‘No-one telling us what to do’: anarchist schools in Britain, 1890–1916

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Abstract

This article seeks to analyse the intentions of anarchists in organizing schools in London and Liverpool between 1890 and 1916. It will also address the various teaching practices and methods of management adopted, and the experience of the children within the schools. Although they formulated many original ideas, the anarchist educators failed to break out of their own milieu and influence a wider community. The experiments in counter-education, meant to be a starting point for an alternative culture, embraced mostly foreign children who had already been brought up within an anarchist sub-culture. This was despite the fact that the libertarian schools belonged to a wider tradition of independent, working-class education that at times was in tune with anarchist thinking.

All socialist movements of the late nineteenth century were arenas of education and cultural activity in a society where the state and the ‘culture industry’ were only just beginning to erode the popular voluntary sphere by substituting national and corporate alternatives. Socialist movements, therefore, served as educational institutions in their own right. Activists believed that the advent of a socialist society would require converts who shared a collective faith in the values of self-improvement and self-culture.[1] Indeed, there was always a heavy didactic element to British socialism. The socialists’ main emphasis was on the education of the masses through the spoken and written word. This activity would spread the revolutionary spirit and raise the consciousness of the people, making them aware of their interests and their ability to attain them.[2]

More importantly, socialists of all persuasions saw children as the harbingers of the future, a social force that could transform society, and they pursued educational policies that were aimed at freeing children to allow them full self-development. Socialists undertook campaigns for free books and education, for effective state maintenance, against corporal

[1] For a discussion of this development, see C. Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884–1914* (Manchester, 1990).

[2] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 246, Oct. 1909, p. 78.

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Historical Research, vol. 77, no. 197 (August 2004)
Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

punishment, for higher grade schools, for the new pupil-teacher 'colleges' and technical colleges, and to defend and extend the local democratic control of the education system.[3] The anarchist foray into the field of child education was, however, different. This was evident in their analysis of the national education system for children and the alternatives they proposed.

For the anarchists the state system of education was authoritarian in that it fostered nationalistic and deferential behaviour in its pupils and was based on coercion. The anarchist critique of state education was also underpinned by a respect for the young as individuals with an ability to think for themselves. The anarchists believed that only a libertarian education could foster the kind of free consciousness that would be vital in any radical transformation of society. Apart from a brief experiment in London in the early eighteen-nineties, the main practical outlet for their analysis was in a number of Sunday and evening schools established in London and Liverpool between 1906 and 1916, which formed a movement of dissent that has gone largely unrecorded. Although several of the schools are discussed by John Shotton in his history of libertarian education, his fundamental opposition to the whole principle of compulsory state education means that he takes a largely uncritical attitude towards the forms of education adopted by the anarchist schools.[4]

By analysing the intentions of adults in organizing anarchist schools, the various teaching practices and methods of management adopted, and the experience of the children, we will be able to come to a clearer understanding of anarchist education theory. The following account will also tell us something about the nature of British anarchism. Although they formulated many original ideas, the anarchist educators failed to break out of their own milieu and influence a wider community. The experiments in counter-education, meant to be a starting point for an alternative culture, embraced mostly foreign children who had already been brought up within an anarchist sub-culture. This was despite the fact that the libertarian schools belonged to a wider tradition of independent, working-class education that was in tune with many aspects of anarchist thought. This tradition presented a potential audience for the anarchist educators, but their sectarianism prevented them from tapping into this culture.

Before moving on to analyse the impact of the libertarian schools, it is first necessary to outline the defining characteristics of the anarchist milieu from which they arose. The number of anarchists in Britain was always smaller than anywhere on the continent. An article published in December 1896 suggested that, in London, there were 8,000 anarchists, of whom 2,000 were Russian Jews. Of the English anarchists, it said, 'they number

[3] See K. Manton, *Socialism and Education 1883–1902* (2001).
[4] See J. Shotton, *No Master High or Low: Libertarian Education and Schooling in Britain, 1890–1990* (Bristol, 1993).

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between 3000 and 4000 . . . the latest adherents being in Canning Town and Deptford with groups of over 100 each'.[5] These figures seem far too high. Although the Deptford and Canning Town groups were among the most dynamic, it is unlikely that they had 100 members. Indeed, the various references to the size of anarchist groups indicate that this typically ranged from six to thirty.[6] For there to be 4,000 anarchists in London there would have to be around forty groups of a similar size to that given for the Deptford and Canning Town groups. This was not the case. The anarchists could mobilize 600 people on a working day and upwards of 1,000 on a Sunday. Larger numbers on special occasions can be explained by the presence of foreign anarchists and socialist sympathizers. This would seem to indicate a maximum of 2,000 British anarchists in London in 1896, and even this is a generous estimate. Equally generously we could double that number for a national total. This was at a time when the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) had 35,000 members and the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) 10,000.[7]

The circulation figures for libertarian journals further suggest that the anarchists failed to break out from the status of sect into that of movement. Compared with *The Clarion*, with a circulation of 70,000 in 1906, and *The Labour Leader*, with 40,000 in 1911, the circulation figures of anarchist journals are not impressive. The Socialist League's organ, *The Commonweal*, with William Morris as editor, had an average circulation of 3,500 when it was a purely anti-parliamentary journal, but steadily lost readers as it became more anarchistic in the early eighteen-nineties. *Freedom*, the leading anarchist paper, sustained a peak circulation of 3,000 in 1911.[8]

Despite its small size, however, British anarchism did exhibit great diversity, harbouring different ideological tendencies and organizational frameworks. Its supporters included communist revolutionaries, rural communitarians, individualists and industrial unionists. At no time did the majority of these exponents unite under one organizational umbrella; they opted instead for small, independent units, many of whom had little contact with each other. British anarchism was not a political 'movement' in the traditional sense of a closely regulated and co-ordinated body. Ideological, ethnic and class differences divided anarchists into multiform groups and disparate individuals.

[5] *The Evening News*, 17 Dec. 1896.

[6] See *The Commonweal*, i, no. 2, 3 Oct. 1903, p. 3 (12 members); *Freedom*, xxvi, no. 275, March 1912, p. 16 (10 members); *The Anarchist*, 3 May 1912, p. 5 (20 members); *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 292, Aug.–Sept. 1913, p. 48 (20 members).

[7] J. Hinton, *Labour and Socialism: a History of the British Labour Movement 1867–1974* (Brighton, 1983), p. 60.

[8] For the circulation figures of various labour papers see R. J. Holton, 'Daily Herald v. Daily Citizen 1912–15', in *International Review of Social Hist.*, xix (1974), 331–48. See also the subscription lists in Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History (hereafter I. I. S. H.), Socialist League Archives; and *Freedom*, xxv, no. 272, Dec. 1911, p. 94.

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Anarchists did, however, share some common characteristics. All were opposed to the use of existing legislative procedures or any organs of the state as tools for social change. That the anarchist struggle was untarnished by bourgeois politics was time and again emphasized and was affirmed as the distinction between anarchism and socialism.[9] Participation in the political system, which the anarchists held responsible for the protection of the exploitative economic order and for the furtherance of prejudices in society, would not only compromise the position of revolutionaries, but also promote the existence of this very system. Even in a socialist guise, the preservation of the state would perpetuate exploitation and authoritarian behaviour.[10]

A major criticism of the anarchists was that by refusing to participate in traditional politics they were left out in the cold. They may have maintained their theoretical purity, but they were condemned to wallow in the political doldrums. Anarchism was undoubtedly anti-political in the traditional sense, in that it did not offer a programme of political change, but it did offer a platform for personal and social liberation. Therefore, if anarchism is to be understood as a 'political movement' it can only be in the very broadest sense. For if the anarchists failed to offer an alternative to political action, it did not stop them from taking part in campaigns where they addressed a whole range of issues.

The key anarchist concept was the rejection of the state and the belief that social and economic life could be regulated according to the principles already put into practice by what have been called 'counter-communities'.[11] Different 'counter-communities' were identified by anarchists and different qualities were noted in them, whether the solidarity of the workers on the factory floor, the economic self-sufficiency of a rural commune or the freedom of libertarian schools. The anarchists' political tactics were designed to strengthen such 'counter-communities', for they provided 'a continuous schooling [and] a university of experience'.[12] The final goal was to develop 'counter-communities' into larger associations until they superseded the state and its allied authority structures. This meant that the anarchists negatively defined their objective as opposition to all authority. Although this was manifested most dramatically as opposition to the state, it also meant opposition to marriage as a symptom of paternal authority, to militarism and, as we shall see, to the educational system.[13]

[9] See, e.g., W. K. Hall, *The Ballot Box Farce* (Edinburgh, 1896).

[10] C. Wilson, *Anarchism and Outrage* (1893), p. 4.

[11] On the concept of 'counter community', see S. Gemie, 'Counter-community: an aspect of anarchist political culture', in *Jour. Contemp. Hist.*, xxix (1994), 349–67.

[12] R. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (1938), p. 117.

[13] For a discussion of anarchism and the marriage question, see M. J. Thomas, 'Anarcho-feminism in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, 1880–1914', *International Review of Social Hist.*, xlvii (2002), 1–30.

