, and find quick reasons to abuse 'foreigners'. What they do not understand is that this is a deliberate strategy used by the employing class (who are also born in the same country as them) to cut wages across the country and to provide a cheap, highly mobilised workforce in great numbers who can be paid as low a wage as possible whilst also minimising the responsibilities that employers are meant to provide for their workforce (sick pay, holiday leave, pensions, etc.). Responsibilities with which the government, too, wants to relinquish whilst still demanding a vast diversity of taxes at premium rates. It is under capitalist conditions like this, where employers can thrive the most. Gangmasters hire cheap labour from countries beyond the EU, to work farms and sweatshops in this country. In many instances, these people are brought in illegally because it benefits the employing class to do so. It is far easier to threaten a labour force with instant dismissal and even worse - to contact immigration, if they begin to organise and make demands to improve their working conditions. The fact that these people do not have some minimal protection, which may be provided for those who have citizenship, ensures total obedience of the workforce and makes them extremely vulnerable. Through maximising exploitation, gangmasters and other members of the employing class, find themselves in ideal circumstances. This is modern day slavery and it is far from finished with many examples that can be outlined - from women in Eastern Europe kidnapped, brought into this country and forced into prostitution to cockleshell pickers from China, workers in retail, workers who work in sweatshops and denied basic human rights, the list goes on! When you end capitalism you end a system of exploitation. And when this does end, under what circumstances will slavery end once and for all? When working people are aware that the capitalist system is not there to serve us but, rather, we are there to serve it; When working people realise that the isolationism, spin, defeatism, confusion, disorientation and general sense of hopelessness of our situation, is deliberately broadcast

## georg elser

### The man who tried to kill Hitler, a lost hero of the working class

Georg Elser was born at Hermaringen in Württemberg province in 1903. His father was a wood merchant and owned several hectares of forest and lived at Koenigsbroenn. Georg left school in 1917 and got a job as an apprentice turner in a local foundry. After the war, his father, an alcoholic, got deeper into debt and had to sell his business and his land. Georg left the foundry after two years for health reasons and took up an apprenticeship as a joiner. He got his master's certificate as a cabinet maker in 1922, getting the best marks in his class.

Described as sociable but not very outgoing, Georg loved working with wood and metal. He set up a workshop in the basement of the family house where he repaired locks, furniture and watches and clocks.

He left Koenigsbroenn in 1925, working in the Dornier plane factories, and then at Konstanz in a watch factory. He worked there on and off during 7 years, and then when the enterprise went bankrupt, was out of work for several months, before getting work with new employers. This was a period of great tribulation for the whole

working class, with many out of work or in short term work.

In his leisure time Georg played a zither with a folk dance association. He was very popular with women, and had a child with one of his many girlfriends, though he had no close male friends.

He had managed to get through the economic depression without any real difficulties, either working around Lake Constance or at Koenigsbroenn. He did not seem to have any particular interest in politics. He had joined the woodworkers

**Continued on next page**

constantly by a mass media, rotten to the core with ruling class chauvinism; When working people realise that the ruling class invest billions in such a mass media for their own purposes and intents - to keep workers confused, fearful and divided - as disunity and fear are close allies of the employing class; When working people realise that the employing class do these things because THEIR OWN greatest fear is to see the working class awake and to be made aware of our plight and who are no longer apathetic but active and prepared for class struggle.

Workers who will commit ourselves. Workers who will prepare together to organise, to unite ourselves for the common goal of liberation. When we uproot and abolish the structures of hierarchy in this capitalist, monarchist United Kingdom, we will begin to create circumstances for ourselves that will enable us to create the society that will benefit and enrich our own lives, we will set an example and bring hope and inspiration to many enslaved working people across the world. The countries in South America have got a headstart on us, it is now time for this country, a country symbolic of the 'developed' world, to show workers in other developed countries what can be done to improve our lot and set an example by abolishing slavery, by eradicating the sub-citizenship status which working people have had forced upon them. This is when we will have cause to celebrate.

