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May 21, 2012



Various Authors

Anarchism in Glasgow (Interview)

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14/8/87

Transcribed in November 1993 from a not-always-clear cassette tape. A formerly
inaudible section has now been transcribed with help from Charlie Baird Jnr.
Anarchy is Order CD

14/8/87

Q: What do you think caused the lull in anarchism after the Second World War? And what do you think of the upsurge in militant anarchism?

CB: There's always been a continuation of splits. Anarchist movements have drifted away and disappeared, but there's always another crops up again. Right from the beginning of the anarchist movement, as Caldly described. There will always be an anarchist movement in Britain now.

We've got to try to assess just what happened to those movements which disappeared. They didn't die a natural death. That's what I was trying to get at tonight. As long as we allow people to dominate within groups there will be splits. And if we are anarchists, we shouldn't allow them, because that's one of the principles of anarchism.

JTC: I must have been at thousands of group meetings and always a personality appears, and when it comes to voting, they want to see how he's going to vote, and you get the votes swung by a person who has the power of speech rather than by pure logic.

CB: I can recognise that Raeside was a great speaker and can hold an audience for hours; I can recognise that Guy was a great speaker, but I never looked up to them, never treated them as personalities, though they had charisma or anything like that. If I did, I'd know I was suffering from an inferiority complex. No anarchist should suffer from something like that.

[Tape ends here]

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you were showing you were opposed to authority, you did it for sheer irresponsibility. All the framework of society had been shattered and that's how it started and it helped destroy the Clarion.

MB: They didn't have a watch committee as such. But it was yours, so everyone looked after it. It was a workers' thing. Parents could let very young children go cycling with them, because the strongest waited for the weaker. . . there was none of this out-to-win. In the rooms it was the same, you just saw that the rooms were looked after.

JTC: They also had caravans pulled by horses from village to village. . .

Q: Were the socialist sunday schools connected to the Clarion Clubs?

MB: No. I was taken very young to the APCF, I knew about the rooms in Clarendon St, and also about Bakunin House. Tom Anderson ran a Socialist Sunday School. They met..

JTC: They met in Methven St in Govan but there may have been other places. . .

MB: Originally in Bakunin House, merely a let. That was my first visit, I was 5 or 6 at the time. They moved away then, and it was too far for us to travel from the north of Glasgow. The College Sunday School was predominantly ILP, not because the ILP ran it. There was a bond between even-pink revolutionaries at that time, that you gathered together. We went to the College Socialist Sunday School. It started down at College St and went from that. Again, it burst up — there's no socialist Sunday School.

Q: What social events were organised besides the business meetings?

MB: Well, they had dances, we had groups playing . . .

CB: Drinking sprees . . .

MB: Even in Guy's . . .

JTC: You look at "The Spur" and you'll see adverts for days in the Waverley, the paddle-steamer. It cost about 2/6 for the whole day. We did a lot of these things. Then you had fighting things too . . . Other socialist groups, the cycling club . . .

MB: The Clarion Club, that did a marvellous job, but the Communists bust that up. The Clarion rooms were up in Wellington St. You didn't have to be in a group at all; they had tea rooms, all these things . . .

JTC: Snooker . . .

MB: That's right and social evenings, which all helped to defray expenses. The Clarion Club covered a long period. And they had camping facilities out in Carbeth. The CP went in and started to run it too.

By the time they were done, there was no group.

JTC: But also the deterioration in social standards helped. The Clarion had a place in Queens Crescent, that was their club, but in no time the billiard balls were pinched the tablecloths were ripped — all sorts of things which never happened before the war. Things were sabotaged, graffiti on the lavatory walls; that never happened before the war.

MB: Even during the war.

JTC: A general deterioration of social standards which happened at the end of the war, because the war broke down inhibitions. Young fellows of 18 or 19 were smashing windows in Germany and pinching things, they carried that back with them. They didn't break them down in a revolutionary sense, where you did things because you were an anarchist or because

CB: After the split we did produce a paper, “Direct Action” but it was mostly industrial.

JTC: Willie MacDougall did a paper? Who produced “Advance” and “Solidarity”?

MB: Willie MacDougall did his own Solidarity but Direct Action was another wee printer, an alternative to . . .

CB: While that issue was going on about more industrial news in War Commentary, I suggested to the Glasgow Group, that we had the money and could produce an organ of our own, quite a substantial thing too, but, of course, Shaw and Leech sabotaged that too. But with the benefit of hindsight, as Mollie said earlier on, the majority weren’t anarchists, just camp-followers suffering from a leadership complex.