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Between 1834 and 1870 Britain was faced with a growing population, a decrease in child labour and, by 1870, the early indications of world competition and industrial recession. It is no coincidence that the demand for a state education system accompanied these developments. By 1870 it was becoming clear that the education system, based as it was on a variety of private and public bodies, was unable to bring a satisfactory level of elementary education to the working class.[14] Pressure for change was organized by working-class radicals in cities like Birmingham where the need for further schools was regarded as desperate. Artisans and skilled workers, who had once feared the state and sought to create their own education outside its indoctrinating reach, received the vote in 1867 and came to see state power as the only effective means of obtaining educational change. This brought them close to the middle-class reformers' position expressed by the National Public Schools Association and the National Education League. The League wanted local boards to be set up in all districts, free schools to be maintained out of rates and education to be compulsory and subject to government inspection.

Those who pointed to the low level of popular education could also argue that the provision of education had to keep pace with the extension of the franchise. The Second Reform Act enfranchised some of the working population and it was felt that if they were educated they would use the vote in the correct manner.[15] Supporters of reform could also point to the growing threat to British industrial supremacy from countries where a national system of education was already in existence. It was an awareness that industries on the continent benefited materially from a higher standard of education that led many industrialists to support the 1870 Education Act. As a result of the act Britain was divided into school districts, within which boards were elected by the ratepayers with the brief to levy a school rate and to build and maintain a board school. Initially, the boards could insist on attendance if they wished, but in 1880 the Mundella Act made attendance compulsory for all children. Elementary education was – by definition – exclusively for the working class. The purpose of the board schools was to provide the poor with a very basic education – that is, reading, writing, arithmetic and religious knowledge – and nothing more. Britain's rulers were anxious not to encourage social mobility, believing ignorance to be the safest policy for the majority.[16]

Yet for many reformers, compulsory education, regardless of its quality, was progressive in that it protected children from the pressure to work and provided them with at least some basic education. The demand for free, compulsory, secular education, for example, was one of the main

[14] J. Lawson and H. Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (1973), p. 315.

[15] B. Simon, *The State and Educational Change: Essays in the History of Education and Pedagogy* (1994), p. 26.

[16] Lawson and Silver, p. 338.

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points in the programmes of both the Fabian Society and the S.D.F.[17] State socialists, then, saw the winning of such concessions as a worthy goal and a springboard for further advance. The socialists agreed with the anarchists that the educational system inculcated the values of capitalism and patriotism, but had no objection to state education as such. Indeed, the school boards played a central role in state socialist thinking. Their democratic franchise afforded socialists new opportunities to have an impact on policy issues and to ameliorate existing conditions.

In 1902 the Conservative government's Education Act abolished the school boards and replaced them with local education authorities nominated by county councils and responsible for elementary and secondary education. For the government, the problem was that voluntary schools had more children than the board schools and standards of equipment were lower. There had to be a change in the financing. Of most concern, however, was the fact that not all children were attending school and there was little central control over the curriculum. The act sought to remedy these problems and concern for education became one of the key priorities for 'National Efficiency' reformers like Sidney Webb, chairman of the London County Council technical education board, and Robert Morant of the education department. The two men agreed on the need for education to be firmly controlled by a central authority as a means of improving standards. They deplored the school board system, with its assumption that education should be subject to local democracy instead of being controlled by expert opinion. Compulsory education was one of the elements in their project of a national minimum, a set of standards below which no citizen should be allowed to fall.[18]

Despite their efforts, sections of the working class were indifferent towards the state education system that was created after 1870. This lack of interest in, or rejection of, state education has been explained in terms of the inadequacy of their income to support the continued education of their children. Certainly the extension of compulsory schooling was not popular since families had their earnings cut and had to pay school fees.[19] This resistance has also been seen as a consequence of cultural deprivation, with its associated characteristics of apathy, ignorance, the search for immediate gratification and low expectations. Although the self-educated and skilled workers were often in favour of compulsory schooling, there were those

[17] *Justice*, 1 March 1884, and *The Workers' Political Programme* (Fabian Tract xi), p. 9, cited in B. Simon, *Studies in the History of Education: Education and the Labour Movement, 1870–1920* (1965), p. 132.

[18] G. Sherington, *English Education, Social Change and War 1911–20* (Manchester, 1981), pp. 10–11.

[19] H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (1968), p. 4. Compulsory schooling also prevented working-class children from helping their parents at home with chores and often stopped them looking after younger siblings while their parents worked. For working-class hostility to compulsory schooling on the above lines, see A. Davin, *Growing up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870–1914* (1996).

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who thought it pointless. They strongly resented the presence of truant officers and the justification for their authority. To this section of the working class the desire of the state to educate their children was unintelligible, and the attendance officers who were the arm of the law in this matter were simply a new confirmation that officialdom was oppressive.[20]

However, recent research on working-class opposition to state schooling reveals that this widespread resistance to educational provision can also be seen in terms of class resistance through withdrawal from the state schooling system itself.[21] The experience of working-class children within the school system often bore little resemblance to the rhetoric of middle-class educational providers. In fact, much of the school routine was felt to be an imposition, with little relevance to the world of the working-class child. Such schooling was widely experienced by both children and parents as an oppressive constraint, and this hostility towards state coercion provoked strong resistance.[22] Stephen Humphries argues that this resistance can be seen as proof of a strong class conflict over the form of education that working-class children should receive. Opposition to state schooling was rooted in three grievances: its compulsory nature threatened the domestic economy; its regimentation and repressive form abused the fundamental personal liberties that many working-class parents accorded their children; and its removal of character development and work from the community to a depersonalized and bureaucratic setting was widely felt to be an infringement of the customary rights of the family.

As a result, a substantial minority of working-class parents often responded to the introduction of compulsory attendance regulations not by sending their children to state schools, but by extending the length of their child's education in private schools. The form of education preferred by many parents was illustrated by the networks of dame schools, common day schools and private adventure schools that persisted throughout the nineteenth century.[23] After the 1870 act working-class private schools were gradually abolished, but throughout the period under discussion a few schools continued to exist alongside the new state education system. Working-class private schools were self-financing and beyond the bureaucratic regulation of the state. Parents favoured these schools for a number of reasons: they were small and close to the home and were consequently more personal and more convenient; they were informal and tolerant of irregular attendance and unpunctuality; they were not segregated according to age and sex; and, most importantly, they belonged to, and were controlled by, the local community rather than being imposed by an alien authority. For

[20] F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: a Social History of Victorian Britain 1830–1900* (1988), p. 35.
[21] S. Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels: an Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889–1939* (Oxford, 1995).
[22] Humphries, pp. 62–3.
[23] See P. Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England* (1984).

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John Shotton and Phil Gardener these schools constituted a forerunner of the libertarian initiatives. They 'were products of a culture that distrusted formality, state control and had little time for compulsory attendance'. They offered 'an education that was fully under the control of its users, it was an education truly of the working-class and not for it'.[24]

Shotton's and Gardener's analysis of independent working-class schooling is something of a romanticization of the social conditions and cultural quality of working-class life in the nineteenth century. Several historians have adopted a more critical perspective. They argue that these schools had little recognizable educational value. Working-class private schools were not schools at all but 'merely baby minding establishments' kept by 'illiterate old women', or were 'mock schools' under the charge of moral and intellectual incompetents. Products of an earlier and unenlightened age, such places possessed little or no educative value and were doomed to natural extinction as more advanced forms of 'mass' education were developed.[25] Despite the controversies over the actual quality of education that they offered, and although these schools were certainly not anarchist, it is within this tradition that John Shotton places the anarchist experiments. On the whole this is correct, but there was a key difference between the earlier private working-class schools and the anarchist initiatives. The libertarian evening and Sunday schools existed in addition to the compulsory state sector and the children who attended them were also educated in the state schools, while the earlier private working-class schools were complete alternatives to the state approved schools.

For the anarchists, the fact that schooling was compulsory demonstrated the authoritarian nature of the state system. It showed how serious the government was in creating a structure aimed at social control and social engineering. After considering the nature of the state's intentions in introducing the 1870 act, it was the process of education within the schools itself, and the actual educational content, that was to be of importance. Anarchists attacked the act not only from the standpoint of a theoretical objection to state authority, but also of a practical objection to the poor quality of education that was administered.[26] The board schools, 'with their military discipline' and 'system of rigid police-like inspection and examination', were denounced as havens of order and obedience.[27] Mobility within schools was controlled by timetables and bells. Actions were monitored and either rewarded or punished. All autonomy of the

[24] Shotton, pp. 14–15; Gardener, p. 4.

[25] See B. Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780–1870* (1960), p. 184; G. Sutherland, *Elementary Education in the 19th Century* (1971), p. 12; and S. Maclure, *A History of Education in London 1870–1990* (1990), p. 16.

[26] See *Freedom*, xii, no. 120, June 1898, p. 41; i, no. 2, Nov. 1886, p. 9; *Commonweal*, iv, no. 129, 30 June 1888, p. 204.

[27] *Freedom*, vi, no. 7, Oct.–Nov. 1892, p. 7.

