

The Floodgates of Anarchy

Some Highlights from the Anarchist Press

Don Alexander

Reports of the July 1988 Toronto anarchist "unconvention," which exploded on the front pages of Canadian newspapers and in television footage, were the first indications many people had that a vibrant, militant, political movement had been building in North America in the deceptively complacent and conservative political climate of the 1980s.

In the publishing world too, there is evidence of increasing anarchist activity. As editors of *Kick It Over*, a magazine with a promiscuous exchange policy, we receive anarchist publications from Japan, Germany, Italy, Korea, Australia, Greece, England, Sweden, Uruguay and France, among others.

Debates carried out in the anarchist press are usually confined to the limited readership of anarchist publications. A recent debate about ecology marks a departure from this; it has spilled over into the rest of the left media, most notably the *Nation*, and the *Utne Reader*. It even provoked a story in *The Globe and Mail*.

The debate went from a simmer to a boil when *Kick It Over* reprinted an excerpt from an interview published in an Australian magazine with Earth First! leader Dave Foreman. Foreman, an exponent of "deep ecology," argued that Ethiopians should be allowed to starve ("let nature take its course"), and that Central American refugees should be forbidden from entering the U.S. and using up "our" resources. The editors criticised the reactionary and superficial analysis that this represented and invited deep ecologists to respond.

Initially, the deep ecologists did not take up the challenge, but Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, two "left Greens" from Vermont, used Foreman's remarks as the basis for two highly critical articles circulated at the "National Green Gathering" held in July 1987 at Amherst, Massachusetts. These articles were later reprinted in *Kick It Over*, provoking a storm of letters, pro and con.

The debate in *Kick It Over* has

since shifted to the question of "spirituality." A follow-up essay by Biehl, "The Politics of Myth" — also published in *Kick It Over* — was critical of neo-paganism and "goddess worship," and drew outraged responses from individuals who abhorred what they felt to be Biehl's intolerant and "hyper-rational" views.

Kick It Over was not the only anarchist journal to carry the ecology debate. *Fifth Estate*, a Detroit-based publication which is now in its 24th year, produced a special issue, entitled "How Deep is Deep Ecology?," which rigorously dissected many of deep ecology's advocates' more misanthropic statements. The issue, which is being reprinted as a book, has recently been followed up by another special issue — "The Return of the Son of Deep Ecology."

The more "high-brow" anarchist publications have also gotten in on the act. Both *Our Generation*, a scholarly anarchist journal produced out of Montréal, and *The Raven*, *Our Generation's* British equivalent, have published pieces by Bookchin dealing with deep ecology and ecological philosophy.

Another issue which has attracted less interest outside anarchist circles (except perhaps with law enforcement agencies) is the issue of tactics of social change, particularly the use of violence. While all anarchists abhor the nation-state, there are many different opinions as to how anarchist social change will come about. Anarchists come in many flavours: anarcho-pacifists, anarcho-feminists, anarcho-syndicalists and "anarcho-cyclists" (urban bicycle activists). There are green anarchists, punk anarchists, even so-called "terrorist" anarchists.

When the Litton factory in Toronto was bombed by Direct Action in early 1983, one of the first anarchist publications to respond was *Kick It Over*. It devoted several pages in each of three issues to the bombing, subsequent arrests, and harassment of Direct Action supporters. Whereas one

manifesto denounced the bombing as "Vanguard Terror vs. State Terror," another declared that the bombing had forced the peace movement to consider alternatives to its sterile reformism. The views of those arrested ("The Vancouver Five," later convicted of the bombing and, by then, residing in prison) were solicited as well, and were published in interview form.

The Vancouver-based *Open Road*, which has declined in frequency in recent years, also published major articles on the subject. In addition to "Litton and the left," assessing the radicalising effects of the action, *Open Road* recently published "The Politics of Bombs," which suggested that the Vancouver Five were too timid in their approach. This, in turn, elicited both denunciations of the article and repudiations of guerilla activity as a viable strategy.

The issue of violence arose again when the demonstration on the last day of the Toronto "unconvention" degenerated into violence between demonstrators and cops. *Ecomedia*, a bi-weekly Toronto street sheet, published an enthusiastic editorial, "This Time We Retaliate" (which was followed up with a special insert next issue offering alternative views), while an article in *Kick It Over* suggested that making militant demonstrations a standard feature of anarchist gatherings was tantamount to imposing the views of a faction of anarchists on the whole movement. Other letters and articles in *Kick It Over* suggested that militant resistance to the cops had a therapeutic value and helped in the self-definition of anarchist politics, while others argued that it merely reinforced tendencies for anarchists to remain in their own hermetically sealed political ghetto.