MB: We had one good wee Irish guy, wee Reilly, he had a huge meeting one Sunday in Princes St, and was doing quite well and got very excited and said “If you want a leader I’ll lead you!” The majority did require a leader.

JTC: What was the name of the old fleapit cinema you (JR) used to fill every Sunday in Partick?

JR: No, the only one was the Cosmo in Rose St.

MB: Oh, the Grove.

Q: Did the women play a distinctive role in those days?

MB: No, women play a part, they’re merely a part. I’m against all this gay movements and black movements and womens movements. If you’re an anarchist, you’re an anarchist and it doesn’t matter what section of them you are. If you start splitting them into groups you’re going to have less.

JR: Babs was minutes secretary . . .

BR: And also made tea!

In August 1987 the Raesides, who had been living in Australia for many years, returned to Glasgow for a visit. This provided a rare opportunity to bring together some surviving members of anarchist groups in Glasgow during the 1940s for a public discussion on the history of that movement and the lesson which can be learned.

Q: How did people come in contact with the movement and how did the movement strike them at the time?

JR: Well, the clothes have changed a bit! And the venue — the anarchist movement would have had to grow quite a bit to get a room like this.

MB: Yes. . . The “Hangman’s Rest”: when there was a lull in the questions the rats used to come out!!

JR: Or street corners . . .

JTC: The movement started in Glasgow in a way that’s buried in a certain amount of mystery because they haven’t been able to research it properly, but after the Paris Commune a number of Frenchmen came to Britain and one of these settled in Glasgow and became the companion of a woman called MacDonald who lived in Crown St. She had anarchist views and they organised the first anarchism movement in Glasgow working from Crown St. and meeting in the space outside Glasgow Green which is called Jostling Sq or Jail Sq. People gathered there every Sunday. Afterwards there was a lull until we have the Social Democratic Federation (Hyndman’s crowd) building up a group in Glasgow; the next stage on the road to anarchism was when the disaffected formed the Socialist League under William Morris. They wanted to be anti-parliamentary but not anarchist. There was such an influx of anarchists in Glasgow and eventually in 1895 it broke up and the anarchist movement of Glasgow was formed. It had 50 members and met in a place in Holland St. It had a number of speakers: Willie MacDougall was one — and the movement developed from that. From 1900 it was able to invite Kropotkin and Voltairine deClerke to speak in Glasgow

and was quite a force up to the start of the 1st World War when it broke up because of the persecutions it had to endure because of its anti-war position. MB: I knew that Guy (Aldred) had a group in little rooms in Clarendon St. . .

JTC: Guy Aldred came to Glasgow in 1912. . . The anarchist movement in London had three elements: one was Stepniak, one was Kropotkin, the other was Bakunin. Stepniak had shot a policeman in St.Petersburg and fled to London — he belonged to the old Russian Narodniks, who believed in propaganda by deed, in shooting officials and they believed that the State has a social contract with the people and when it fails to fulfil that contract, the common people are in a state of nature and can declare war. That was the beginning of the theory of propaganda by deed in Russia. The other stream was Kropotkin who believed that we are dominated by the State and he gave a historical analysis of the State and that we should get back to a pre-state condition of a society run by communes. But the third person was Bakunin who from a philosophical point of view came through Hegel and he believed that we had to destroy authority. Guy developed that point of view in the Freedom Press, but then felt that they were too theoretical, Sunday afternoon anarchists, so he and another founded a paper called the “Voice of Labour”, to carry the fight into the factories. After 3 or 4 months Guy realised that it you do that it runs along trade-union and amelioration lines; what we need is education — so he formed the Communist Propaganda Groups — these were to educate, the other to agitate. Now the CPGs were anti-parliamentary. You have to remember the context: the Labour Party was something new, it had been formed to represent trade unions and wasn’t sure whether it was going to be a left or liberal party or be an industrial syndicalist organisation as identified with Tom Mann or Daniel deLeon in America. There was a careerist element and Guy fought against payment of members, and this took on the form of an anti-parliamentary faction. Guy was invited to speak in Glasgow in 1912 by a splendid organisation called the Clarion Scouts. It had all kinds of things to interest young

JTC: No, I’d say the fact of economism, trade unionism gathers strength in countries before anarchism does proves that people re out for what they can get. That has been the bugbear of socialism.

JR: The people who make a living from trade-unionism are very much tothefore in persuading people to accept that outlook.