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individual was undermined by the teacher. Given the power invested in adults over children, through means of reward and punishment, the latter were treated as passive objects condemned to be deferential. The anarchist critique of the authoritarian education in the board schools was strengthened with the passing of the 1902 act and the establishment of a centrally controlled and regulated system that propagated the interests of the nation.[28] The fact that the state schools indiscriminately imposed a standardized regime that demanded the thoroughgoing submission of body and mind to edicts issued from a centralized bureaucracy was not lost on the anarchists. Their searching critique of state education brings to mind Foucault's observations concerning the 'techniques of an observing hierarchy'.[29]

Equally important to the anarchists was the fact that the educational content of the state schools was focused on creating specific national and patriotic identities. Stephen Heathorn, for example, has demonstrated how the texts used in state schools during the 1880–1914 period 'set the conceptual boundaries and shaped the imaginative experience of the working-class children of the English elementary school'. The anarchist schools were established in order to challenge this attempt at creating 'good Englishmen' and 'good English wives'.[30] As one anarchist journal declared, they were 'an antidote to the patriotic bombast that the day schools were giving'.[31]

Anarchist critics of compulsory education also considered the whole experience of state schooling from the child's point of view. Without a focus on the ways in which the meekness and deference that was expected of children in schools could be rejected, any transformation of schooling would always be incomplete from the anarchist perspective:

> From the first years in which [children] are capable of understanding, they are the victims of despotic authority . . . The child has no right to a desire of its own, cannot say anything, do anything. No attempt is made to educate the child's reason by explaining *why*. Always authority, and the inculcation of obedience. Never the slightest attempt to aid the development of the child's nature . . . Can we wonder that men stoop so readily to authority? . . . Nor can we wonder as long as education is authoritarian, that the one thing never attained is education, development.[32]

For the anarchists education had to be freed from the authority of the teacher as well as from the state. Anarchists saw education as a spontaneous process rather than as something to be imposed on the child. Memorization, routine and the staples of conventional learning that characterized state education

[28] *Commonweal*, iii, no. 65, 9 Apr. 1887, p. 116; iv, no. 129, 30 June 1888, p. 204; F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, *The Pyramid of Tyranny* (1st edn., 1903; 1909), pp. 3–6.

[29] *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rainbow (1984), pp. 183–6.

[30] S. Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880–1914* (2000), pp. 212, 200.

[31] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 242, June 1909, p. 47.

[32] *Freedom*, xvii, no. 174, March 1903, p. 10.

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did nothing but destroy the imagination and prevent the natural development of children.[33]

This concept of 'development' was a crucial theme in anarchist ideas on education. It emerged from a common set of assumptions regarding the psychic and physiological nature of the child that developed during the late nineteenth-century 'invention' of childhood and adolescence. Carolyn Steedman has shown how, by drawing on the work of individuals like Edouard Seguin, Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori, British educationalists came to believe that children could be rescued from deprived circumstances, made whole, well and strong and educated to become agents of a new social future.[34] As we shall see, exercise, play and activities were a key part of this physiological approach, and were adopted by anarchist pedagogues like Paul Robin and Francisco Ferrer. At the same time, 'psychologists played an important part in the discovery of the normal child, in revealing the detailed stages of child development, in classifying behaviour problems and in developing techniques of educational surveillance and child rearing'. The work of G. Stanley Hall, for example, was especially important in explaining that each person went through changes in both the psychic and somatic senses which followed the evolutionary scale of the mind and body. Hall believed that the child developed best when it was not forced to follow constraints, but rather to go through the stages of evolution freely.[35] The work of psychologists like Hall provided a further source that could be drawn upon by reformers.

The anarchist critique of state education was obviously underpinned by a respect for children as individuals, accorded powers of initiative, a capacity for discretion and an ability to think for themselves. Anarchists were among the first educationalists to see children as equal to adults, with the same needs for freedom and dignity. They belonged to themselves and accordingly should be treated with respect, 'As creators and not creatures'.[36] This attitude stemmed from a faith in the essential goodness of human nature. Rejecting the notion of original sin, the anarchists insisted that children were innocent at birth and that evil was rooted in a corrupt and repressive environment. The anarchists maintained that children were the repositories of truth and goodness that had been repressed by the authoritarian structure of the family and conventional methods of schooling.[37] This belief in both the goodness of human nature and the capacity of the young to direct their own learning was to be reflected in the schools they established. The

[33] *Freedom*, xi, no. 119, Sept. 1897, p. 63.

[34] See C. Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860–1931* (1990).

[35] D. Armstrong, *The Political Anatomy of the Body* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 114. For Hall, see G. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: a Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1870–1917* (Chicago, Ill., 1995); and D. Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: the Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago, Ill., 1972).

[36] M. Stirner, *The False Principle of Our Education, or, Humanism and Realism* (Colorado Springs, Colo., 1967), p. 11.

[37] L. Tolstoy, *Tolstoy on Education*, trans. L. Weiner (Chicago, Ill., 1967), p. 12.

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three main influences on the anarchist schools were the ideas of the French libertarian educators, propagated by Louise Michel at her International School, the theories of the Spanish anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer and the socialist Sunday school movement.

In March 1890 the French anarchist Louise Michel established a school for the children of political refugees. Its address was 19, Fitzroy Square, London and it was known as the International School.[38] There were many anarchist émigrés in the Fitzroy Square area who wished to take their children out of the state schools because of the harshness of the regimes and the patriotic and religious nature of the teaching. Margaret McMillan visited the school, which was in 'a couple of dingy rooms approached by a dirty staircase, in a squalid yard'. She considered it 'the prototype of all the anarchist schools'.[39] Louise Michel was trained as a teacher and in 1865 had worked at a school in Paris. Georges Clemenceau, a close friend at this time, wrote: 'It was a strange school . . . It was something of a free for all, with some highly unusual teaching methods'.[40] The methods of which Clemenceau wrote lacked coercion and enforced discipline. The International School's emphasis was also on liberty. Michel had no time for disciplined learning and punishment; on the contrary she encouraged her pupils to think for themselves, to explore diverse areas of interest.

Louise Michel's educational theory also extolled the virtues of *éducation intégrale*, an education that cultivated the physical as well as the mental skills and developed all aspects of the child's personality. Human nature was multifaceted, and traditional education, which had hitherto concentrated too much on theory, left many facets undeveloped. Integral education therefore sought to integrate theory and practice and was related to the desire for the complete development of the individual.[41] It also referred to the gap between school and work. An education which was derived too much from the concerns of the grammar school was wholly inadequate preparation for earning a living in a labour market which was stacked against ordinary workers.[42] There was also an emphasis on investing an education with the implication and effect of those wider social forces making for inertia or change. Integral education was to do this by appealing to reason as science in the sceptical manner of the *philosophes* and, through this, by a focus on the 'rational' functions of the workshop and commune. Integral education had formed part of the programme of the Paris Commune, and although there had been little

[38] *Freedom*, iv, no. 49, Dec. 1890, p. 58.

[39] M. McMillan, *The Life of Rachel McMillan* (1927), pp. 57, 59.

[40] E. Thomas, *Louise Michel* (Montreal, 1980), p. 44.

[41] On the concept of *éducation intégrale*, see M. P. Smith, *The Libertarians and Education* (1983); and G. C. Fiddler, 'Anarchism and education: *éducation intégrale* and the imperative towards *fraternité*', *Hist. of Education*, xviii (1989), 23–46.

[42] P. Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, ed. C. Ward (1974), p. 171.

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time to put the plan into effect, the experiments no doubt had a profound effect on Michel, herself a leading Communard.[43]

The key figure in the implementation of ideas on integral education was the French anarchist, Paul Robin. He developed a programme of integral education that was co-educational and designed to develop the physical, moral and intellectual capacities of the pupils in a non-coercive atmosphere. During the eighteen-eighties his work became well known in anarchist circles in Britain.[44] Robin emphasized the need for an education that would foster 'the harmonic development of all the faculties'. Handicrafts and technical skills were therefore given as much priority as theory. He also emphasized the need for the young to study in nature and in the workshop, rather than relying upon books.[45]

Louise Michel drew a great deal of inspiration from Robin's attempt to broaden the educational experiences of working-class children and sought to put his ideas into practice in her school. Walter Crane printed a highly artistic prospectus for the school, the cover of which showed a woman wearing a liberty cap and lighting her lamp from the 'sun of truth' with one hand, while feeding children the fruits of knowledge with the other. There was a caption in French, 'La solidarité humaine', and in English, 'From each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs'.[46] Members of the school's committee included William Morris, Peter Alexeivich Kropotkin and Errico Malatesta. Its teachers included Florence Dryhurst, Charlotte Wilson, Cyril Bell and Agnes Henry, who had spent most of her life studying kindergarten theory.[47] The teaching, in English, French and German, was unpaid and the school was maintained by donations and parental contributions. There was a wide-ranging curriculum and no subjects were compulsory, although a lot of importance was attached to foreign languages. Classes were also available in science, music, drawing, geography, needlework, gymnastics and technical education. This curriculum was much more varied than the curriculum of the board schools. However, it was the way in which learning took place that was important. Children were taught in very small groups and were rarely lectured as such. Sometimes teachers would offer particular classes, but it was not unusual for groups of children to come with their own idea of what they wanted to study. The teachers apparently tried to strike a balance between encouraging and developing diversified interests and the autonomy of

[43] S. Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (1973), pp. 273–4.

[44] See, e.g., *Commonweal*, ii, no. 38, 2 Oct. 1886; and *Freedom*, iii, no. 36, Nov. 1889, p. 52.

[45] Robin put his ideas into practice at an orphanage in Cempuis (1880–94). At Cempuis theory was derived from the child's actual experience in the workshop. The school housed workshops, a farm, botanical gardens, a physics and chemistry laboratory and even a meteorological station. Boys and girls were treated the same at the school, with the boys learning cooking and sewing and the girls metal and woodwork (*Freedom*, iv, no. 46, Sept. 1890, p. 42).

[46] I.I.S.H., Nettlau Collection (hereafter N.C.), Prospectus for the International School.

[47] *Freedom*, v, no. 59, Oct. 1891, p. 78; and A. Hamon, *Psychologie de l'Anarchiste-socialiste* (Paris, 1895), p. 224.

