

My Anarchism

The etymology is good enough for me “*Absence of government.*” The spirit of authority and the standing of the laws must be destroyed. That says it all.

Open-minded enquiry will see to that.

The ignorant reckon that anarchy is disorder and that in the absence of government, society will always revert to chaos. They cannot conceive of order other than as something imposed from without by force of arms.

Anarchism, as I understand it, boils down to political free enquiry.

We need to rid ourselves of respect for the law. The law is not accountable. It is an obstacle to all real progress. It is a notion that we have to abolish.

The laws and constitutions that govern peoples by force are phony. They are not the products of men’s inquiry and common advancement. They are the creatures of a barbarous minority that resorts to brute force in order to indulge its avarice and cruelty.

Perhaps social phenomena operate in accordance with to underlying laws. Our sociology is still in its infancy and is unfamiliar with these. No doubt we should investigate them, and if we should identify- them, they will prove immensely useful to us. But, even if we should discover them, we should not enshrine them in a Code nor make them into a system of government. To what end? If indeed they are laws of nature, then they will operate unaided, whether we like it or not. It is not the astronomers who order the stars. Our only function is to bear witness.

Plainly, written laws bear no resemblance to the laws of nature, not even in form. Ah, for the brave majesty of those ancient parchments that every revolution puts to the torch in the town squares, scattering the ashes for ever! A law that has need of an enforcer usurps the name law. Such a law is no law at all: it is a hateful lie.

And what enforcers! To appreciate the extent to which our laws fly in the face of logic and the genius of humanity, we need only contemplate the colossal armaments – swelling with every day that passes – and the stockpiles of brute force that governments amass in order to survive, in order to fend off for a few more minutes the anticipated onslaught of souls.

Nine tenths of the world’s population, thanks to written laws, know the degradation of poverty. It does not require much knowledge of sociology, when one thinks of the wonderful talent for assimilation and creativity displaced by the children of the “lower” orders, to appreciate the monstrous lunacy of that extravagant waste of human energy. The law rides roughshod over the mother’s womb!

We fit the law the way a China-woman’s foot fits its binding, or the was the baobab tree fits the Japanese vase. Voluntarily stunted!

Are we afraid of the “chaos” that might follow should we remove the restraints, if we should shatter the vase and plant ourselves on solid ground and face into the vastness? What does it matter what forms the future will take? Reality will unveil them. We are sure that they are going to be fine and noble like the tree sprouting freely.

Let our ideal be as lofty as may be. Let us not be “practical”. Let’s not try to “improve” the law and substitute one set of restraints for another. The more unattainable the ideal appears, the better. The sailor plots his course by the stars. So let our focus be on the longer term. In that way we can identify the shorter term. And speed our success.

What are we to do? Educate, ourselves and others. It all boils down to free enquiry. May our children take the measure of the law and hold it in contempt!

Rafael Barrett from *Rebelión*,
 Asunción, Paraguay, 15 March 1909

Jens Bjorneboe: Anarchist Writer at Constant Odds With Bourgeois Respectability **Hans Müller-Sewing**

Jens Bjorneboe was born on 9 October 1920 into a ship-owning family in Kristiansand in southern Norway. He had a difficult childhood beset by frequent, painful illnesses. He was the youngest of three children of Anna Maria and the Belgian-born shipowner Ingvald Bjorneboe. During his childhood he spent many long days on his own, and spent a lot of this time on reading, poetry and writing. At the age of fifteen, he read the book *Moorsoldaten* (The Peat-Bog Soldiers) describing the harsh conditions suffered by inmates of the Oranienburg concentration camp in Germany. Such reading plus his own sensibilities vis a vis individual sufferers soon prompted him to devote all of his energies to combatting bourgeois prejudice. During his high-school years he adopted a position of radical opposition to ‘decent society’ and those loyal to the established order. Friedrich Nietzsche soon became his favourite philosopher, whilst his favourite targets for criticism were his high school teachers, precisely because they were the representatives of that order. Inevitably, he quit school. In 1939, following the death of his father, he left to go travelling with his mother Anna Maria. His travels brought him to Italy where he came face to face with the war and the German terror which he described as “concentrated evil”. Indeed, he wrote: “The threat to us came, not from Nazism, nor from the policy of any particular party or just any nation; it came from a specific nation, Germany.” When Germany invaded Norway in 1940, Bjorneboe applied to join the army, but was rejected. That summer he went to sea as a cabin boy, peeling potatoes and performing menial tasks. He went to North America [> p.5]