JTC: Very few strikes are entirely idealistic. They’re about 3p more because the labourers got a rise: they’re differentials.

Q: What about the strikes in 1944: the apprentices, the strikes in Lanarkshire, etc?

MB: What was the apprentices strike about in 1944?

CB: Wages. *JTC:* They were still getting 8/- a week and with the war there was inflation of wages, but the boys weren’t getting it.

Q: And fighting for their rights?

MB: Plus the fact that boys who were not fully-fledged journeymen were doing men’s work. . .

JTC: That’s true. They were making the fourth year apprentices do men’s work.

MB: And sending an apprentice along with an apprentice.

Q: What about the printing press question? You’ve talked about the problems with Freedom Press in London. Guy Aldred had his own printing press, but it was the one time there was a really strong anarchist group in Glasgow — did you never think of doing your own paper?

MB: We did.

So there's no conflict between the ego and mutual aid in that respect, and that was pointed out to Jimmy Dick and Eddie Shaw and we heard no more about it.

JTC: George Woodcock in his study of anarchism refers to the Glasgow anarchists as a small group who are still Stirnerites, believing in Egoism. Now, I know that Eddie Shaw believed that, he once had quite a long talk with me, but he was a crude Stirnerite. He said to me "I believe in Number One — Get what you can out of it" And he said of fixing his cars: You see the one that's going to give you the most, and hang on to him. That was his concept.

CB: He didn't relate it to the group. Conscious Stirnerites, through self-interest, would identify their safety in numbers and that we can achieve more in numbers than as an individual. . .

JR: One point regarding that, this attitude towards the ego. I believe (with Bertrand Russell) that the most we can hope from the individual in our society is intelligent self-interest, and if he is intelligent he'll see that cooperation is going to be a great deal better than confrontation.

JTC: That's asking too much. The intelligent self-interest of most people means getting themselves and their family on. . .

JR: Well, it's hardly very intelligent then, is it?

JTC: Mrs Thatcher in one of her last speeches (you must listen to Mrs Thatcher, she's a genius of mediocrity) said that a person should do the best for themselves and get the best they could out of society and pass it on to their son. She said that is the deepest morality. That's not the deepest morality.

JR: I believe literally in what you just said she said. Because I don't think she meant it the way you meant it. That you should screw everyone else — that's hardly intelligent self-interest. I think the norm of intelligence doesn't vary very much and we're all products of our environment, which includes even our parentage and our upbringing.

people — camera clubs, bicycle clubs, etc. Youngsters used to get on their bikes and cycle through the villages and they had a secret sign when they passed each other (one said "hoops", the other said "spurs"). They formed their first organisation in Glasgow in 1898, I think, and would help any left-wing organisation — they helped the ILP, they helped the anarchists — they were not sectarian. They invited Guy Aldred to speak in the Pavilion Theatre in 1912. There were no microphones in those days and the theatre was filled, but he was such a success that he came back again and again, and in the end made Glasgow his native city and formed his own Communist Propaganda Group. He was running "The Spur" which had a good circulation and was well known in the movement. When the war came Guy went off to jail but his paper was carried on by Rose Witcop, his free-love companion. When he came back after the war, his CPG had folded, because he was really the centrepiece of it. The Glasgow Anarchists (those who'd formed a group at the time of William Morris) were carrying on: Willie MacDougall was one of them — he'd been jailed too, taken down to Dartmoor. He simply escaped from Dartmoor — he jumped on a bike and cycled home and nobody stopped him. (Only a few years ago, at 86, he was still carrying on his propaganda) Then came the Russian revolution, which split the group in a dozen ways introduced a new concept — vanguard communism. There came a conflict between the anti- and pro- parliamentary communists.

Guy was quite in favour of the Russian revolution when it took place and spoke favourably of Lenin, even although he knew him to be a statist. He thought that, under the conditions in Russia, Lenin was doing all he could do, until he discovered that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were persecuting the anarchists in Russia and when the 2nd Congress of the Communist International took place and Lenin declared distinctly that anti-parliamentarians were not to be allowed in the Communist International. He denounced left-wingism in Britain; he said it was infantile, you must capture that organisation which has the