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the individual child. A strong emphasis was put on teaching children to reason for themselves.[48]

By February 1892 the school had over eighty children, with more waiting for places. Dryhurst reported that 'to take them in we require a much larger staff of teachers than at present, as our object is to avoid the poll-parrot system of the Board schools, and to give the children opportunities of learning to think for themselves'.[49] Margaret McMillan was among those who visited the school in order to help:

> Louise had just finished teaching the piano . . . and Coulon her assistant, was teaching French. [Behind Coulon] stood the blackboard with its terrible pictures: the Chicago anarchists hanging by the neck . . . 'We are teaching history, you see', observed Louise, 'They will never forget it', pointing to the class. And the class, which as a whole had enjoyed the lesson, on hearing this prophecy, smiled cheerfully.[50]

Not all observers were so sympathetic. W. C. Hart recalled that

> while in one part of the room the teachers tried to attract their pupils to lessons of arithmetic, Louise herself gave them lessons in piano playing, the children surrounding her, climbing on chairs, and even on her shoulders; the general noise being so great that nobody could be heard at all by either teachers or pupils.

Hart was not alone in being shocked by the 'disorder' of the school; Henry Nevinson found that his efforts 'to instruct the little Anarchs in the elements of drill and orderly behaviour were thwarted by the chaos that reigned in the small room'.[51]

According to Peter Latouche, the school closed in 1893 because 'the scholars mostly exercised the privilege of individual liberty in refusing to submit to the tyranny of paying fees'. In her memoirs, however, Michel said that the police found explosives in the school cellar. She was genuinely surprised, not knowing that one of the school's teachers, Auguste Coulon, was a police spy. Coulon had hit on the idea of using the school as a way of keeping political exiles under surveillance.[52] Despite its short life, the International School illustrates the way in which ideas concerning libertarian education, which were growing in France, attracted attention and took root in Britain, admittedly in this first instance largely among the foreign refugee community.

Apart from Louise Michel's school, the major influence on the later experiments in Britain was the growth of educational ideas under the inspiration of Francisco Ferrer, the founder of the Modern School in Barcelona and the International League for the Rational Education of

[48] *Commonweal*, vii, no. 260, Apr. 1891, p. 27.

[49] *Freedom*, vi, no. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 16.

[50] W. D. Cresswell, *Margaret McMillan, a Memoir*, with a foreword by J. B. Priestley (1948), pp. 63–4.

[51] W. C. Hart, *Confessions of an Anarchist* (1906), p. 121; H. Nevinson, *Changes and Chances* (1923), p. 3.

[52] P. Latouche, *Anarchy!* (1908), p. 202; and E. Thomas, p. 319.

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Children. Like Robin, Ferrer believed in education that would be rational, where pupils would not be tied down by dogma and would be able to organize their own lessons without compulsion.[53] His pedagogical theories involved a shift from emphasis on instruction to emphasis on the process of learning, from teaching by rote and memorization to teaching by example and experience, from education as a preparation for life to education as life itself. Ferrer aimed to do away with the formality and discipline of the conventional classroom, the restrictions and regulations that suppressed individual development and divided education from play. He cultivated physical as well as mental development, crafts and arts as well as books, and give and take between pupil and teacher. Hostile to dogma and superstition, he emphasized reason, observation and science, as well as independence and self-reliance. Anti-coercive and anti-authoritarian, he stressed the dignity and rights of the child, encouraging affection in place of regimentation.

Ferrer moved to a wider concept of libertarian education than that of the French anarchists, and from the very start stressed that the children would control the learning process: 'education is not worthy of the name unless it leaves to the child the direction of its powers and is content to support them in their manifestations'.[54] Ferrer created a school in which pupils were not subjected to discipline but were allowed to come and go freely and to organize their own work. He was determined to free the child from the stultifying effects of the formal classroom, with its fixation on discipline, its rigid and often irrelevant curriculum, its pressure for conformity and denial of originality and independence. Accordingly, a lesson often consisted of a visit to a factory or to a wood where specimens were collected and individual observation encouraged.[55]

Other schools adopted Ferrer's methods and soon his influence reached far beyond Spain. In April 1908, undeterred by the closure of the school after the authorities tried to implicate him in an attempt on the life of King Alfonso XIII (Ferrer was briefly jailed), he founded the International League for the Rational Education of Children in Paris. The organization had an international committee, which included Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Anatole France, Lorenzo Portet and William Heaford. The League provided a link between the modern schools in Europe and gave an impulse to the formation of new schools. Portet and Heaford, for example, were involved in several of the schools created in Britain.[56] In

[53] J. Joll, *The Anarchists* (1st edn., 1964; 1979), p. 234.

[54] F. Ferrer, *The Origins and Ideals of the Modern School* (1913), p. 51.

[55] C. P. Boyd, 'The anarchists and education in Spain, 1868–1909', *Jour. Modern Hist.*, xlviii (1976), 171–2.

[56] Ferrer's imprisonment also gave rise to the formation of an English Ferrer Committee. Freethinkers, socialists and anarchists came together to protest against the Spanish government's actions. After his release Ferrer visited England in order to 'express his heartfelt thanks to all who took part in the international protest against his imprisonment'. This visit proved inspirational to many, particularly Jim Dick who was to be instrumental in establishing a libertarian school in Liverpool. For an account of Ferrer's visit, see *Voice of Labour*, i, no. 32, 24. Aug. 1907, p. 163.

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August 1909 the League lost its guiding spirit when Ferrer was arrested in Barcelona. He was executed in October after being charged with, and found guilty of, being the author of a rebellion during the 'Tragic Week' of July.[57] Ferrer was clearly innocent, but his martyrdom led to his ideas about education spreading even more widely. One of his English disciples, Jim Dick, called on anarchists to continue Ferrer's work: 'The murder must be avenged, but in a form that will undermine the foundations that exploitation is built upon, i.e., by freeing the child's mind of the prejudices that are daily inculcated by the State and Church . . . If you believe [Ferrer's] work to be good and effective, then set about it'.[58]

The English libertarian schools owed much to the ideas of Ferrer, yet they were also variants on the English tradition of socialist Sunday schools which had developed their own comprehensive critique of state education. The Liverpool anarchist Sunday school for example, had close links with the local socialist schools and, as we shall see, adopted their teaching practices. The socialist Sunday school movement was established when the first school was set up in 1892 in London by Mary Gray of the S.D.F. The movement soon spread throughout the country, uniting socialists of many faiths. The schools were dedicated to teaching socialism to working-class children and to bringing an understanding of the nature of existing society, with the aim of bringing about its transformation through political action.[59] Like the anarchists, many of those involved in the socialist Sunday schools were advocating a new outlook, not only of teaching on enlightened lines, but also of a humane attitude to discipline, and respect for children as individuals.[60] Their journals carried articles about children's rights and published the activities of the Society for the Reform of School Discipline, a body committed to the abolition of corporal punishment. Moreover, they attacked the 1902 Education Act as 'a reactionary measure . . . a serious set-back to the progress of free, unsectarian and democratic education'.[61]

From the eighteen-nineties progressive educational ideas, such as those of Friedrich Froebel, the kindergarten pioneer, were finding a voice in socialist education circles.[62] Margaret McMillan used the socialist schools as a forum for her ideas. She was interested in the teachers who, frustrated by the restrictions in the state system, were using the Sunday schools to experiment in educational technique. In 1908 she noted 'the new intimacy between teacher and taught' in the schools, which 'may usher

[57] See J. Connelly Ullman, *The Tragic Week* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).
[58] *Freedom*, xxiv, no. 252, Apr. 1910, pp. 29–30.
[59] See F. Reid, 'Socialist Sunday schools in Britain, 1892–1939', *International Review of Social Hist.*, xi (1966), 18–47.
[60] See, e.g., A. Russell, 'The social teaching of children', in *The Labour Annual* (1900), p. 141.
[61] *The Reformer's Year Book* (1903), p. 101.
[62] See *I.L.P. News*, Nov. 1899.

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in the new method . . . our children should write more and talk more than is possible in the day school'.[63] A few of the schools tried to take the concept of learning out of the classroom, with the teachers taking classes into the countryside. A scan of reports in *The Young Socialist*, the movement's journal, reveals a varied curriculum: dancing, rambling, athletics, book clubs and performances of plays. Although the anarchist and rationalist supporters of Ferrer found the semi-religious and 'Sunday-best respectability' of many socialist schools distasteful, their own schools were part of the same tradition. Their distaste increased, however, when the socialist Sunday school movement took over the framework of traditional Christian worship, introducing the socialist ten commandments, which were based on justice and love.[64]

The libertarian Sunday School which developed at the Jubilee Street Club in Whitechapel in 1906 was established by thirteen-year-old Nellie Ploschansky. She became demoralized by national state schooling and by the lack of facilities for young people in the working men's institutes of the East End. To begin with she helped to set up a Sunday school, which was later to grow into a larger and more regular school. The Jubilee Street Club had already formed the Workers' Circle, a Jewish anarchist organization that supported 'progressive cultural work'.[65] It was here that Ploschansky was taken by her father in order to listen to lectures. Throughout 1906, as she attended, she began to notice the absence of children at the classes.[66] It was this that encouraged her to ask the club to set up a school on its premises 'for working men's children . . . I had heard about Ferrer's school in Barcelona and that was what I wanted'. Ploschansky was determined that it be a school that was run freely. She remembered:

> Comrades sent their children along and we read poetry and sang songs. We used to sing a poem written by Morris . . . called 'No Master High or Low'. Gradually the children got other children to come [and] the Rabbi would come out and stand in front of the door and when the children left he would follow them home and tell their parents they should not allow them to go there because it was a bad place. But the children made no mind. They liked it.[67]

The Rabbi's concerns reflected the fact that the anarchist schools were one of the few secular alternatives to religious education for the East End Jews.