**Brad Evans**

### Organise! replies:

Thanks very much for this letter. In addition to the points you make, the 1807 Slave Trade Act didn't even stop the trans-Atlantic trade, never mind that slavery in the British West Indies was still legal until 1838, since even the 1833 **Slavery Abolition Act** only gave partial freedom to begin with, and the 1807 Act did not prohibit trade within the Caribbean colonies, only from Africa. Legal slavery continued well into the 1880's in Spanish Cuba and Portuguese Brazil, and in Africa continued into the 20th century under British empire rule in Nigeria and Gambia and until the late 1920s in Sierra Leone, for example. In 1921, in reply to the governor of Sierra Leone, Winston Churchill argued that abolition of slavery there would not be beneficial to the country's economy! Then there is evidence of continued smuggling of slaves across the Caribbean and South American coast and import into the British Colonies using **slave ships under foreign flags that had been fitted out in London and Liverpool**. Naval photographs in the National Archive show slave ships (with slaves on board) being intercepted in Africa decades after the supposed end of the transatlantic trade. So much for the proud idea of British abolition being 200 years old, then. Plus, in the 1830s, British slave owners

(who included some abolitionists!) many who never even lived in the Caribbean, were compensated for each slave they freed to the total tune of 20 million pounds. This money they then used to build the cotton mills, plus gasworks for night working, canals and railways to move the cotton away from the ports, and banks they ran to invest in these ventures. These made life a misery for thousands of British working class women, children and men after the official end of the Trade, still using slave-grown cotton from America! Back-breaking and fatal indentured labour continued in the British Caribbean plantations under the same masters for years after. African slaves fought hard to win their freedom, and although to be legally free is a very big deal, we do have to ask as you have done - to what extent did the exploitation ever end?

You refer to recent inspiration from South America. A word of warning here - the key is to get rid of both capitalism and state control. Indigenous people in Venezuela are experiencing the controlling nature of state leaders like Chavez who is continuing to give their lands over to companies like Anglo-American (Tarmac in UK). Leaders of authoritarian left parties like Chavez certainly do not like the idea of peoples' autonomy. This situation is being highlighted by our Venezuelan anarchist friends in the CRA.

union in 1920 as a teenager. Like many workers, he voted Communist up to 1933. Between 1928 to 1930 he was a member of the Roeter Frontkaempferbund, a front organisation of the Communist Party (KPD), but this only involved paying his dues, buying the badge of the group (but not the uniform) and attending 3 or 4 meetings in 2 years. He said later – during the course of police interrogation – that : “ I was never interested in the programme of the KPD. In the meetings there was no question other than wage rises, the improvement of social housing by the government and that sort of thing. That it was them who formulated these demands were sufficient to bring me to the communist side”.

He was far more active within the folk music group. From 1933, he ended all political contact but became a member of a zither club and took double bass lessons. At the end of 1936 he got work as an unqualified worker in an arms factory at Heidenheim. He quickly moved up the scale, getting a responsible post in the dispatch office in 1938. In this period, when his life had never been more stable, quiet, bland and anonymous, that he decided to kill Hitler.

Georg later explained his reasons under police interrogation. The first was that Hitler was preparing to take Germany into another war. This opinion was shared by many in Europe, and not least amongst a large number of Germans. Other reasons for his acts were that wages had been driven too low by Hitler (in fact wages in 1938 under Hitler were less than in 1929, contrary to popular misconceptions). Georg said that the working class had become exasperated and that something had to be done. He admitted often talking with colleagues, and unknowns met on trains or in restaurants, though he never revealed any names, even under torture.

Georg was not mad, nor a fanatic. Once he had made up his mind, he proceeded in the methodical manner like the conscientious worker he was.

In autumn 1938 he started stealing small amounts of explosives from the factory, bringing out 25 packets in a year. Georg knew that Hitler visited the Buergerbraukeller pub in Munich every year on 8th and 9th November to celebrate the anniversary of the Nazi putsch of 1923. He went to Munich on 8th November, inspected the pub and saw Hitler arrive and then returned home.

In March 1939, shortly after German troops

invaded Czechoslovakia, Georg resigned from his job and went to Munich. He attempted unsuccessfully to get work at the pub. Returning to live with his parents, he got a job in a quarry, which allowed him to build up his explosives supplies. He returned to Munich in August.

Georg was an anonymous worker, one among many in a crowd. He attracted no attention.