Beating Fascism Anarchist anti- fascism in theory and practice edited by Anna Key

Anarchists have never hung back in the fight against fascism. This pamphlet covers the physical and ideological battles that anarchists have waged against fascism and its authoritarian dream. It starts with the Arditi del Popolo (Peoples Commandos) against Mussolini's Blackshirts, goes via German anarcho-sindicalists to the Spanish Revolution of 1936. This much can be found (usually well buried!) in the history books. But this pamphlet also uncovers the history of anarchist anti-fascism in fighting against the National Front in Britain in the seventies and the 'No Platform' activities of Anti-Fascist Action & Anti-Racist Action in the eighties, nineties and beyond. Documents from Russia and Australia and an interview with current activists from Britain and North America fill out a comprehensive look at the ideas and practice of anarchist anti-fascism.

Read it and you'll know we don't fight fascism out of loyalty to the current set-up: we want a world without bosses! This reader will give you an insight into the anarchist critique of fascist ideas – and our history of practical opposition to them.

Know the sort of world you want. Know your enemy and remember this – we have to beat the fascists every time, they only have to beat us once. If they come into power, we are dead and buried. Literally.
– from the 'Anti-fascism now' interview.

ISBN 1-873605-88-9 Anarchist Sources Series #6 ISSN 1479-9065 Price £2.50

NEW Santos – The Barcelona Of Brazil: Anarchism and Class Struggle in a Port City by Edgar Rodrigues, translated by Paul Sharkey, cover illustration by Clifford Harper

Anarchist Library Series #9 ISSN 1479-9073

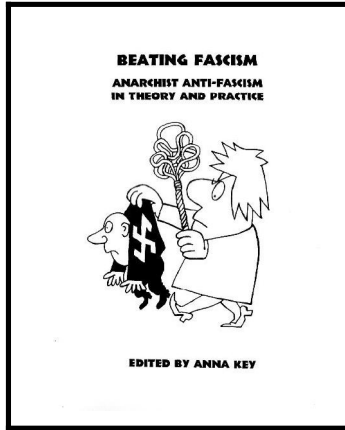
ISBN 1-873605-93-5 £3 (£2 subscribers)

Edgar Rodrigues, the chief historian of Anarchism in Brazil, recounts some of the events that made Santos notorious as an anarchist stronghold: demonstrations, raids and cavalry charges, but also self-education, workers' newspapers and revolutionary theatre.

Publishing News

Next pamphlet, due in January will be:

Konstantinos Speras: the Life and Activities of a Greek Anarcho-Syndicalist by Leonardos Kottis. ISBN 1-873605-14-5



To coincide with publishing our Anti-fascist collection 'Beating fascism' we here reprint a piece from *Black Flag*. At the time this was written (1971), the ruling classes of Europe were still reeling from the sixties' revolts and the upsurge in working class militancy. The 'taming' of the working class was – and still is – at the centre of their worldview. Anyone who thinks that 'police state' is merely a figure of speech (or propaganda) should read some studies on the Miners' Strike of 1984-5. Besides that, it's a useful piece for putting a class perspective on issues of racism. Some things have changed in the thirty-four years since it was written, except for the preference of media and politicians to see the 'race problem' rather than the 'boss problem'.

The Militant Right – Is It A Menace?

Fascism in this country has gone through many phases. The original Imperial Fascisti, in imitation of Mussolini, was purely a strike-breaking outfit. As such, it received the blessing of many right wing Tories, including Churchill, until it fell under the domination of the unbalanced Arnold Leese, who introduced racial theories (which included measuring the members' noses with callipers).

Then came Mosely, first of all welcomed by the Tory Right – such as Rothermere – who played first with the idea of direct ant-working-class activity on the Mussolini lines, made popular in conservative circles by American examples such as the Legion, KKK, etc – and then bid for power by parading as a "national socialist" on Hitler lines. This nominal anti-capitalism was never very strong in the case of British fascism, which collapsed during the East End rent strikes because it wholeheartedly supported the landlords. During the War Mosely fell into disapproval with all because of the identification of Fascism with the national enemy, and since then he has tried to deny he was ever anything more than a pioneer of the Common Market. How far this is taken seriously by those who still support him (chiefly because of the bread scene) is doubtful.