The school remained at Jubilee Street until June 1912, when it moved to Commercial Road. Among the anarchists who occasionally helped out at the new premises were William Wess, a leading figure in the local

[63] *The Young Socialist*, Feb. 1908.
[64] *Freedom*, xxv, no. 268, Aug. 1911, p. 63.
[65] R. Rocker, *The London Years* (1956), p. 218.
[66] University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre (hereafter M.R.C.), MS. 21/1538/4, typescript of Nellie Dick talking to Andrew Whitehead, 5 Nov. 1985, p. 2.
[67] Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in Shotton, p. 38.

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tailoring trades unions, and Ambrose Barker, a free-thought campaigner. Although the school was known as a 'Sunday school', it often met up to three times a week.[68] The school sought to develop a curriculum that was relevant to those who attended it and included science, languages, physical education, sewing, reading and recitations. The older pupils would be instructed in sewing, often bringing material with them and mending their clothes while readings took place. This training helped to prepare them for work in the tailoring trades of the East End.[69] Controlled by its users, the emphasis was put on allowing the children to organize themselves and to discuss topics that they felt to be important. The school arranged trips to places like Epping Forest, where they could study out in the open. One pupil recalled: 'I remember my father saying to [my sister] "Did you have a good time?" "Yes" she said, "wonderful, there were no parents, no-one telling us what to do"'.[70]

The school also began to develop an adult section with classes in sex education, literature, theatre, poetry and languages. Of the latter, Esperanto was especially popular since it was expected to foster anarchism by creating international unity and understanding.[71] Nellie Ploschansky recalled that many children from the school used to go and join the adults, and the barriers between young and old were broken down as both learned together. The school also fostered links between the immigrant Jews and the local community, with a minority of the pupils being the children of local people.[72] In January 1907 the school celebrated the new year. After tea, the children and their families held a concert of socialist songs. In March Wess reported that 'the school has broken into three classes and is much more satisfactory . . . We have also combined physical exercise with intellectual practice . . . When the warm weather comes we are always eager to get them out into the fields'.[73] Not everyone who was involved was so enthusiastic. In 1908 A. Davies confirmed that she was 'giving [the school] up as hopeless', since 'the parents of local children make use of it as a crèche, a convenient place to send their children to while they otherwise amuse themselves. It is all very dispiriting'.[74] Despite their best endeavours, the anarchists sometimes came up against deep currents of apathy and ignorance in working-class culture. Clearly not everyone shared their faith in the power of libertarian education. Indeed, it would be interesting to know exactly how many

[68] N.C., List 128, A. Barker to M. Nettlau, 5 March 1907; and M.R.C., MS. 21/1538/3, typescript of Leah Feldman talking to Andrew Whitehead, 7 Oct. 1985, p. 10.

[69] N.C., List 237, W. Wess to M. Nettlau, 13 March 1907.

[70] Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in Shotton, p. 3.

[71] See E. Chapelier and G. Marin, *Anarchists and the International Language* (1908).

[72] M.R.C., MS. 21/1538/4, typescript of Nellie Dick talking to Andrew Whitehead, 5 Nov. 1985, p. 2.

[73] *The Weekly Times and Echo*, 19 Jan. 1907; and N.C., List 237, W. Wess to M. Nettlau, 13 March 1907.

[74] N.C., A. A. Davies to M. Nettlau, 14 Apr. 1908.

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members of the school were the children of anarchists and revolutionary socialists, and how many were the offspring of local people who merely wanted a cheap child-minding establishment.

The Liverpool anarchist Sunday school was founded by Jim Dick and Lorenzo Portet in November 1908 and met at the Toxteth Co-operative Hall on Smithdown Road. By January 1909 there were thirty-eight children attending the school, and it was reported that 'the young comrades practically run the meetings'. Jim Dick declared that the aim of the school was to provide a rational education and 'to break down the national prejudices which are inculcated into the children of our present-day schools'.[75] In order to develop this spirit of internationalism the school was affiliated to Ferrer's League for the Rational Education of Children. Throughout the spring of 1909 there was a series of lectures. Matt Kavanagh spoke on 'The Paris Commune', Fairbrother on the imperialist play 'An Englishman's Home' and Junior on 'The elements of socialism'. Fairbrother 'pointed out the true condition of the Englishman's home and finished with a plea for the solidarity of the workers of all nations'. The lecture programme continued throughout the summer of 1909, but at new premises, the I.L.P. rooms at Clarendon Terrace. The programme included a lecture by Kavanagh on 12 September 1909 on 'William Morris' and Beavan's lecture on 'The spirit of unrest'. In the autumn many of the pupils became involved in the campaign to support their jailed mentor, Ferrer, sending their protest to the Spanish embassy.[76] On 17 October, after Ferrer's execution, the children decided to change the school's name to the International Modern School. A pamphlet was also published in conjunction with the local anarchists at the International Club entitled *The Martyrdom of Francisco Ferrer*.[77]

During 1910 the school began to change; instead of there just being a programme of lectures, the school began to develop a more systematic approach. After visiting a local socialist Sunday school, Dick decided to adopt their Froebelian method of teaching according to age and stage.[78] Froebel's ideas on the development of individual character and the removal of restraints upon growth harmonized well with libertarian educational theory. Agnes Henry, for example, believed that kindergarten theory was 'essentially anarchist in method and principles'.[79] Froebel believed that the child was an organism and education was the development of that organism. This development was spontaneous – Froebel called it 'self-activity'. He insisted that observation must be combined with free expression. Thus

[75] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 238, Feb. 1909, p. 16.

[76] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 241, May 1909, p. 39; no. 247, Nov. 1909, p. 87; no. 246, Oct. 1909, p. 79.

[77] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 247, Nov. 1909, p. 87.

[78] Steedman, pp. 176–7.

[79] Hamon, p. 224.

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the educator's role was not to interfere and prescribe, but to oversee and protect. The child's natural activity expressed itself in play, and the school's function was to encourage this natural development.

By the summer of 1910 there were several classes in operation. Kavanagh ran a class for children under seven years of age in which he utilized kindergarten theory, encouraging the children to play freely and to express themselves. Dick had responsibility for a class of older children. In response to demand his classes focused on the theory of evolution, which he compared with creation theory. This was a popular class, partly because of the informal discussions that took place. Finally, there was an adult class that focused on numeracy skills and language teaching.[80] The winter of 1910–11, however, brought disaster. With the numbers rising and the lectures and discussions becoming ever more diverse, the aftermath of the Sidney Street siege took its toll. For the last two weeks of December 1910 the papers were full of fevered speculation. Under the headline 'Liverpool and the anarchists – is there a centre in the city?' the *Daily Post and Mercury* declared: 'the most active centre is Liverpool. In some places anarchist schools have been opened where the children are practised in revolutionary songs and brought up in the ways of violence'.[81] The subsequent controversy meant that the I.L.P. was not altogether pleased at the negative publicity which the school had attracted and the effect that this might have on its reputation. As a result the school was evicted from the I.L.P. buildings, on the grounds that the children were a disruptive influence.[82]

The school found a new home at Alexander Mall, Islington Square, and reopened on 26 February. Within three months, however, it became clear that the school would have to close because the children could not travel easily to the new buildings.[83] In 1912 Dick left for Oxford, where he attended Ruskin College. This was not the end, however, and under the guidance of Matt Roche the school reopened on 12 October 1913 at the Communist Club in Islington Road. The following Sunday a series of discussions on trade unionism was started and workers from the docks came to speak to the children.[84] Whilst the Liverpool school did not pioneer any radical teaching methods, the lectures by workers did reflect the need for the children to receive an education that was connected to real life and not overly focused on theory. In the anarchist schools children were taken out into the working environment and workers were encouraged to come into the school.

The Ferrer School which opened at New King's Hall, 135, Commercial Road East, London on 23 June 1912 was an offshoot from

[80] *Freedom*, xxiv, no. 251, March 1910, p. 24.
[81] *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, 5 Jan. 1911, p. 7.
[82] *Freedom*, xxv, no. 262, Feb. 1911, p. 15.
[83] *Freedom*, xxv, no. 265, May 1911, p. 40.
[84] *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 295, Nov. 1913, p. 91.

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the Jubilee Street school. Why this occurred is not clear, but it may have been due to lack of space. When the school opened sixty children attended: it is likely that the Jubilee Street Club could not accommodate such numbers, especially as it was used by so many other people. Kavanagh opened the school and a speaker from the Central Labour College, A. J. Cook, co-author of *The Miners' Next Step*, gave an address on mining. In conjunction with this, a discussion of Zola's *Germinal* took place.[85] On 8 September 1912 Malatesta gave an address, on 'Ferrer and the modern school movement'. The following week there was a visit by Bonar Thompson, who recited Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.[86] The school grew rapidly until, by the end of 1912, there were over 100 children from five to sixteen years old attending regularly. In March 1913 Nellie Ploschansky reported that the school was moving again, this time to 146, Stepney Green East. There were clearly more rooms that could be used at the new premises since a club room and a library were established, and from now on the school was to be open every weekday evening.[87]

In 1913 Ploschansky met Jim Dick at a May Day rally, where he was handing out anti-militarist leaflets under a banner belonging to the Central Labour College. She invited him to speak at her school and he soon became involved in its running.[88] Sunday afternoons were mostly given over to lectures. However, children formed groups after the lectures, some by age, some by gender. Usually they wished to discuss the lecture topics, without the adults interfering, but frequently they began different discussions altogether. An adult education class was also established. In June 1913 Roche gave an address on 'Evolution' and Dai Owen of the South Wales Miners Federation spoke about the coal industry. Thanks to Charles Lahr, who donated many books from his shop, the school developed a large library and Tuesday evenings were given over to reading class. Whilst the teachers usually suggested books to read, any of the children's suggestions were accepted.[89] Thursday evenings were devoted to sports and dancing and the school even had a cricket team. On 12 October 1913 the children commemorated Ferrer's death and letters of greeting were read from the Liverpool school and the Modern School in Barcelona.[90]

As the school developed in size and organization so too did the involvement of the children in its running. Thus, on one occasion, when Ploschansky was away and the other teacher did not turn up, the children

[85] *Freedom*, xxvi, no. 279, July 1912, p. 55.