attention of the working class, the Labour Party, so the Communist Party was founded in 1921 with a programme of capturing the Labour Party and trying to capture parliament. Opposing that, Guy reconstituted his Propaganda Groups but in time called it the ANTI-PARLIAMENTARIAN Propaganda Groups; he had a paper called *The Spur*. The new group wanted its own paper, and called it the Red Commune, which had a program of anti-parliamentism. Guy said, Let's take a leaf out of the book of the Sinn Feiners, who made use of the ballot box in 1918 by standing for every seat they could capture. Guy said "There's what to do, let the workers say, 'We are the disinherited'; let us use their ballot boxes and let us pledge ourselves not to go into parliament but stay in Scotland until there's enough of us to form a quorum. This was his anti-parliamentism. Some of the anarchists in his group and some belonging to the remnants of the William Morris groups opposed this, so the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation was formed with some antagonism. It existed until 1932 when it was taken over by a different faction and faded. Then came the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Then from nowhere erupted the anarchists who had deserted anti-parliamentism as too dogmatic and too theoretical. They came to the fore again and, under Frank Leech and one or two others, formed the new Anarchist Federation. Guy at this time had changed his group to the United Socialist Movement, because when the Labour Party fell apart in 1931 and formed the National Government, Guy said "We don't have to be anti-parliamentary; history has proven it" and said to his anti-parliamentary comrades, who had their headquarters in Great Western Rd. in Bakunin House: "You're crushing socialism to reach anti-parliamentarism — let's try to get united and assume parliament is dead". The ILP and the left had left the Labour Party because of the National Government and (this is coming into my own area) Fenner Brockway said "Let us form a united movement and use parliament only as a sounding-board for the workers' demands". Guy said: "Let's forget past antagonisms and join with the ILP, the Trotskyists" (the American Left Opposition groups). So at this point, the Spanish Civil War, Guy had

was a predominating feature in biology from the beginning of time and one of the causes of evolution — not "nature red in tooth and claw" as Darwin had said and the capitalists were now using. . . . That's two different clashes you had. You can, when you join a movement, have at the back of your head "I am but an integral part of a community. What I do has to be related to the advantage of a community. Mixed with other people I can develop what's inside myself, my own personality, that's my anarchy" You do not accept standardised authority for its own sake. . . .

That's two different types of anarchism. Bakunin had a slightly different one. . . .

Q: Can we explore the situation in the 1940s with these three different movements: Guy Aldred's USM, the Anarchist Group, Willie MacDougall's group. Did people get on? Was there mutual aid in relation to the anti-war movement, etc?

JTC: No, there wasn't mutual aid.

JR: There was indeed, there was a great deal of mutual aid.

JTC: Well, we both look from different aspects.

CB: As a matter of fact, in the Glasgow group, it was split too. This didn't contribute to the ultimate split, but the group was split over the question of mutual aid and the ego. Eddie Shaw was an egoist; he was a Max Stirner man, and it was a bible with him, he carried it in his pocket every day and crusaded with it. On the other hand there was Jimmy Dick who was a Kropotkin man. It became so tedious that we had a debate on it. So Shaw and Jimmy Dick put their cases and we were still split. In fact from my own point of view and others too, mutual aid and the ego weren't antagonistic at all, they were complementary. First of all take the ego: a herd of buffalo — why do they herd together? For the maximum of safety — that's mutual aid. It comes from the self, the ego, the individual.

JTC: One I can tell you intimately about was that Harry McShane was due to go down to Brunswick St to speak on a Sunday morning. He got his orders to change completely and call the war a people's war, a patriotic war, a war against fascism, and he didn't know where he was — he had to read it. He only spoke about 20 mins, so that he could report back to the party that he had held the meeting as directed. They did such a somersault. But then he (CB) was going into more theoretical stuff.. The difficulty is that in the anarchist movement there's always lack of definition: get 3 anarchists together and they'll give you 30 definitions of what anarchism is, because by its very nature it's indefinable because it's without authority. Therefore you have different kinds of anarchism. Talking of personalities and clashes within the movement: Bakunin and Marx destroyed the 1st International between them and although Proudhon was dead, his influence was so great that Marx moved the centre of the International movement from France to Germany, in which it became connected with Kautsky and took on Social Democratic character, which was later reflected in the ILP and the Labour Party . . . The movement has been riddled with dis-sension the whole time, with personalities — we've just got to contend against that, try to clear your way through that and see what you can find solid. Now there's many different schools of anarchism. Guy used to say there were 7, but two which seem to come to the fore now and again were anarchism and egotism, that is Max Stirner's "Ego and His Own" in which an anarchist was an individual and a multiplicity of anarchists were a con-course of individuals, and these individuals had to find some common denominator in running society, but these individuals were all persons in their own right. Now, the Kropotkinite anarchists were anarchist-communists — in simplistic terms, an ego is not a person bounded by his skin from head to toe, an ego is a ramification of all his associations . . . and his associations go back beyond his present time, beyond your 20 years away back into the past, so that we inherit much of our ego, much of our responsibility. Therefore a centre of our egotism should be a concept of the community. He tried to prove this

