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Jack the Anarchist (Jack Grancharoff)

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An interview with Jack...

Jack Grancharoff emigrated to Australia after fleeing Stalinist repression in his native Bulgaria. After a period of rural isolation he began to make contact with a broad range of radicals, bohemians and immigrants along the east coast of Australia. As a newcomer and relative outsider he was able to transcend the boundaries that kept so many others isolated from each other. For many years he was associated with the Sydney Libertarian Push who dubbed him "Jack the Anarchist". Always eager to air his views and engage in debate he has been a life long public speaker and published Black and Red magazine for over 30 years. In the following interview he discusses his experiences of Australia in the 1950s.

How did you come to Australia?

It was a real fluke. I had no intention to emigrate to Australia. I turned to anarchism while a member of the Agrarian Party. As a member of the latter I participated in the Popular Front Government representing the youth section of the Party. As an antifascist I closely collaborated with the communists during the war but deep down I harboured certain suspicions of communism and never officially joined the Communist Party. Nonetheless, I was invited to the founding meeting of the Communist Youth organisation. I did not attend. I was reprovved in the strongest possible language but to no avail. I wanted to wait and see the course of events.



Jack the Anarchist speaking at the Sydney Domain - 1950s, shortly after arriving from Bulgaria

Not long after that I went to a debating meeting between the Agrarian Party and the Communist Party. The representative of the Agrarian Party, a shepherd by profession, impressed me a lot. His arguments were those of the Social Revolutionaries: land to the peasants and factories to the workers. Not that the communists had not used these slogans but for them it was expediency. I was shocked to realise that the Agrarian Party could not form a Youth movement in my town because they needed two antifascists in the governing body. I volunteered and the group was formed. I was assigned the position of treasurer, secretary and group representative in the Regional Popular Front. The Stalinist manipulation within the Popular Front forced a split six months or more later. A Popular Front in opposition was formed without the communists. I joined the opposition and began agitating against the Official Popular Front and especially against the communists the main culprits in this case. For this action I was declared an enemy of the people, an agent of the Reaction and in service of Turkish conservatism. As a result I was expelled from the local branch of the Agrarian Party

still a part of the official Popular Front due to strong communist pressure even if the majority of its members were supportive of me and later on joined the opposition too. The official Popular Front was a front of the Communist hegemony. It existed only in name.

In the end of 1947 the opposition was virtually eliminated, the newspaper banned and its leaders and active members either jailed or sent to concentration camps. I was sent to concentration camp in the beginning of 1947.

So what was life like there?

I was pretty lucky because coming from a communist family and having an anti-fascist past, perhaps, they considered me a misguided person and, therefore, my stay in the camp was of short duration. About seven months. The camp was named Camp of Re-education, which in fact was a torture chamber and slave labour. I was working in a mine. Every Wednesday night we were given lectures on Marxism. It was in the camp that I joined the anarchist group. I had been always an anarchist in thinking but I had never met anarchists.

So the anarchist movement was large in Bulgaria?

Yes it was pretty large and spread like a fire. Since most bookshops were under control of the Communists, to buy an anarchist newspaper one had to buy four other newspapers, including the communist (laughter). The anarchist publications were not displayed.

Were many killed in the camp?

It is difficult to say. Many of them died from overwork, torture, malnutrition etc. How many were killed one has no clue, but the strong oppression got quite a few victims.

So how did you get out?

Well, the political commissar called me and said: "There is a request from your town for your release. But you have to sign a declaration that you renege your fascist past." I told him I had no fascist past and, therefore, I was not going to sign it. I was sent back. I had a conversation with an old anarchist comrade nicknamed "Naroda". He said to me: "if you sign, your situation would be worse, because you'd incriminate yourself, if you have intention to escape from Bulgaria, that is a different matter." I chose the second option. Naroda then said: "It is up to you. I have been a political exile during fascism in France and I was treated like a shit. Collecting cigarette butts from the streets. If you want to go, go - but I will die here." Next day I signed and was told by the commissar that I would soon be back in the camp if I upheld anarchist ideas.

Back home I was followed by informers. Informers are usually close friends recruited by being tortured, by threats or otherwise. Two of my friends confessed to me and instead of them informing about me, it was I who, through them, had been informing about myself. So things worked in my favour.

I and my father were ploughing the fields. One day coming from work I was told by Mum that the cops had been looking for me three times. "You better go to the police station straightaway". I had no choice. I was to be accompanied by my father who was to make sure that I would go to the police headquarters.