[86] *Freedom*, xxvi, no. 281, Sept. 1912, p. 72.

[87] *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 287, March 1913, p. 23.

[88] P. Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), p. 243.

[89] *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 293, Sept. 1913, p. 46; no. 292, Aug. 1913, p. 67; no. 290, June 1913, p. 51.

[90] *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 295, Nov. 1913, pp. 91–2.

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organized the class themselves and held a debate on 'Charity', while one of the elder girls spoke to the younger class.[91] This spirit of self-empowerment was particularly evident in plans to publish a magazine entitled *The Modern School*, aimed at 'promoting self-expression' and reporting on the school's activities. The first issue was published at the end of January 1914, the second issue in April and the third in July. They contained articles which were written by the children: issue three had an article entitled 'What is anarchy?' by Willie (aged eleven), two letters from children in Canada and 'Bits by the bairns' by Henry (aged seven). The magazine featured a frontispiece showing two children holding aloft the torch of liberty with a copy of *Science and Truth* under their arms, while in the background a priest could be seen retreating.[92]

With the outbreak of war in August 1914, Dick reported that the school was organizing lectures aimed at 'maintaining the spirit of internationalism'. To this end, Jack Tanner lectured on 'Ferrer's life as an internationalist', reminding the children that 'in these times of carnage', Ferrer, 'as an advocate of human solidarity would have grieved over the spectacle of today'. 'All the more need', he declared, 'for centres like our school as a protest against barbarism'.[93] In December Dick announced that the school had moved again, 'taking up quarters at 24 Green Street, Cambridge Road. On Tuesday evenings French lessons. Thursday evenings discussion and reading class. Sunday afternoons our usual meetings'.[94] In January 1915 *Freedom* reported that 'we are requested to draw attention to the fact that only part of the school has shifted its quarters, the larger section remaining at Whitechapel Road'.[95] A new 'education group' was established to run the school which remained at Whitechapel and consisted mostly of younger children. At Green Street the older children set about developing their school on their own, with help from Jim Dick. At Whitechapel Road, Rudolf Rocker's son, also called Rudolf, ran the school until he was interned. His half-brother, Fermin, remembers how it was free from all forms of coercion: 'Rudolf would have no rewards or punishments. Children learned as they wanted to learn'.[96]

The breakaway school at 24, Green Street, Cambridge Road did not stay there too long. By March 1915 it had moved to Ashburton House in Hertford Place.[97] Lectures still took place on Sunday, but the school was also open on most evenings during the week. The school began to publish another magazine entitled *Liberty*. Issue one was published in

[91] *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 287, March 1913, p. 23.
[92] *Freedom*, xxviii, no. 302, July 1914, p. 55; *Voice of Labour*, 3 July 1914, p. 3.
[93] *Freedom*, xxviii, no. 307, Nov. 1914, p. 83.
[94] *Freedom*, xxviii, no. 308, Dec. 1914, p. 90.
[95] *Freedom*, xxix, no. 309. Jan. 1915, p. 8.
[96] M.R.C., MS. 21/1538/2, typescript of interview with Fermin Rocker by Andrew Whitehead, 27 Sept. 1985, p. 13.
[97] *Freedom*, xxix, no. 311, March 1915, p. 21.

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February 1915 and contained articles on the war. There was also a piece about Futurist art by 'Barney'. The most interesting was an article written by 'Ruben' entitled 'State schools and the workers'. It stressed that 'the duty of the workers is to take more interest in the education of the children in state schools. They should protest against the teaching of religion and patriotism'.[98] Ruben's article is remarkable in that it suggests that some children at least resisted the state's attempt to create a set of unique national identities for boys and girls through the 'numerous patriotic symbols and national narratives that found expression in school reading books and class room practices'.[99]

In issue two of the magazine there were features about evolution, conscription and a review of Zola's *Germinal*. There was also a report from children in Ledbury who had been engaged in a school strike:

> The children played a lively part in the teachers' strike. They boycotted the strike-breaker headmistress by preventing her to open [*sic*] the school. When the children came into the schoolrooms they upset desks, threw inkpots, knocked down pictures etc. They have made use of direct action, which I think the grown-ups have never applied in their cause and I hope they will take a lesson from the children.[100]

The children had gone on strike in support of the Herefordshire teaching union's demand for salary increases. The children's resistance began at the start of February 1914, when, in response to the union's strategy of mass resignations, the local education authority appointed new teachers, many of them unqualified, to replace those involved in the dispute. Pupils throughout the county expressed sympathy for their former teachers, who were among the lowest paid in the country, by refusing to be taught by the new members of staff, and seventy schools were forced to close. The most violent scenes occurred at Ledbury Girls' School, where a riot developed during which desks were overturned, and the new headmistress was chased off the premises by a crowd of girls chanting 'Blackleg'.[101]

In late 1915 the Cambridge Road school moved to Marsh House, an anarchist commune in Meckleburgh Street. On 13 October this was the location for a meeting commemorating Ferrer's death. Among the speakers were Millie Witcop, Bessie Ward, Bonar Thompson and Jim Dick.[102] However, the school was virtually at an end. During the winter of 1915–16 it had its share of trouble with the authorities. Nellie Ploschansky recalled:

[98] *Liberty*, i, no. 1, Feb. 1915, p. 5.
[99] Heathorn, p. 203.
[100] *Liberty*, i, no. 2, March 1915, p. 6.
[101] For an account of this strike, see Humphries, p. 111. For school strikes generally, see D. Marson, *Children's Strikes in 1911* (History Workshop pamphlet, vi, Oxford, 1973).
[102] *Freedom*, xxix, no. 319, Nov. 1915, p. 88.

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Once we had a party which was raided by the police – there was a spy in our group – who arrested everybody without a registration card. Also a Conservative paper, *John Bull* I believe, had an article about our school which said Jim was related to Lenin and I to Trotsky and that we were teaching the children to make revolution and manufacture bombs.[103]

In 1916 Jim Dick and Nellie Ploschansky were legally married so that Jim could avoid conscription, and when married men became eligible for the draft they decided to go to the U.S.A. With their departure the East London Modern School ended.[104]

The anarchist educators did not necessarily speak with one voice. Although they were all theoretically bound by a belief in the autonomy of the individual to control the learning process, at times this goal was not always adhered to. Indeed, insofar as the schools preached specific social values, their pupils were subjected to some form of indoctrination. Dick maintained that the Liverpool school had been organized to 'teach a child to think and act for itself. To point out to them that humility, patience and submission are no longer virtues; and that they must own themselves'.[105] The anarchist educators sought to achieve these goals through engagement in political activity, through participation in the running of the school and through the libertarian ideology which they hoped would pervade everything that went on in the classroom.

In the anarchist schools children were educated to believe in liberty, equality and social justice. They were taught that war was a crime against humanity, that the capitalist system was evil, that government was slavery and that freedom was essential for human development.[106] Lessons were illustrated with examples of patriotism, superstition and exploitation and the suffering that they produced. Ferrer believed that 'the distinction between justice and injustice is perhaps the first moral distinction which a child can and does grasp and it would be ridiculous to pretend it lies outside the proper sphere of education. Our intrinsic plea that it is not fair to prejudice the mind of a child on subjects he cannot fully understand is nothing but a fallacy of bourgeois self-defence'.[107] *Freedom* agreed, addressing the whole question of teachers and teaching: 'At no point in his work can the teacher remain neutral; that is without conviction, without assent. However hard the truth may seem to established powers, this is only the right of the child'.[108]

[103] M.R.C., MS. 21/1538/4, typescript of Nellie Dick talking to Andrew Whitehead, 5 Nov. 1985, pp. 2–3.

[104] Embarking in Jan. 1917, the Dicks's first thought was to see the Ferrer School at Stelton, New York, which they had heard much about and which paralleled their own endeavours. Jim and Nellie soon joined the staff and continued to teach in various modern schools in America until 1958 (Avrich, p. 243).

[105] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 241, May 1909, p. 39.

[106] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 241, May 1909, p. 65.

[107] W. Archer, *The Life, Trial and Death of Francisco Ferrer* (1911), p. 48.

[108] *Freedom*, xii, no. 232, Aug. 1908, p. 52.