the USM; there was still a APCF under Willie MacDougall; but when the anarchists came on the scene again the anti-pantys (as they called them) and the anarchists joined to fight the Spanish Revolution. They adopted Emma Goldmann as a hero, and Guy was opposed to that, because Emma Goldmann was at that time promoting culture and literature in America and was doing this with various literati and had forgotten about her anarchism and was now coming back. He opposed that and this caused a great deal of antagonism in the streets of Glasgow — they were tearing each other's hair out, metaphorically. Frank Leech continued his group until he died and then on the scene came Eddie Shaw, Jimmy Raeside, I think a man called McGatvey was there too . . .

JR: Johnny Garvey?

MB: Aye, but he was much later though

JTC: Was he later? I met him some time ago and was speaking about the past.

JR: Charlie (Baird) was in the movement before I was . . .

JTC: Well, I've brought the movement up from the beginning of the century until the time when Charlie and Jimmy were in it. Now they can tell you about it then. I remained in the United Socialist Movement, agitating for some form of unity. Before Guy died we'd long realised we weren't getting it, that we in the movement were only being Guy's supporters, because he was an enormous platform figure and well-known orator, and we in the USM were finally simply his stewards and supporters. (I may say that Guy did a lot of work helping conscientious objectors during the war; he helped Eddie Shaw, the two Dicks.)

CB: That was an excellent history of the origins of the anarchist movement. To go on from then: Anarchism continued in the form of the old Glasgow Anarchist Group, which was actually from a split in a group called the Marxist Study Group. Two men broke away from that group: Eddie Shaw and Frank Leech. A little fellow, an ex-miner called Jimmy Kennedy, a man steeped

in Marxism used to give excellent lectures on anarchism. Now that may be misleading — Jimmy Kennedy was an anarchist out-and-out although he approached anarchism from a marxist point of view. It was deceptive but they still called themselves the Marxist Study Group. Shaw and Leech had broke away from them (a clash of personalities or something). Another group was started up calling itself the Glasgow Anarchist Group. I was in prison at the time (so was Jimmy) and don't know exactly what happened but . . .

MB: Jimmy Dick was also in prison at the time. He had been a member of the Marxist group but Charlie and Jimmy only came into it when the came out of prison. Roger Carr was in prison at the same time, and Eddie Veigh. Fenwick and Carr and Jimmy Dick had been members of the Marxist Group and that was when the split took place and they formed the Anarchist Federation.

JTC: The Marxist Study Group had a place in George St. on the corner on Albion St. where they held mock tribunals, that is at the beginning of the war young chaps went before this mock tribunal — 3 or 4 would pretend to be the sheriff principal, etc. and the youngster would have to put forward his case and what happened then was they were prosecuted There was a 2 day trial and they were found not guilty. And outside George St they had the anarchist red and black flag and the police pulled it down . . .

MB: The shop was painted red and black . . .

JTC: And on the other side of the road was the Strickland Press.

MB: ..Round the corner.

Q: So was it really your experiences in prison which made you want to move into the anarchist group?

CB: Since I was 16 I'd been a rebel. I'd a short period in the Communist Party, a short period in the ILP and came out of

CB: That was the debit side of Eddie Shaw, but there's another side of him. He was an asset of the movement, I recognised that. I didn't agree completely with the type of propaganda — he was comical, funny, entertaining, a carefree type of person. There was a place in the movement for him, he was an asset. Mollie gave you another side of him, but then we could live with that, it wasn't doing the movement any harm. Except that he was a personality with most of the other members, and this is one of the lessons to learn from anarchist groups who broke up and disappeared. We have to ask ourselves the question: why? what happened? If we don't learn from them, it's worse. I'd suggest to young anarchists today to consider these aspects of the problem. I'd say the responsibility to prevent these splits is to be vigilant about personalities and see that no-one constructs power from the group; once that happens that's the beginning of the end for the group. We may have mentioned certain comrades, but you have to understand I still liked Shaw, in spite of all the thing we've said about him. Leech I couldn't like — some people excused him by saying he was naive — he was naive but he was dangerous. He contributed most to the split within the group by his activities.