Since all given informations were in my favour and I knew more or less their contents I succeeded in convincing the detective in charge to let me go home for the night, on condition that I would report to the police next day. As soon as I was freed from the police clutches I met a friend of mine and told him that I had to leave the country immediately; that I would never again go to the police station alive. Better be shot than cripple for life. I knew my torturers pretty well, their sadism, their hate towards me, and it was they who gave the order for my arrest. In fact my thoughts then were how to die rather than runaway. My friend decided to come with me. In vain I tried to argue to the contrary. He knew the border pretty well and the army movements. Early next day I told Mum that I got up earlier to give a hand to a friend of mine. She, somehow, was suspicious and asked me: "What time will you be back?" Late tonight, was my cryptic answer, trying not to show my suppressed tears. With this lie I left my parents never again to see them. We crossed the border to Turkey. This was the

beginning of my emigration journey.

So how was Turkey?

I spent two years in Turkey. First I was kept six months in police custody and then set free. I then registered with I.R.O. (International Refugees Organisation). I had no intention to stay in Turkey. It was not a heaven for leftists. I was arrested for putting the case of the eight hours day and the need for trade union movement. Workers were really exploited. What saved me was the fact that I discussed the issue in Bulgarian and my Turkish was virtually non-existent. There were informers among the immigrants. There was even an attempt to be returned to Bulgaria. I was approached by a Bulgarian in service of the Turkish Security Section who tried to persuade me to accompany him to the Istanbul Vilayet. I refused. This gave me time to contact my friends and tell them, that in case I disappeared, I would be either liquidated or sent back home, which was equally the same thing. Next time when the same person visited me and asked me to accompany him to the police headquarters I bluntly refused, to which he remarked that it is better to go voluntarily rather than be escorted by police. My reply was that my preferences were to be arrested by the police rather than be dealt with stealthily. This was the end of it. I never heard of it again. When I left for Italy I felt a change of air.

So how did you get to Australia?

I was staying in a refugee camp near Lesi (Italy). As an ex member of the Agrarian Party I was approached by ex agrarian party parliamentarians in exile who tried to convince me that anarchism was wrong and that there was no historical case of an agrarian turning to anarchism while the opposite had happened, in the context of Bulgarian political history. Happened or not had no bearing to me unless they provided a better argument against anarchism. They told me that unless I changed my views, the way to go to France would be blocked. Faced with this dilemma I decided to apply for Australia. But leftists were not welcome to Australia.

One Friday, thirty of us were on the list to appear before an Australian emigration officer. Since I spoke some Italian I was called first. I told the officer I was an agrarian worker and loved the bush. I also stated that I had an elementary education. I signed a contract for two years and he wished me good luck. He asked me if I would like to be an interpreter for the rest on Monday. He was anxious to go somewhere and postponed the interviews of the rest for Monday. The majority of them were upset. They knew that on Monday their chances would be nil because majority were leftists and the informers would inform on them. They were correct. I told some of them that I was accepted but they told me to keep my mouth shut. On the Monday I went as interpreter and none was accepted. It was that Monday that I was my introduction to coca-cola culture.

So you arrived in Australia in the early 1950s...

Yes. I arrived barefooted, in shorts and a singlet: all my belongings. From Newcastle we were taken to Greta camp. Not long after I was sent to work in the Forestry in the town of Imbil. The first year I did not learn English but Serbo-Croatian and Polish. They were the official languages of communication. English, I learnt through them. It had had a disastrous effect on me. Even now, after so many years I am still a victim of it.

What was it like doing your stint of enforced migrant labour when you first came here?

I liked the work in the forestry but most of the people were so anti-communist and hated the unions. Arguments with a lot were useless but I asserted my leftism trying even to tell them that The Labour Party was reformist and far far away from communism. The work itself was not hard. At the time the Australian society was much more egalitarian as far as wages were concerned. I worked with Polish, Yugoslav and Ukrainian nationals. My attitude to work was long established: no sweat for the bosses. On the other side I had a two year contract so if they sacked me they had to find me another job.

Nonetheless since I had my own approach to work, I had a lot of trouble and I thought I would be sacked but the bosses put up with me. My worse enemies were the workers. Some of them

wanted me sacked, because they envied my rebellious stand, but the decision did not belong to them. One day for some reason they sacked one of the best workers in my gang. Then I told the rest that if they worked hard there was a possibility for them to lose their jobs. Many, especially Poles, called me a Jew because I refused to work overtime while they worked some Saturdays and Sundays. The Jew embodied everything that they hated in themselves. After eight months I arranged with an Italian anarchist to formally guarantee me a job so I could go north among comrades. So I left Imbil for Mareeba, North Queensland.

Once you left the camp what work did you next get into?