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What *Freedom* did not come to grips with, however, was the idea, accepted by Tolstoyans for example, that any form of indoctrination was wrong since it hinted at dogmatism. Should not distrust of the imposition of values extend to the imposition of libertarian values? There was a danger that new dogmas, justified by being credited with such attributes as modernity and naturalness, would replace the old ones. Some anarchists thus argued 'that on general grounds of universal expediency and experience, no human has a right to force knowledge down another's throat'.[109] There was, therefore, some controversy about the politicized nature of the subject matter at the schools. Dick, though, defended this teaching, not out of a desire to build a vanguard of politically conscious children, but because he believed the young had a right to learn about politics, notwithstanding their ability to make up their own minds about all issues.[110]

In many ways, anarchists like Jim Dick were constrained by their belief in the transformative potential of alternative schools. Max Stirner, the German author of the anarcho-individualist tract *The Ego and its Own* (1844), however, went further, embracing what later became known as 'radical de-schooling', rejecting the entire concept of the school as an affront to the child's autonomy. Stirner, himself an ex-teacher, drew a distinction between the 'educated man' and the truly free individual. He would not have disputed with Dick the value of obtaining knowledge, but claimed that 'through knowledge . . . we only become internally free . . . outwardly, with all freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, we can remain slaves and remain in subjection'. For Stirner, 'knowledge must die and rise again as *will* and create itself anew each day as a free person'. This could only be done outside the confines of the schoolroom.[111] In many ways Stirner's views corresponded with Nietzsche's contempt for the mediocrity of institutional education. Yet neither really offered an alternative to the concept of the free school; their thoughts on education remained on an existential rather than a practical level.

Pedagogy was also an area in which anarchists differed. An extreme Tolstoyan definition of freedom with respect to teaching, as embraced by Louise Michel, implied absolutely no compulsion in the teaching pattern. Other anarchist pedagogues, however, seem to have forgotten that the dynamics of hierarchy and power existed in the class room as they did in society at large. Although Jim Dick strongly argued for the capacity and ability of young people to organize their own lives, his approach to pedagogy was more conventional. He believed that content was what mattered most in learning, and viewed lectures as the most effective

[109] University College London, Special Collections, Pearson Papers, C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 22 Nov. 1886.
[110] *Freedom*, xxiii, no. 241, May 1909, p. 39.
[111] Stirner, pp. 27, 22.

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medium of instruction. This view was hardly compatible with Ferrer's principles and places Dick more in the traditions of socialist Sunday school teaching than within the libertarian approach. Indeed, when he was invited by the Socialist Sunday School Union of Liverpool to attend a conference in July 1911 he expressed his full support for that movement. His only criticism of socialist education was of its 'Sunday School morality' and 'quasi-religious' content, not of the fact that it was more structured and formal in nature than libertarian education.[112] In contrast, Louise Michel or Tolstoy would have insisted on the child's absolute freedom to decide upon what was learnt, to determine the pattern of his or her day. There was thus a debate as to the degree to which self-motivation was essential to the learning act.[113]

If some anarchists did not always have faith in the ability of children to control the learning process, others seem to have been convinced that only through coercion could the young learn. Charlotte Wilson's educational theories, for example, allowed for order as well as for freedom. She emphasized the need for moral training, 'starting with the necessary absolute authority' and proceeding 'with the gradual removal of restraints and by the inculcation of personal dignity and respectability in order to form free men and women filled with reverence and love for the freedom of their fellows'.[114] While most anarchists would share her desire for 'free men and women' they would not see such authoritarian methods as the way to make them. Indeed, in Wilson's endorsement of 'the rod in the nursery', a tendency to advocate force on a selective, not entirely consistent basis appears. She explained: 'Children are not reasonable beings and must be trained up to perfect liberty, by the gradual removal of restraint . . . I have beheld an infant anarchist corrected with a resounding slap by its fond and enlightened parent, for talking unreasonably in the presence of its elders'.[115] Although Wilson occasionally helped out at Louise Michel's school, given her belief in disciplining infant anarchists until they were fit for freedom, she must have had her doubts about its non-coercive approach.

On the whole, however, such views were rare. Educators like Robin, for example, took up a liberal position, the characteristic features of

[112] *Freedom*, xxv, no. 268, Aug. 1911, p. 63.

[113] This distinction between absolute freedom and some form of guidance was best demonstrated in the differences between Tolstoy's school at Yasnaya Polyana and the Modern School of Ferrer. The former allowed the children such freedom that one commentator accused him of being a 'pedagogical nihilist'. At Yasnaya Polyana pupils sat where they pleased and came and went without restraint. Attendance was optional. A class was adjourned when the pupils lost interest in it, and if they did not feel like working, nobody forced them (see F. Tayer, 'Politics and culture in anarchist education: the Modern School of New York and Stelton 1911–15', *Curriculum Inquiry*, xvi (1986)).

[114] *Justice*, 6 Dec. 1884.

[115] British Library, Shaw Papers, AM 50510 fos. 310–14, C. Wilson to G. B. Shaw, 10 Dec. 1884.

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which were avoidance of corporal punishment, the imposition instead of social penalties, often communally arrived at, and a general reluctance to breach the child's self-respect. Most British anarchist educators took this line. Punishments were rejected, as was the process of distributing rewards or prizes to selected pupils, since this led to 'vanity and venality'.[116] The anarchist educators thus made an effort to address the whole issue of pedagogy, discussing new techniques such as those of Maria Montessori whose

> system . . . has practical results that the old authoritarian child deformers would scout as impossible. The object is not to teach the child certain set subjects, but to develop its bodily senses and powers of observation and reasoning, so that it can teach itself in accordance with the prompting of its nature. The children in school are free to talk, sit where they like, work or watch others working, just as they choose . . . the teacher is not there to coerce, but to stimulate.

Freedom believed that this approach was based on 'anarchist first principles'.[117] In February 1910 it began a column specifically aimed at young people that included articles attacking parents and teachers for their abuse of children. In their journalism the anarchists called on adults to try to gain some sort of insight into youthful emotions and to sympathize with them, and argued strongly that an absence of coercion was essential for the full achievement of youth's autonomy.[118]

The anarchist educators also sought to foster a free consciousness amongst the young by encouraging their participation in the management and decision-making process of the schools. The issue over decision-making at the Ferrer School on Commercial Road became the subject of intense debate at the end of 1914. In December part of the International Modern School moved to 24, Green Street, Cambridge Road, while the larger section remained at Whitechapel Road. Apparently, the teenagers at the school felt that it was in 'the best interests of free development to rely upon their own initiative' and 'without reference to rules, regulations or precedent, they proceeded to find a meeting-place wherein they could run a school themselves'.[119] Nellie Ploschansky recalled that it was the older boys who wanted to leave. She and Jim decided to leave with them, while Rudolf Rocker remained to continue with the younger children. He described the division thus:

> the senior children, after discussion between themselves came to the conclusion that the school would prosper better if they themselves were concerned in the general management. On this point we agreed. The division came because a part of the scholars (mainly the older boys) thought that the improvement could only be attained by a complete severing . . . whereas we (the older girls and younger

[116] *Freedom*, xi, no. 119, Sept. 1897, p. 63.
[117] *Freedom*, xxvi, no. 284, Dec. 1912, p. 91.
[118] *Freedom*, xxiv, March 1910, p. 6; xxvii, no. 287, Feb. 1913, p. 16.
[119] *Freedom*, xxix, no. 309, Jan. 1915, p. 8; *Voice of Labour*, Dec. 1914, p. 3.

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children) were of the opinion that the remedy was to be sought in co-operation between the adults and children.[120]

The split shows that the schools were not always perfect outposts of harmony. However, that the controversy between the students of the Modern School was over such an important issue as decision-making demonstrates the extent to which many of the pupils and teachers were committed to empowering the young.

As stressed earlier, Dick and his comrades saw their schools not only as educational institutions, but as a centres of agitation, a training ground for revolutionary activity. Basic to their philosophy was the belief that education should develop individuals who were equipped to build an anarchist society. This meant that the children at the schools were encouraged to participate in direct agitational activity outside their class-rooms. Ploschansky for example, discussed how the Jubilee Street school politicized children and legitimized their hostility to the state schools:

For instance when I took some children to a 1st May demonstration, one time it happened to be on a day when they should have been in public school. I told them that if the teacher asked why they were away they were to tell them why they were not at school. They did. They were punished . . . but they said 'we went because it was a workers' holiday and my father is a worker, so there'.[121]

Sometimes children used the discussion groups within the schools to organize their own activity. Ploschansky recalled that the boys at the Stepney Green school held a meeting and decided that they would organize protection for the suffragettes: 'Our boys would go out and make a circle around them and defend them from the police and the people who would try and disturb the campaigning'.[122] Similarly, Dick reported that a discussion had taken place at one of these meetings to strike against the saluting of the flag in state school on Empire Day. The children went to school and openly refused to salute the flag, thus making 'their protest against this fostering of hatred of other countries'. Prior to this, on Empire Day in May 1909, the children from the Liverpool school had distributed leaflets 'as an antidote to the patriotic bombast that the day schools were giving'.[123] This anti-nationalist sentiment was to develop further after the passing of the Military Service Act in 1916. Many of the boys at the Green Street school became involved in distributing anti-conscription leaflets. Nellie Ploschansky remembered that

our boys were sometimes yanked up to the tribunal because they were tall and they looked older. And once one of the boys was called up and he said that he belonged to this Sunday School, and he didn't think he had any fighting to do

[120] *Freedom*, xxix, no. 309, Jan. 1915, p. 4.
[121] Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in Shotton, p. 39.
[122] Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in Shotton, p. 49.
[123] *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 290, June 1913, p. 51; xxiii, no. 242, June 1909, p. 47.