From 5th August until 6th November he ate every evening at the Buergerbrau. At closing time he hid in a cupboard, waiting for the staff to leave. He was able to work for four hours, then returned to his hiding place and left with the arrival of the first customers. In three months, he had hollowed out a pillar big enough to house a time bomb. He planned for this to explode on 8th November at 9.20 pm.

Georg should have read the papers, where he would have discovered that Hitler had cancelled his visit. He was apprehended by customs officials when he attempted to cross the border to Switzerland, and detained on suspicion of being a spy or deserter. Incriminating evidence, including a postcard of the pub, were found on him. Meanwhile the bomb had exploded killing 6 members of the Nazi old guard and a waitress. When this was announced on the radio, the customs officials remembered the postcard.

Transferred to Munich, Georg denied all involvement in the attack. The Gestapo was

called in . After 14 hours of beatings and torture, Georg admitted his responsibility. The Gestapo refused to believe that a simple German worker had acted on his own.

Georg gave away no one. Despite his suffering, he refused to remember a single name of Roeter Frontkaempferbund members, except one who had died in 1930. The German papers called Georg a British agent. Hitler hoped to finish the war on the Western front with a trial of British leaders at London, for which he would use Georg as a witness, and he was placed in Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

When it became obvious that the London trial would not happen, the Nazi leaders lost interest in him. Transferred to Dachau in 1944, he was murdered on the orders of Himmler on 9th April 1945 at the same time as other resisters, just a few days before the liberation of the camp.

From 1933 he had refused to salute the swastika and promptly left any public place where a Hitler broadcast was being played on the radio. Once he had taken his decision to act, he proceeded methodically.

Some remarkable individuals have made their lives a monument to revolt and courage. Louise Michel, Nestor Makhno and Simon Radowitzky spring to mind.

Georg never thought himself anyone out of the ordinary, let alone a hero. But he had acted as he saw fit. How many in similar situations would act as he did?



# Back issues

Back issues of Organise! are still available from the London address. They cost 20p each + SAE. Alternatively, send us a fiver and we'll send you one of everything plus whatever else we can find lying around.

**Issue 27:** LA riots; Yugoslavia; Malcolm X.

**Issue 50:** GM foods; Who owns the land; War in Kosovo; Ireland - the 'peace' process.

**Issue 51:** War in Kosovo; Roots of our movement; Land and freedom; East Timor.

**Issue 52:** Mass direct action; East Timor; Youth resistance to the nazis; Workplace notes.

**Issue 54:** Civil war in Colombia; Humans and animals; Giving up activism; Dissent.

**Issue 55:** Land and ecology; Kropotkin and tribal society; Mental health.

**Issue 56:** Anti capitalism; Riots in Oldham; Anarchist culture.

**Issue 57:** The war against terror; Class war in Argentina; ADD; Primitivism.

**Issue 58:** Argentina: growing resistance; Paganism; Immigrant labour; Angola 3; US anarchist poets; Yellow House

**Issue 59:** Anarchism and Sex; Class Struggle in China; Arditi del Popolo; Scottish nationalism; Prison Industry; Zazous in Vichy France; Ito Noe.

**Issue 60:** Iraq War; Argentina; White Boys in Ireland; Fatherhood; Yelenski's fable; Senna Hoy.

**Issue 61:** Anti-war action; Argentina autonomous movement; New Economy; Airline strike; Punk Rock; Paris Commune; Prison Human Rights.

**Issue 62:** Participatory economics; Anarchist movement in Argentina; Camille Pissarro; International or Anarchist Federations.

**Issue 63:** Anarchist movement in Argentina- part two; Nanotechnology; Resistance in Iraq; School strikes.

**Issue 64:** G8 special; Casualisation; ID cards; Women's struggles in Iraq

**Issue 65:** International special. Reports from Australia, Belarus, China and Croatia.

**Issue 66:** The fight against ID cards; Rosspport; Mountain top removal; Empowering prisoners; Spanish revolution 1936.

**Issue 67:** The anniversary issue: 20 years of the AF, Hungarian revolution and the British general strike; décroissance; Belarusian anarchism.