Colin Jordan revived the Nazi movement by adroit publicity – out on a limb from other fascist movements, he deliberately cultivated a German Nazi appearance. But he seems out of the picture now. The other hordes of would-be Fuhrers have come and gone – one missed his chance because too much excitement sent him back to the nut-house (something which can only be overlooked once one gains power), another evaporated at the sight of too much cash around (so did the cash). The only fascistic organisation left worth considering as more than a token gesture to frighten the naughty workers is the National Front. This sometimes boldly denies being fascist, but the members make little pretence of not being so. It has the overt sympathy of a large part of the Conservative Party, but also makes a bid for working-class support chiefly on the anti-coloured issue. Yet it never spells out what it really is – because this issue conceals a larger truth: that the fascist movement has reverted to its honest position of being a militant pro-capitalist body without pretence about "national socialism".

For the Powellite line is quite clear: IF it is true that the capitalist *gives work* to the worker, and if it is true we are dependent upon “the market” for the amount of work available, then if there are too many workers there will be unemployment. Hence immigration is a calamity. BUT THIS IS FALSE FROM THE BEGINNING – for the capitalist is in reality dependent upon the worker. The more workers there are, the more is produced. “Ah – wait until you get depression,” cheerfully cry the National Fronters. “Then you will see... rivers of blood etc.” This is on the assumption that depressions are naturally caused, like floods or earthquakes, whereas in reality they are part of the repressive machinery of capitalism.

It is noticeable that those who call for a ban on immigration never call for a ban on emigration (of the totalitarians, only the Soviet Union is logical on this). But while both exist, and in more or less the same proportions, there are really no problems whether of overcrowding or anything else, even within capitalism.

Any tendency towards right wing militancy is welcomed even by the most liberal of the right wing, for it represents the threat to left wing militancy which is often called upon. “If you persist, what will happen will be a right wing backlash” we are warned. One would, however, need a better set of bogeymen than those now parading as the would-be restorers of order. Fascism in this country has never been able to get off the ground. Its only weapon is incitement to hooliganism on racial grounds. Even at this game, it has been outbid by the police. We repeat what we said elsewhere in this issue: the immediate danger in this country is a Police State, rather than a fascist one.

Black Flag, v.2, n.3 (March 1971)

It It Was Easy, They Wouldn't Call It 'Struggle': Mark Barnsley Talks About Repression and Resistance in British Prisons.

Mark Barnsley tells the story of 10 long years in prison, a story of resistance against repression, about struggle and solidarity. He explains how the State attempted to crush the British prison struggle, and the tactics they used, he looks at the Prison Industrial Complex and the Panopticon Society, at the exploitation of prison labour, prison privatisation, prisoner solidarity, and more.

The pamphlet is composed of two transcripts of talks given by Mark in Lille and Barcelona in 2004, the first part of which has already been published, in French, by the anti-prisons group La Breche. The French group's original introduction is also reproduced, for the first time in English.

Twenty-six pages. £2 plus postage

Copies available from the KSL

Credit

This edition of the KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library produced in October 2005 by the KSL collective. Thanks to everyone who helped with this issue and the pamphlets (including the 'reading group' and the comrade who stumped up the cash for the anti-fascist one).

Obituary

Gary Fletcher 1967-2004

Gary was a militant anarchist who lived and fought for a better society in Bolton. Gary was a committed class-struggle anarchist heavily involved in the struggles against the Poll Tax and Anti-Fascism in the 80's and 90's. Gary formed part of the Bolton Anarchist Group – an affinity group whose impact and influence within Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), especially the Northern Network was instrumental in the anti-fascist successes against the revived BNP of the 80's and early 90's. Gary distinguished himself in many actions against the BNP ensuring AFA's no platform for fascists in the North of England was a great success.

At first glance Gary could appear forbidding and fiery of character, but anyone in his presence for any time was won over with his ready wit, warm uninhibited friendship and hatred of oppression. Gary was without guile and treated his friends as equals. He was a positive and dynamic influence on all those who met him, though his sometimes frank manner reflected his impatience with the oppression of the system, rather than animosity to friends or comrades. Gary's politics could be summed up in one word: 'militant' – direct action was instinctive with him. Gary was a pivotal figure in any activity. Although Gary was a strong individualist, he never underestimated the importance of collective action.