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with the workers in Germany. And they said to him 'How old are the children who attend that school? How young do you take them?' He says, 'As soon as they are able to think'. It was very tough on those youngsters because mothers whose sons were going to war, would pin white feathers on them. They didn't know how old they were.[124]

Political activity such as this helped to train the next generation of militants. The schools were, therefore, the nearest thing to a youth section that the anarchists ever had. The training of future activists was clearly a major, if unemphasized, part of the adult agenda. Some of the adult educators also seem to have had another, ulterior motive in mind, namely that of seeking refreshment in the presumed childlike innocence and thirst for knowledge of the young. This is evident in Dick's description of a trip to Shiplake-on-Thames by the Commercial Road school:

What a glorious time we had. And what children we all are when we are freely communing with nature. All thoughts of private property – if we have any – are left behind and the law and order of the old fogies passes away like a bad dream. Our revels are so free that the musts and must not of which I for one am heartily sick, have no meaning in our joyous but too brief experience of an unchained existence. Let them call us savages if they will. We will accept the name . . . our fathers and mothers who have been good too long must learn that the time is fast ripening when the 'bad uns' will play the devil with the suppressers of merriment.[125]

Rather than describing the actual experience of the children on the trip, Dick's account demonstrates something about the adult anarchist frame of mind. In many ways it seems as though the adults experienced an almost euphoric refreshment, a recapturing of a lost youth. Indeed, it could be argued that the anarchist view of humanity in general is nothing more than a cult of childlike innocence. Amongst the young and 'uncorrupted' the adult anarchist could be refreshed and rejuvenated after experiencing a glimpse of the ideal society, or as Dick put it a 'joyous . . . experience of an unchained existence'. Dick's description lends support to the post-modern theorist Henry Giroux's contention that libertarian pedagogues are romantic advocates of 'self-fulfilment'.[126]

Carolyn Steedman has demonstrated how early twentieth-century adult beliefs and desires were often expressed in the figure of a child and the experience of an idealized childhood. This view of childhood and its history, like Dick's account of the school trip, had much less to do with actual children than with adult concepts of the self. The *fin de siècle* saw a search for the self, for a past that was lost, and this lost essence or vision came to assume the shape and form of the child.[127] Steedman writes: 'the

[124] Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in Shotton, p. 55.

[125] *Freedom*, xxvii, no. 292, Aug. 1913, p. 67.

[126] H. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: a Pedagogy for the Opposition* (1983), pp. 218–20.

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child-figure came to be used as an extension of the self, a resource for returning to one's own childhood, and as an image of one's extension in time'.[128] During the period under discussion a change took place in the way that people understood themselves and a new conception of what 'self' was occurred. The idea that the core of an individual's psychic identity was their own childhood began to gain credibility. At the same time, childhood acquired a new significance. As Dick's comments show, children became symbols of hope, of a better future and of individuality.

So far this article has discussed the schools from the perspective of the adult teachers. What were the schools like for the pupils? On the whole the children seem to have enjoyed their schooling. Despite the question as to whether or not the anarchists sought to indoctrinate the children in their care, the children seem to have believed that they were free to pick and choose their ideas. One of the pupils at the Jubilee Street school, Leah Feldman, recalled that the children were free to reject the views of their teachers if they so wished. They were encouraged to think for themselves and to study a wide range of subjects.[129] In an article entitled 'Why I attend the Modern School', one of the pupils declared:

> I am compelled by law to attend an elementary school which is not to my liking. We find the discipline of the elementary schools very strict. It is not so in the Modern School. Our discipline is self-respect, that is we do not run about like hooligans knowing that the teachers can do us no harm. By doing no harm I mean that they do not cane us. Some of the subjects taught in the Modern School are: clay modelling, astronomy, natural sciences and drawing. In the council schools we are taught to be patriotic, but in the Modern School, we are taught to be lovers of freedom.[130]

In an article in *Liberty* a girl called 'Lilly' also explained her reasons for liking libertarian schooling:

> Before I went to the Modern School I had friends from the day school and they were very religious and as my parents were not so I could not make out which were right, my parents or my religious friends. At home we never keep up holidays (holydays) but my friends always did so I felt very uncomfortable. Now I go to the Modern School and my friends are just the same as I am. I feel much nicer because I see more children whose parents are like mine.[131]

Although Lilly clearly enjoyed her experiences at the school, her statement raises an important issue, namely to what extent the schools

[127] See C. Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (1995).
[128] Steedman, p. 64.
[129] See M.R.C., MS. 21/1538/3, typescript of Leah Feldman talking to Andrew Whitehead, 7 Oct. 1985, p. 10.
[130] *The International Modern School Magazine*, i, no. 2, Dec. 1921, p. 7.
[131] *Liberty*, i, no. 2, March 1915, p. 6.

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served only to withdraw children into an anarchist ghetto, protecting them from having to negotiate with the wider world. It could be argued that a true education should involve the experiencing of a variety of situations and perspectives, no matter how unsavoury, which would allow children to develop into human beings prepared for the real world, not just a small sectarian milieu where everybody thought the same way.

The libertarian schools reveal a considerable amount about British anarchism. The political orientation of the schools did not develop as an isolated experiment in radical teaching, but was deeply rooted in working-class politics. Most of them largely recruited from a sympathetic milieu in communities where anarcho-syndicalist ideas and activities were much in evidence. The schools also drew support from those sympathetic to the Central Labour College and Plebs League. Many anarchists involved in trades union militancy reinforced the links between syndicalism and education through their work in adult learning at the Jubilee Street Club. Such individuals saw their schools not only as educational institutions, but as centres of propaganda and agitation, a training ground for revolutionary activity. The school, in other words, was at once an instrument of self-development and a lever of social regeneration. In the meantime, the schools would serve as libertarian alternatives to the existing regime, embryos of the coming millennium, 'counter-communities' within the larger authoritarian society, providing a model for others to emulate. In effect, the anarchists were applying the principle of syndicalism to educational practice, with the school, the counterpart of the union, acting as an agent for social change.

This type of anarchist self-activity formed a small, but not insignificant, re-appropriation of social space among the working-class and immigrant areas of the *fin de siècle* metropolis. The proliferation and evolution of anarchist schools and learning networks was thus an attempt to engage radically with what Edward W. Soja has labelled the 'politics of spatiality'.[132] Indeed, the schools bring to mind Certeau's concept of strategy as a 'technique of place'. This was 'the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power [in this case the schools] can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serves as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats [such as the state] can be managed'.[133]

An examination of the schools indicates a strong belief in direct action as a justifiable and liberating form of political activity. The refusal to submit to flag saluting on Empire Days and the leafleting against conscription

[132] E. W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), p. 235. For a discussion of space as a source of social power, see also D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 226–39.

[133] M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), pp. 35–6.

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illustrate that the schools were not just places of study, but that they were part of the anarchist milieu. As far as practice is concerned, the schools had their own individual characteristics, but there were many shared beliefs and practices. The schools sought to develop an approach to learning and teaching that was individualized, insofar as children were encouraged always to think for themselves in the way they desired. There was no requirement that children should follow a particular curriculum. The range of subjects that were offered in the schools was extensive and enabled the pupils to make real choices about what they wanted to study. The children were also able to exercise control over what they studied and for how long. The schools held a set of beliefs that sought to break down the boundaries between pupils and teachers, that were grounded in a desire to construct non-coercive pedagogies, and that were not concerned with a system of reward and punishment as was evident in the state schools of the period. There was no compulsory attendance and yet in all the schools there was a demand for them to be open as often as possible. Taken as a whole, the anarchist schools formed a coherent critique of the national education system.

The schools were funded and run by anarchists and tended to serve the immediate interests and concerns of children from anarchist communities, rather than those of working-class children generally. Apart from Davies's description of local people using the Jubilee Street school as a crèche, there is little evidence to suggest that children who were not brought up within the anarchist milieu attended the schools. Although they were part of a broader progressive educational current, it does not seem that the anarchist schools looked to link up with other initiatives. This examination of the libertarian schools reveals that some working-class radicals had a vision of the type of school they wished to see, but the children being taught in such schools were clearly a drop in the ocean in terms of numbers. Despite the seriousness with which the issues were thought through and acted upon by anarchists, and despite the existence of a potential audience for such thinking within the tradition of independent working-class schooling, it is unlikely that they had any influence outside their own ghetto.

Yet the anarchists were not alone in criticizing state education. Many of their concerns were shared by educationalists within the socialist Sunday school movement. Reformers like Margaret McMillan were certainly interested in new child-centred approaches to learning and could have been useful allies. The anarchists' sectarianism, however, prevented them from linking up with these progressive elements. The anarchist education reformers could also have had more of an influence if they had accepted the possibility of gaining recognition for their schools from the state. A later series of private libertarian initiatives were recognized by the government and became well known throughout the world. The work of A. S. Neil at Summerhill, for example, had a great influence

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on other experiments that emerged after the nineteen-twenties. These experiments had a far greater impact than the earlier anarchist interventions.[134] Nevertheless, while it is true that their goals were not fully realized because of their isolation, in terms of the development of an alternative method of education that rejected dogma and coercion and placed the experience of the child at the centre of pedagogic practice, the anarchist schools were a success.

[134] See J. Croall, *Neil of Summerhill: the Permanent Rebel* (1984). There is little evidence to suggest that the anarchist educators or their state-recognized cousins sought to link up with one another. The only exceptions to this that the author has found are two letters from A. S. Neil to Jim Dick, written in 1931, inviting him and Nellie to visit Summerhill. Neil was clearly aware of the Dicks's educational activity in America at this time, but there is no suggestion that he knew of their earlier British initiatives (see A. S. Neil to J. Dick, 11 Apr. and 30 June 1931, cited in Avrich, p. 315).

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