Q: What may amaze many people sitting here is that this was all happening in the middle of the Second World War, which was meant to be mass united patriotism united everyone against the common foe. Here we're getting a picture that in Glasgow it was a bit different. maybe we haven't talked about the industrial front, as well, the opposition to the CP collaborating with the bosses.

MB: Yes, that certainly did happen.

JR: I understand that at that time when the CP in New York were discussing it, one bloke went to the toilet and when he came back the position of the group had changed!

Q: When was this, Mollie, '44?

MB: '45 I would say.

JR: They started coming in before that — Roy Johnston and that — that was before. . .

MB: That's right. They were holding meetings down at Clydeside, like at. . .

JR: John Browns Yarrow, right along the Clyde side. . .

MB: . . . and these young apprentices were getting interested. Then the apprentices strike — and we had about about a dozen young apprentices coming in — Bobby Lynn was one of them, and a big fellow — Willie Johnston — not that he was much of an anarchist, he stood for Lord Provost of Clydebanks before he finished up. The boys were really keen, Spain had just finished and they were still interested in Spain.

Johnston had a conference that Sunday and, just to give you an insight into Shaw: if you could have got Chic Murray, the comedian, he would have been just about as good. Charlie got this boy Johnston to go up on the platform, he was doing quite well, he said: well, I'm not a speaker, but Charlie said: We'll help you if you get into difficulties. The boy had a marvellous meeting and the other apprentices were asking questions, and he even did quite well in answering these questions. The boy was holding their attention, but Eddie said: You know, they're only holding on waiting for me. The man's head was that size!

JTC: He was a forerunner of Billy Connolly.

MB: Eddie was in America for a few years — he was a fender-bender. He wouldn't work for a boss, he would only do for the different garages which would employ him. His wife used to say, come on in Eddie when he was standing watching the suckers (and he said "suckers" from the platform!) putting in the hours. Now you know you've got to do something to get money but. . .

both disillusioned. I was an anarchist and didn't realise it — politically immature, of course, at that age. I registered as a conscientious objector, went to prison where I met Jimmy, Jimmy Dick, and Denis Glyn, who all became members of the Glasgow Anarchist Group. I knew Eddie Shaw, who was a founder member of the GAG. When we came out of jail, Roger Carr, myself and Denis McGlynn and Jimmy came out and joined the GAG. Do you want to take it from there, Jimmy?

JR: No, I think you're a repository of knowledge of the entire GAG. I keep learning things from Charlie.

CB: The Glasgow Anarchist Group in the 1940s became a very large group, very active. We had meetings at the weekend in Burnbank, Hamilton, Paisley, Glasgow, Edinburgh. It was the Glasgow group who supplied speakers. . .

MB: It had a big following among the miners in Hamilton and Burnbank. . .

JTC: The anti-parliamentary movement had laid the foundations. . .

MB: That's right.

CB: The Glasgow group supplied all these towns with speakers and sold a tremendous amount of anarchist literature and had tremendous meetings in Brunswick St and had a hall too in Wilson St. We had meetings there too; when the weather was inclement we took them into the hall. That must have been one of the most prosperous, lively periods for Freedom Press, on account of the amount of literature we took from them. Later on we might have something more to say about the estrangement between the Glasgow Anarchist Group and Freedom Press, which finally led to the split and final demise of the Glasgow Anarchist Group.

JR: I wasn't too aware of the machinations prior to the split and the fact that, although Charlie was the elected secretary of the group, there were individuals in the Freedom Group who bypassed Charlie and had a sort of liaison with Frank Leech.

When this became common knowledge it led to clashes of all kinds. . .

MB: They talked about “Frank Leech’s group”, “Eddie Shaw’s group”. How do you have an anarchist “Charlie Baird” group? — You become an anarchist to do away with that! They allowed these personalities to take over. I mean, even Guy — the very last time I talked to Guy, he talked about Frank Leech’s group.

JTC: I know, he identified a group by its outstanding person, Kropotkin’s group, Bakunin’s group, but when it comes down to definition, as you say, it’s wrong. They called USM Guy’s group, with this justification, that Guy was an outstanding person. . .

MB: Guy was the group. . .

JTC: . . . But Frank Leech couldn’t speak for toffee apples! It was called his group because he ran three newsagents. . .

JR: He was the biggest newsagent in Scotland, metaphorically and physically!