Gary was a born story-teller and used to keep people entertained on actions with his stories. My personal favourite which I also witnessed took place at an anti-fascist event. From where I stood, I saw the colour drain from Gary's face, as a copper pulled him up and searched him, coming up with a small cylindrical object from his clothing. I expected the worse: but then inexplicably, the copper returned the object after saying something to Gary who suddenly looked very relieved, almost ecstatic. Gary walked over and smiled his smile, and then told me what happened. The copper mistakenly attributed the object as a rape alarm and accused Gary of being 'soft.' Gary, probably for the first and only time ever – agreed with the 'plod'! This apparent meeting of minds between Gary and the plod (in every sense of the word), wasn't because Gary had lost his radical edge or instinctive hatred of the agents of state oppression but to the fact the item was a CS canister and Gary faced a custodial sentence if caught.

Gary's struggle for a better society was cut short by a long and debilitating illness. Gary died at the young age of 37 with much promise unfulfilled. Gary remained true to his beliefs up to the end asking for no religious imagery or speeches at the funeral. The best tribute to Gary would be to redouble our efforts to change this evil and corrupt system. Gary will be missed by all who knew him. For those who want to know a little more about Gary, he appears in the anti-fascist book, *No Retreat: The Secret War Between Britain's Anti-Fascists and the Far Right*, as 'Gary the axe'.

Solidarity with the Moroccan libertarian paper *Ici et Maintenant* (Here and Now)

On the night of Wednesday 22 to Thursday 23 June 2005, persons unknown torched the premises of Morocco's only libertarian paper, *Ici et Maintenant* in Msemrir, in the province of Ouarzazate where the paper is published.

Since its inception the paper had been under pressure from the authorities and from persons unknown, mainly due to its exposes of the jailing of trade unionists and miners from the Imini mines. A threatening letter was received on 26 November 2004 after the publication of issue No 3 of the paper. On 3 June 2005 the paper's managing editor, Brahim Fillali, was summoned before the judicial brigade of the Ouarzazate gendarmerie in connection with a forged letter sent to the Justice Minister. He refused, having received no written summons. 19 days after that there was an arson attack on the paper.

CGT Andalusia in Spain is asking for protest faxes to be sent to:

The governor of Ouarzazate province; fax number 00 212 44 88 25 68

The Moroccan Minister of Justice: 00 212 37 72 37 10

The Moroccan Interior Minister: 00 212 37 76 74 04

E-mails of support can be sent to: tiwirga@caramail.com

Brahim Fillali writes:

"I point an accusing finger at the authorities and the local mafia, at all who are disturbed by this paper, those who profit from the poverty, ignorance, marginalisation and under-development of this region."

From Rojo y Negro Digital (www.rojoynegro.info)

Spanish Anarchists in Exile in Algeria

On 19 March 1939, my father was forced to flee Spain due to the victory of Franco's troops. With him went his partner and two children, which was unusual, for the vast majority of fugitives had been forced to set off alone as per instructions from their trade unions or, more rarely, for personal reasons.

I was seven years old at the time. The war that ended in defeat for the anti-Francoists lingered as the backdrop to my childhood. All I can remember of it are a few striking eruptions. On the other hand, I spent the long period of exile that followed surrounded throughout my childhood and early youth by comrades who had themselves also been landed in Oran, then a French colonial port, from a trawler in March 1939.

Our exile started once we were ashore. The French police were waiting for us on the dockside. We found ourselves being treated, not as fighters against fascist rule, but as common criminals. We were lashed and scattered through concentration camps, some of us never to return. The camps in Colomb-Bechar, Boghari and Djelfa were nothing better than punishment centres. My father spent six months in Boghari, at the end of which he was transferred to Carnot where his wife and two children had been waiting for him to be released from prison. Carnot was a family reunification camp which I have to admit could not be compared with the sinister prisons named earlier. My father eventually secured a certificate allowing him to take up a

job at a hairdressers' in Orleansville and we were allowed to leave Carnot after an enforced stay of over a year. Fleeing the malaria raging on the Cheliff plains, we moved on to the capital, Algiers where a number of other comrades had also sought refuge.