Kick It Over, *Open Road* and *Fifth Estate* have been around for eight, 13 and 24 years, respectively. In recent years, however, they have been joined by a new generation of anarchist publications, edited by people in their late teens and early twenties. These younger activists, many of whom were involved in organising the

"uncor
ing pul
Reality
overlap

Real
basis an
on nat
politic
the afc
distrib
Toront
action
brates
except
tions t
enthus
their y
feel th
neede

This
a critic
Fifth E
RN's se
eration
and el
sugges
trust o
doctri
on the
analys

The
hierar
ments
tion fo
leftist
has fo
debate
main
believ
nearly
with t
capita
the co
the we
view a
don't
up a b
cite su
as evi

Fifth Estate

Toronto's Anarchist Bi-Weekly
Ecomedia
BULLETIN

REALITY
NOW

KICK IT OVER®

"unconvention," produce impressive-looking publications. Two of particular note are *Reality Now* and *Ecomedia*, which have overlapping editorial groups.

Reality Now is published on an irregular basis and consists of unedited submissions on native issues, animal rights, personal politics, and prisoner solidarity. *Ecomedia* is the aforementioned street sheet which is distributed free at various locations around Toronto. It highlights instances of direct action from around the world, and celebrates resistance in myriad forms. With the exception of *Open Road*, the older publications tend to be more theoretical, and less enthusiastic about violent activities than their younger counterparts, while the latter feel that more action, and less talk, is needed.

This difference in emphasis emerged in a critical letter sent by the editors of the *Fifth Estate* to *Reality Now*, commenting on *RN's* seemingly uncritical support for "liberation movements" in Central America and elsewhere. The editors responded by suggesting that it was better to earn the trust of the oppressed, even while having doctrinal reservations, than to merely sit on the sidelines and develop the "perfect" analysis.

The theme of what stand to take toward hierarchically structured "liberation movements" has long been a bone of contention for anarchists and anti-authoritarian leftists in general. The diversity of views has found its clearest expression in the debate around Nicaragua. There are three main schools of thought. *Fifth Estate* believes that the conflict in Nicaragua (now nearly over) was a "capitalist civil war" — with the Sandinistas representing state capital (*à la* Cuba and eastern Europe) and the contras representing U.S. capital and the west. A second group sees this point of view as totally reductionist. While they don't deny that the Sandinistas want to set up a bureaucratic authoritarian state (and cite suppression of the labour movement as evidence of this), they claim that the

Nicaraguan revolution was a real revolution and that the Sandinistas have not yet achieved complete hegemony. And, finally, there are those who advocate limited support for the Sandinistas, claiming that the F.S.L.N. is not monolithically Marxist-Leninist and may yet yield a relatively democratic society. These views were debated with great passion and sophistication in the now-defunct anarchist journal *No Middle Ground*. The debate continues in *New Politics*, a forum for a variety of views, including those of anarchists.

While the writing in the new anarchist publications isn't as elegant or the layout as appealing as in the long-established journals, their editors are speaking to a new generation of activists who have their own unique concerns, which are better expressed in forums produced by their peers. Fortunately, interchange occurs between the generations. Many common themes appear in both kinds of publications, with each side maintaining a healthy respect for the other's work. Unlike the old left/new left split of the 1960s, anarchism of the late 1980s seems big enough to encompass both the young and those who forged their politics in the struggles of the sixties.

Don Alexander is a member of the Kick It Over editorial collective.

JOURNALS DISCUSSED

Ecomedia, P.O. Box 915, Station F, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2N9. Free in Toronto; twenty-six issues for \$15.00 (mailed).

Fifth Estate, P.O. Box 02548, Detroit, Michigan, 48202, U.S.A. Four issues for \$7.00 (U.S.).

Kick It Over, P.O. Box 5811, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1P2. Four issues for \$7.50.

New Politics, P.O. Box 98, Brooklyn, New York, 11231, U.S.A. Individual copies are \$6.00 (U.S.).

Open Road, P.O. Box 6135, Station G, Vancouver, B.C., V6R 4G5. Four issues for two hours' pay.

Our Generation, 3981 boulevard St-Laurent, Montréal, P.Q., H2W 1Y5. Two issues for \$14.00 (\$10.00 students).

Reality Now, P.O. Box 6326, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1P7. Four issues for \$8.00.

The Raven, 84b, Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 U.K. Write for subscription rates.

For regular reviews of alternative publications (including anarchist) see:

Factsheet Five, c/o Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Avenue, Rensselaer, N.Y., 12144-4502, U.S.A. \$2.00 (U.S.) per issue (can order up to 4 issues in advance).

From *Reality Now*,
Spring 1989