JTC: Physically he had been heavyweight champion of his regiment. Another reminiscence which won’t add to your theoretical knowledge but will give more biographical colour: Frank Leech joined the APCF when he left the Navy. He had been the heavyweight champion. Bakunin Press had a little gym down in the basement, although they were all pacifists! Benny Lynch used to go down there. Jenny Patrick (Guy Aldred’s companion) says Frank was so indestructible, you couldn’t knock him down, but you could knock him out on his feet and he’d still be fighting! When we had the Free Speech Fight on Glasgow Green. The Communist Party tried to take it over and we had a meeting in the City Hall and a fight developed between the anti-parliamentarians and the Communist Party over the domination of the meeting. It came to fisticuffs and the CP were very surprised when they discovered we’d so many pugilists!

MB: I remember that! There weren’t membership fees for the APCF. I can tell you a bit about Bakunin Press. . . They had these

That was the situation in the group. On to the defense committee. As Mollie pointed out, when the Trotskyists were arrested, War Commentary came out with a front page article lambasting them for employing bourgeois lawyers, but when they were arrested it was the first thing they done — employ bourgeois lawyers. However, we’ll let that one go.

All these things were mentioned; the cumulative effect was the split. What shocked me was that the majority of the Glasgow group disappeared at that period too; whenever Shaw and all went away they disappeared.

JTC: The group practically ended when Jimmy Raeside and Shaw left it.

CB: Mollie and I, Phil Gordon and Jim Dennis — we carried on. We had big meetings at Wellington St., good meetings. My voice wouldn’t stand outdoor speaking — I didn’t regard myself as a speaker anyway. Bill Borland went into hospital — he died in Knightswood Hospital — and John Dennis went down to London and he drifted out. And that was the end of it. We were still anarchists.

JTC: What did you think of Eddie Shaw as a speaker?

CB: Well, I didn’t agree with his type of propaganda. He could draw a crowd; he could hold a meeting, but you always got the feeling that Eddie was speaking for Eddie and his distinctive propaganda was different from Jimmy’s. Jimmy was a very capable speaker. The difference was that Shaw’s type of propaganda and perspective was that Shaw pandered to an audience, he commiserated to them in their misery and all the rest of it. You could see blokes bring their wives up to hear him. Raeside sent them away thinking — this was the difference. I didn’t agree with Shaw — I told him that at the time.

MB: The apprentices strike: now, we had about a dozen apprentices at the time. . .

there were different lads home on leave getting literature and taking it back and spreading it around. The boys were getting the idea — this was the idea, but they wanted to know more about it . . . If you were above a sergeant, Frank Leech took you in, but privates he didn't want to know them. Frank had this big newsagent at Knightswood — Temple — and he had a loft; the only private he ever took, he put up in the loft; the rest got decent digs. They (Freedom Press) put out a leaflet from Connolly's speech — you know, keep your arms — but prior to this the Trots in London had got the jail also for suggesting it. The first edition of War Commentary afterwards came out with London Anarchists slamming the Trots for getting bourgeois lawyers to defend them. Then Freedom Press put out this leaflet and got the jail for sedition. Charlie's the bloody secretary of the AFB and doesn't know the leaflet's out — he's up speaking at a meeting and liable to get the jail and he doesn't know the thing's printed!

CB: To put that in perspective: it was a leaflet carrying a quote from Jim Connolly. He suggested to the British soldiers during the First World War — “When the war's finished, hang on to your arms, come back and assert yourselves, demand your rights”. Well, I agreed with that; I'd never seen it, I didn't know what they were arrested for, I knew it was sedition but apart from that didn't know anything about it So they were setting up a defence committee and the group wanted to know something about why they were arrested. A week after that, Albert Meltzer, who was doing correspondence for the Freedom Press group, who I was corresponding with, suddenly appeared in the Glasgow group in their rooms. He went over to Eddie Shaw and pulled a leaflet and showed it to Eddie Shaw. Eddie read it and handed it to another comrade who read it — Frank Leech read it — and it went back into his pocket. I mean, what the hell's going on here? I asked Shaw about it on the way home — we both stayed in the east end — I asked him what was in the leaflet. He said “It's just a list”. “Christ”, I said, “Come off it, let us know what's in it.”

wee dances to help to pay the rates, because the rooms were their own and the Communists used to burrow from within (same as now) came to Bakunin House, and it was Willie MacDougall, my father, Jimmy Murray and Frank Leech who had to put them out of Bakunin House.