It was in Algiers that I grew up. I shared the life of my exiled elders, targeted for all manner of problems reserved for outsiders and driven by just one hope: of returning to Spain once Franco had been overthrown. Of itself, this obsession of theirs explains their stand-offishness as a cultural group; they kept out of the events that were to shape Algerian history. But there were ideological grounds to for this undeniable remoteness (on the part of the libertarians at any rate) from a land that they regarded, right up until the end, as simply a place of transit, and from its inhabitants.

In fact, when the colonized rose in violent revolt against their colonizers in November 1954, a ferocious seven year war ensued. During which terrorism and a trail of bereavement, hatred and thirst for vengeance would become standard practice. The libertarian "Spanish refugees" would take no part in the conflict, although right from the start they were sympathetic to the fact that the oppressed had finally rebelled against their colonial masters. But they could not see how their own struggle could be squared with a fight for national independence and the creation of an Algerian state. During rare contacts with the local leadership of the National Liberation Front (FLN), the comrades tried to persuade them that all their people would be doing would be exchanging one master for another, an Algerian exploiter for a French one. They also criticized the complacency with which the Movement played along with the Muslim religion. And they disapproved of the rebels' tactics of using terrorist outrages as a fighting method, something that was to lead to their murdering more than one of our comrades on the grounds that he was a "roumi", a European like all the rest. This reflected a sordidly racist, inhuman behaviour like the one that drove their colonialist opponents. In short, the Spanish libertarians could not see anything in that struggle around which to mobilize. In Spain, they had fought for an end to capitalist society and to install a regime of exemplary justice for all the peoples of the earth.

Besides, had they, in spite of everything, thrown their weight somehow behind the uprising, they were still Spaniards, ie. foreigners, utterly forbidden to interfere with French government domestic policy. Breaching that ban amounted to illegal interference and that would have jeopardized their special residency status which entitled them to go on living in Algeria, or in France.

Finally, the last but undeniable factor preventing engagement with the insurgent movement was the aforementioned obsession they had with some day returning to Spain. After twenty years in exile, this still-vivid dream impelled them to devote all of their efforts to making a reality of that dream.

All of which explains of course why no history of the Algerian war, so far as I am aware, ever mentions the presence of Spanish refugees or tackles their stance on events in Algeria. Does that not mean that they should be lumped together with the masses of "Algerian French"?

North Africa

That is hard to say, they being “refugee Spaniards”. Nor can they be lumped with the *pieds noirs*. For the reasons set out, the libertarians never backed the cause of an Algerian Algeria, but it is equally true that they did actively oppose the criminal activity of the OAS, some at the risk of their lives, as in the case of comrade Suria who used to sell anarchist newspapers in a bars in Bab-el-Oued; he was murdered by OAS thugs and his remains dumped in a sack labelled “So perish all traitors”. But then again, as far as the libertarians were concerned, opposing the OAS which had secured support from Spain, boiled down to fighting Francoism rather than participating in the Algerian people’s national liberation struggle. Even though it is a fact that on the whole they had always been openly hostile to the colonial population which they held to be reactionary in political terms, their stance was a non-interventionist one. This fight was not their fight. They were neither for a French Algeria nor for an Algerian Algeria.

After the declaration of independence (and the Evian Treaty of 1962) the vast majority of the “Spanish refugees in Algeria” opted for exile in metropolitan France.

In my own case, having taken French nationality and become a teacher, I stayed on in Algeria to help out. This enabled me to witness the birth of the Algerian state and to see confirmation of the analysis earlier offered by libertarian comrades. The fellagha populace of the Mitidja, workers from Belcourt or Bab-el-Oued still worshipped Allah and found themselves under new masters. The only change was that they and the masters were now citizens of a new Algerian Algeria