I got a job in dam construction laying down stones in front of the dam to prevent erosion. Somebody made a mistake with the level and we have to move the stones five inches up, a hard task. We would help each other. At one stage I had to move a really big stone -too large for one worker to move. I asked the rest to give me a hand. They refused because they saw the approaching of the big boss. The workers were new comers like me: mostly Italians and Poles. Their servility shocked me: "Hey boss mine is the best, mine is all right etc" as if it was their own property. I looked at them with amazement but said nothing. Then a big stone came and they tried to move it. The big shot turned to me and said with an authoritative voice: "Give them a hand!" I looked at him. "Who are you?" "I am in charge and I am telling you to give them a hand, I am the boss here!" -said he in a commanding voice. "Sorry mate, I have no boss and am not a slave either. No body can order me. You give them a hand!" And I lent him my crowbar. His face turned red and he said: "Go! You are sacked!" "Thanks" said I. (laughter) I went to the Employment Office and told them that I was sacked: "What about my contract?" "Bugger that" was the answer and so I was free and this was the end of my contract. It was meant to be for two years, but did not even last a year.

So you think it was because you were a troublemaker?

I don't know. I was just happy to get out of it. So then I went and worked on the tobacco, on farms in the North of Queensland.

Was there still a radical community up there?

Yes, there were: some Italians, Yugoslavs, Spanish. In Mareeba, where I stayed there was a small community. They had meetings, debates etc. For me it was an excellent intellectual intercourse that I had missed. The influx of new comers had an opposite effect. Their main interest was making money. Radicalism lost impetus and the collapse of fascism contributed to that even if the old people were quite outspoken radicals.

So what kind of activities were happening in the early 1950s?

Some anarchist meetings were still going. Then there was the pub where a lot of issues were debated such as religion, socialism, ideologies. My comrades told me that I had to learn the art of drinking since the main debates and actions were in the pub. (laughter).

Well the male action anyway?

(laughter). Well there were a few female anarchists. Regina Bertoldi (if the memory does not betray me) was one. Later in her life she suffered from paranoia. Years after I paid her a visit but she shut the door in my face saying "I know nobody". Learning to drink beer was not a difficult task. (laughter). As I mentioned beforehand the pub was the center of most activity. You were not supposed to talk politics and religion in a pub but it was there where we did it. I left Mareeba, with some sadness, for Sydney. A friend of mine begged me to help them coming to Australia. They had the documents but not money for their tickets. People who had promised money reneged their promises. She wrote to me: "You are the only one who promised nothing and the only one who can do something". So I left for Sydney in search of money.

So what happened there?

At first I worked on the railways' extra gangs. The workers really lacked workers consciousness or whatever it is. They were working like mad to prove their machoism and to please the bosses. I isolated myself from the rest and was working alone. I repeatedly told them that by working hard they were driving down the conditions. One day two Italians came

to me and one said: "You are not an anarchist by any chance, are you?" "Why " I answered. "The way you talk and behave". I said: "I am an anarchist"! Then he said to the other Italian: "See, I told you" and they told me that they were from Rome's Libertarian movement. Later on our gang moved to Michelago. I was always hustled by the second boss. Once he kept watching me and we were alone. He said: "You work but nothing comes out of it". To which I answered: "And if you keep watching me I will not finish it today. Get out of here! Sack me but don't watch me! And be aware that a stone may fly by chance and hit you on the head and you'll be sent in a coffin as a present to your wife. There is nobody to witness!" Since I constantly quarrelled with the bosses they referred to me as "mad bulgaro", because italians called me bulgaro.

One year before leaving for Xmas holidays we had a party with a keg of beer. Two workers started fighting. I and the first boss tried to stop the fight. One of the workers said to the boss: "Look Tom you better sack Mario because he is a lazy bastard and I work hard. Or you sack Mario or I will transfer to another gang." I was furious and I said to John: "You don't pay Mario's wages! Mario is a worker like you and you should be ashamed of yourself. Tom is your class enemy, and you, John, you are licking the Boss' arse instead of defending your fellow worker." Tom said to John: "Look John some work more, some work less but, nevertheless, everbody works as much as one can do". The fight stopped and we went back to drinking. Later on the first boss, Tom, approached me and said to me: "Listen Jack you don't mind me asking you a question?" I answered: "No, but I would not answer it if I don't like to". "May I ask you what party do you belong to?" Without much thinking I said IWW. I already knew about IWW even if I was not a member and basically I agreed with their preamble. To which Tom answered: "Well I was a member of the IWW and you are the best worker in the gang. You stand for your rights. You fight for workers' conditions. You are a good fighter but you are wasting your time here. Go somewhere else where you will be useful". "But everywhere the situation is the same " I retorted. Then I knew why I was not sacked (laughter). I left the country for the big smoke. It would have been 1954-5.

So how was it there?