CB: It's important for young anarchists to understand why splits took place. Caldys mentioned a few. Why did the Glasgow anarchists split up? You'd think that anarchists didn't look up to leadership and shouldn't regard any other member of the group as a personality or as a charismatic person. Anarchists should be free of all those things: over-estimating people, getting impressed by their personality. If you look up to a person with charisma, it's a leadership complex. This is what happened in the Glasgow Anarchist Group. Eddie Shaw was regarded as a great personality and very few could see beyond him. He was a good speaker, a good orator, and he worked hard enough at the group, but Eddie was pro-Freedom Press along with Frank Leech. The group was mainly based on the activities of industrial workers in the factories and shipyards. A tremendous amount of literature was taken into these factories by these comrades.

There came a time when we asked Freedom Press to give us more industrial news in War Commentary. Immediately, Eddie Shaw and Frank Leech ganged up against the idea, so we had a conference — several conferences — with Freedom Press, but no way would Freedom Press give way. As a compromise they allowed us one article in War Commentary and by the time it got into print it had been condensed out of all recognition of the original copy. So this was the beginning of the dry rot in the movement. It was obvious then that a split had taken place.

I knew too that there was a bit of subterfuge on the art of Eddie Shaw, Frank Leech and Freedom Press. (Incidentally, the anarchist movement was known by this time as the Anarchist Federation of Britain. Glasgow was the centre; the secretary of the Glasgow group, who was myself, was the secretary of the AFB.) For example, I had correspondence with Freedom Press

regarding the request for more industrial news in the paper, which we thought was the organ of the anarchist movement as a whole, and I found that Frank Leech was corresponding with Freedom Press regarding Glasgow's business with Freedom — over my head. I said nothing at the time, but I knew that a split would inevitably happen, but in the interests of the continuation of the movement I didn't tell anybody. Eventually it came out anyway and what forced me to bring it out was another incident. We had another comrade in prison at the time — Johnny . . . from Burnbank?

MB: Johnny Carracher

CB: He was a married man with about ten of a family. I went through to see him before he went in, and as a consolation I was able to tell him that the Group would help his family.

MB: Of course we were doing that with other guys, with Glasgow lads . . .

CB: So I brought it up at the next meeting — Johnny was in prison by this time — How much will we give Johnny's family? Frank Leech got up and whispered: I want the members of the group to stay behind tonight, I've something confidential to tell them. We'd a few strangers about — we didn't stop anyone coming in. So at the end of the meeting the strangers left and Frank finally told us: "You know, Johnny Carracher's not married!"(laughter)

JTC: Earth-shattering news!

CB: That was it. I had to come clean and told them that Leech (and Shaw too — he was definitely pro-Freedom Press and against the members who were for the class struggle, the industrial struggle . . .

MB: Of course, you should set this up right for the people who're here In the group in London we had Vero Richards, Marie-Louise, Sampson and all that. But they were theoretical . . .

CB: They were philosophical . . .

MB: And intellectuals, But up in Glasgow, and this is why we wanted the page of industrial news, all the members we had up here were industrials. They were working all over the Clyde and that was why we wanted the news — we felt they were entitled to that because they were putting in the funds — we were sending at least 100 pounds a week to the running of Freedom Press and getting nothing out of it.

CB: I talked about the pro-Freedom Press members of the group. Well, the rest of them weren't anti Freedom Press. We agreed that Freedom Press were doing a good job as far as publications were concerned — anarchist books, pamphlets, leaflets — we realised that the intellectual has a place in the movement, but so too do the workers. Freedom Press didn't accept that, so the breakaway eventually took place. The strange thing was — there was no intimation of it: Shaw and Leech didn't come and say: Well, we're finished. Everything was going all right and I still had hopes of salvaging the group by speaking to Leech and Shaw. There was no way they were going to compromise. One week they didn't appear at the business meeting and the following Sunday they had a meeting in Maxwell St. They had deserted Brunswick St where they usually had their meetings and — that was the split.

Q: When was that?

JR: It was before the end of the war, because when I came back I wasn't even aware the split had taken place when I was speaking in Maxwell St! I was approached by both Eddie Shaw and Frank Leech who said We hold great meetings in Maxwell St, you'll need to come up. And I did.

MB: What you must realise about the split, is you must come back again to Marie-Louise and Vero Richards getting the jail, because it was all part of the split . . . We had a very big group, but it's no good kidding ourselves — they weren't all anarchists. They were deserters from the army, the navy, the airforce, but