Miguel Martinez

From www.chez.com/ascasodurruti/Pages/debanaralger

Jens Bjorneboe from front> and the Svalbard Islands deep inside the Arctic Circle. He then bummed his way around northern Norway before settling in Oslo. In the Norwegian capital, he quickly drifted into a circle of bohemians. He learnt to paint and attended an arts and crafts school. He was delving ever deeper into world literature and was attracted to the thought of the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard. He then left for Denmark and finally settled in Stockholm in Sweden where he met the German Jew Lisel Funk. In the Swedish capital he came across refugees from half the countries in Europe. He listened to the tales they told and that was how he discovered the outrages in the concentration camps. After a few years, in 1945, Jens and Lisel, now married, moved to Oslo. There he became deeply involved in symbolist art and literature. He wrote upwards of twenty novels and several plays which highlighted Nazi barbarism, the death camps and a whole education system rooted in authoritarianism. But he also highlighted the difficulties of life in cities subjected to air raids. In the 1950s he became a teacher at a Steiner school. 1955 saw publication of his novel *Jonas* which targeted the Norwegian school system and the State, as he accused the Norwegian government with exercising power through the school system. The response from the bourgeois world was not long in coming and Jens became the target of a massive campaign of denigration. In 1957 Bjorneboe was stricken by very serious depression. He took to drinking and tried to

shake off his depression by going travelling. In 1959 he parted from Lisel and a year after that married Tove Tveteraas, by whom he had three children. It was towards the end of the 1950s that he started to tilt towards anarchism. To be honest, in his *Fear in America* (1952), there are elements of interest from a libertarian viewpoint. In it, he associates the West with the idea of freedom and the East with the notion of equality, but Jens argued forcefully for the need to marry these two things differently since a society rooted in freedom without equality would lead to privilege and a system of equals would, in the absence of freedom, lead on to slavery.

His trips to Italy led Bjorneboe to turn his attention to matters very different from his past concerns. He wrote *Winter in Bellapalma*, a book designed to set out the frictions between fisherfolk and tourists. Meanwhile, his drinking was becoming a problem. In the 1960s, his family’s economic fortunes suffered a serious downturn and by then he had a reputation as an author who showed insight but who was also argumentative and unreliable. As if to confirm his critics he published the sexually-based novel *Without a Stitch*. A scandal erupted and he was accused of nihilism and even faced some difficulties with the law. A few years after that, in Denmark, he published *Without a Stitch 2* reigniting the controversy and its consequences.

Between 1964 and 1973, he wrote his trilogy devoted to *The History of Bestiality*. This is how he described the time he had spent working on these books: “Throughout the entire time I was writing the history of beastliness, I had only one lifestyle: research, drink, work, drink, collapse and drink almost without interruption.”

At a symposium on anarchism held in Oslo in 1971, he argued that the core of the anarchist project was the promotion of socialism plus freedom of the individual and for that very reason he came in for criticism from the Leninists as well as from the capitalists. Anarchism therefore was a candidate for the status of the most despised of political movements.

Bjorneboe saw anarchy as the only acceptable form of society if freedom was to be preserved and equality pursued. But, more interestingly, he zeroed in on anarchism’s ongoing urge to explore, its ongoing refusal to embrace things uncritically.

Bjorneboe remained a free spirit and a lonely one. He despised political parties and organisations and felt close to a number of literary figures like Hans Jaeger, Henrik Ibsen and Arne Garborg. This is what he wrote about parties: “We are losing our ability to face up to other people’s views. We see different opinions as a disease and a crime. On the other hand we see nothing wrong in political parties pursuing a policy in which dissent is not merely unprovided for but inconceivable.”

Shortly before his death, he wrote a play about Emma Goldmann (*Red Emma*). In May 1976 he took his own life, leaving behind a note that stated that loneliness was killing him.

Bollettino Archivio G. Pinelli (Milan), No 25, July 2005 (pp. 35-36)

Zapata Reprinted

'Zapata of Mexico' – a review

A timely reprint of Peter E. Newell's account of the life of Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919) and the part played by the insurgent peasant forces under his direction in the Mexican Revolution. Originally published by Cienfuegos Press in 1979, this short and fast-paced book provides a useful introduction to the ideas of the original Zapatista forces.

Many readers will be struck by the many similarities between the life and struggle of Zapata and those of another great revolutionary anarchist figure, Nestor Makhno. Both were charismatic organisers of peasant insurgent armies and highly expert in guerrilla warfare tactics, who initially supported a wider social 'revolution' only to be betrayed and forced to continue fighting against a professional group of bureaucrats, petty tyrants and opportunists. Vilified by an increasingly biased press, who referred to Zapata as a 'licentious and savage demon', both men were portrayed as mere 'bandits' in an attempt to stifle their concepts of egalitarian land distribution and libertarian social revolution.