## Organise! ...on the net

Articles from Organise! can be found on the internet at [www.afed.org.uk](http://www.afed.org.uk)  
You can also email us at [organise@afed.org.uk](mailto:organise@afed.org.uk)

## Stormy Petrel pamphlets

**Towards a Fresh Revolution by The Friends of Durruti**, writings from the much misunderstood group who attempted to defend and extend the Spanish Revolution of 1936. 75p plus postage.

**Malatesta's Anarchism and Violence**, an important document in the history of anarchist theory refutes the common misrepresentation of anarchism as mindless

destruction while restating the need for revolution to create a free and equal society. 50p plus postage.

**A Brief Flowering of Freedom: The Hungarian Revolution 1956.** An exciting account of one of the first post-war uprisings against the Stalinist monolith. Also includes a history of the Hungarian anarchist movement. 60p plus postage.

## Anarchist Federation pamphlets in languages other than English

**As We See It:** Available in Welsh, Serbo-Croat, Greek, German and now, thanks to our Spanish comrades, in Spanish and Portuguese. They are each available for 70p including postage and packaging from our London address.

**The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation:** Available in Serbo-Croat for 70p including p&p.  
If anybody you know who speaks Serbo-

Croat in Britain or you have contacts in the countries of former Yugoslavia where Serbo-Croat is understood then why not send them copies?

German, Greek, Portuguese, French, Italian, Esperanto and Spanish translations of our **Aims and Principles** are also available for 20p plus postage.

Write to the London address for orders and bulk orders.

## Other Anarchist Federation publications

All pamphlets include the cost of postage.  
**NEW EDITION: Defending Anonymity** - Free - ID cards are coming to Britain (and elsewhere) very soon. This pamphlet aims to see through Labour's smokescreens of 'identity theft' and the 'war on terror'. Printed copies Donation + SAE.

**NEW: Working Class Resistance to the Nazis** - £1.50 - a major new pamphlet detailing the resistance of young and old to the rule of the Nazis in Europe.

**Beating The Poll Tax (online only)** - a relevant 'blast from the past', our out-of-print pamphlet that encouraged and analysed the rise of mass revolt against the Community Charge in 1989/90. Available from [www.afed.org.uk](http://www.afed.org.uk)

**Anarchism As We See It** - £1 - Describes the basic ideas of anarchist communism in easy to read form.

**The Anarchist Movement In Japan** - £1.80 - A fascinating account of Japanese anarchism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Japan had an anarchist movement of tens of thousands. This pamphlet tells their story.

**Aspects of Anarchism** - £1 - Thoughts and commentary on some of the most important issues that anarchists must confront. Collected articles from the pages of Organise! on the fundamentals of anarchist communism.

**Against Parliament, for Anarchism** - £1 - Insights into the political parties of Britain and why anarchists oppose all parties.

**Basic Bakunin** - £1 - This revised edition outlines the ideas of one of the 19th century founders of class struggle anarchism.

**The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation** - £1 - This 2003 reprint explains the concept of revolutionary organisation and its structure. All libertarian revolutionaries should read this fundamental text.

**Beyond Resistance - A revolutionary manifesto** - £2 - A detailed analysis of modern capitalism and the state and our understanding of how they will be overthrown.

**Work - Why it must be destroyed before it destroys us** - £1 - The title says it all really.

**Ecology and Class: Where There's Brass, There's Muck** - £2 - Our newly-revised and extended pamphlet on ecology.

# Aims and principles

## of the Anarchist Federation

1. The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.
2. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.
3. We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-Communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women, lesbians and gays, and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.
4. We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.
5. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.
6. It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.
7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.
8. Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.
9. As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.
10. We oppose organised religion and beliefs.

## Join the AF! Find out more!

If you agree with the aims and principles of the Anarchist Federation (see above) then why not apply to join the organisation. Maybe you want to find out more about what the AF thinks on a particular subject or the ideas we believe in. Perhaps you would just like to be put on our mailing list.

Whatever you want to find out from us, please get in touch.

Write to our national contact at:

**Anarchist Federation, BM ANARFED, London, WC1N 3XX**

Alternatively you can email us at [info@afed.org.uk](mailto:info@afed.org.uk) or visit our website: [www.afed.org.uk](http://www.afed.org.uk)