Although he never explicitly referred to himself as an anarchist, Zapata was clearly influenced by the ideas of the Flores Magon brothers and their libertarian communist journal *Regeneracion*. This was published by the Partido Liberal Mexicano from exile in Texas and smuggled into the country. In fact, the famous rallying-cry of the Zapatistas, 'Tierra y Libertad!' was originally coined by Flores Magon and was only later adapted by Zapata and his comrades.

Newell places the Zapatistas within the context of growing anarchist, socialist and syndicalist concepts that began to take root in Mexico from the 1870s onwards. However, although he touches briefly on the early mutual-aid and friendly societies formed at the end of the nineteenth century, and mentions the Gran Circulo de Obreros (and early trade union centre), it would perhaps have been better to have explored these areas in more depth. Libertarian ideas never exist in a vacuum and by mainly concentrating on the chronological events of the Mexican Revolution, the reader is sometimes left confused as to the ideological background and basis behind Zapata's guerrilla tactics.

However, as a straightforward account of Zapata and the Mexican Revolution Newell's book is certainly a page-turner. The struggle for the restoration of communal land rights in their fight against the oppressive hacienda system (huge estates owned by wealthy landlords and worked by the locals for near starvation 'wages') was the central concern of Zapata and his forces. The famous 'Plan de Ayala' drafted by Zapata and Oticio Montano, a libertarian schoolteacher, wherein the revolutionary demands of the Zapatistas were clearly formulated, is well covered by Newell. Addressing a gathering of local chiefs who had been called together to express their opinions on the Plan de Ayala, Zapata uttered his and stirring words:

'Amigos, seek justice from tyrannical governments, including this one we have now, not with your hat in your hand, but with a rifle in your fist... Men of the South, it is better to die on your feet than live on your knees... The land is free, free for all, without masters, that is the cry of the revolution.'

There follows a clear account of the twists and turns of the Revolution and the parts played by figures such as Madero, Huerta, Obregon and Carranza. For anyone unfamiliar with the events of 1910-19 and the roles of such shadowy figures as 'Pancho' Villa (with whom Zapata formed a brief alliance) Newell's book is certainly a useful starting point.

The Zapatista forces were not a highly centralised or structured army as such, but rather a loose collection of armed guerrilla bands. As Newell points out, these forces represented the people themselves in arms. Functioning without paid secretaries or officials, the Zapatistas operated along libertarian lines, insisting upon regional autonomy and decentralisation. As Newell comments: 'It organised itself into small, largely self-supporting bands, based upon the village which, in turn, could be marshalled rapidly into much larger contingents where and when necessary... the liberation army established the procedure of alternating the *Soldados* between three month periods of "active service" and working in the fields.'

This will be of great interest to students of anarchist methods of organisation in the first half of the twentieth century, as are accounts of the local federalist administrations that were set up in the southern state of Morelos during the middle years of the revolution. We see how a direct grassroots democracy was put into place, based around village councils and self-policing, with the aim of destroying the old hacienda system one and for all. A highly-structured programme of agrarian reorganisation was undertaken by the Zapatistas who employed the services of skilled technicians and agronomists. This led to a (regrettably brief) period of relative prosperity in Morelos state. However, we should perhaps take with a pinch of salt Newell's assertion that during the summer of 1915 'Morelos had become almost a rural paradise.'

Zapata's eventual murder in 1919 by the treacherous Colonel Guajardo is covered very well, as is the gradual disintegration of the southern revolutionary forces as the wider revolution eventually 'fizzled out'. There is also a useful appendix summarising the history of the Mexican land question and the continuing struggle for a fairer share of land and natural resources.

Newell quotes a Mary Charlesworth in his conclusion: 'The Mexican Revolution is still incomplete, as great inequalities in wealth exist and the peasant problem is still unsolved. But at least there is the ideal of the revolution to struggle towards, and this is important for the Mexican temperament.'

Newell's book is clearly of interest to those following events in modern Mexico. The EZLN, the indigenous rebel army of Chiapas, who have named themselves after Zapata and continue the same struggles against power and corruption are seen by many anarchists as the most important and influential libertarian grouping of the early twenty-first century. This is not the place to discuss the aims and methods of the EZLN and their relationship to the original Zapatistas. However, for a critique of the EZLN, I would recommend *Beyond the Balaclavas in South Mexico* published by Elephant Editions (2003).

Guy de Stronacchi. *Zapata of Mexico* (£9.50) from Freedom Press – www.freedompress.co.uk