I was working for the Railways again, and again I was faced with the same problems. One boss called me a bludger and I told him he was a bludger because he watched workers and got pay for doing nothing. He said that he worked for the Railways and he still could work better than me. I challenged him to remove a sleeper as quickly as me. He tried, but to no avail because I had put a nail in the sleeper. (laughter). Soon after I had an argument with him, I threw my thongs and shovel at him and left. The first boss said : "You are not sacked" "But Frank sacked me". "Frank is not in charge I am in charge." Nonetheless I left. The first boss said to me: "You are a good chap but from the time you become a communist you changed". "What are you talking about I never joined the Communist Party." Ten years later I applied for a job with Railways again and got it. They asked me if I had ever worked for Railways. Unguarded, I said yes. They told me to come back in the afternoon, which I did to be told that there was no job for me. I realised they had me down.

Do you think people's lack of fight on the job was because it was easy to leave and find work elsewhere at that time?

It was true that it was easy to find jobs but, nonetheless, they accepted the conditions as they were. But one has to consider the fact that many migrants, especially those of the Eastern Block, were anti-communists and they identified the struggle for improvement as a communist tactic and the unions as communist. Also many migrants bought properties as a security and they were afraid of losing their employment. There was action and reaction. While the communists were pretty active, their insistence on the virtue of the Soviet Union weakened their case. Internecine struggles among the union did not help the radical case either. Strikes for improvement of workers' conditions were rare. Later on I worked on the busses.

What were your political activities in Sydney at that time?

My activities were to search for an arena to express my views. This I found in the Domain. I also was selling the English anarchist paper Freedom there. Being a Bulgarian I hung out with Bulgarian anarchists but a lot of them were not my cup of tea. The Bulgarians tried to organise

among Bulgarians and one may say that we had a group of twenty or so members. I also published a small anarchist magazine in cyclostyle but there was a lack of dynamics, the situation remained static. There were some Russian and Ukrainian anarchists but by the displacement of people on job projects we lost contacts. I managed to keep contacts with Italian anarchists in Melbourne and a few in Sydney. They even established an Italian club in Melbourne but I do not think it lasted for long.

Was there much disagreement amongst the different anarchist factions or did people stick together because of the times?

Well, I was a member of the then Sydney Anarchist Group which included three women and four men, not including myself. But I left it because they would not try to work together with the Sydney Libertarians, a kind of pessimist anarchists, who considered anarchism as an ideology if not a utopia. They insisted on Libertarian aspects of Marxism, involved in Reichian and Freudian psychology.

I thought the Bulgarian anarchists should establish contact as much as possible with Australians because we were settling down here. And then there were not many Bulgarians in Australia. To think that Bulgaria were to be liberated tomorrow was an illusion and the more important task was to establish contacts with the locals. This was the reason behind my interest in libertarianism. But even the Sydney Group, where Bulgarians were a minority, was opposed to Sydney Libertarians.

I remember you saying that other than the Sydney libertarians and a few others you found a lot of fear and paranoia amongst Australians in the 1950s?

Selling Freedom at the Domain I was faced with the question: "Aren't you scared of being arrested?" Many would buy Freedom and put it straight in their pockets as if they were pinching something from the shops. The Domain was a very good place. A lot of activities on Sundays. I was speaking from the Rationalist platform. Questioning the communists was one of the greatest fun. I was called a traitor, a fascist and quite often they would call the police and a few times I was removed from the Domain. For the communists anyone who left Eastern Europe was a fascist. Nonetheless I had established a friendship, not without arguments, with a communist, Harry Read, who was expelled from the party because of his criticism of its handling of the Hungarian affairs in 1956. He left for Cuba in 1959 if I am not mistaken. Many of the communists, like Aaron's faction, were Stalinists.

When did you meet the Sydney Libertarians (aka The Sydney Push)?

I think around 1956. I asked a Trotskyite about them and he told me where they drank. But he warned me about them as being libidinarians rather than libertarians. They used to give papers in the philosophy room No 1 at the University and later on down town. They were open minded and anything could be debated with them. I used to go to a lot of their parties and to some extent became a part of them. They held the view that personal and sexual liberation were the same as social liberation to which I was not in agreement. Being promiscuous doesn't mean that one is socially liberated. There was also an Italian socialist club in the 1950,s in George Street close to Central Railway Station. Later the Sydney Anarchist Group rented a room adjacent to it referred to as "Liberty Hall". Purpose: papers and discussions.

So there was a lot going on at that time?

Yes. One may argue the society was pretty conservative, but is it different today? People prefer security to freedom, T.V. to thinking, ideological correctness to critical examination. There are courses on communication but the art of communication is rather rare. At that time the Domain was a real place of debates and people took notice of it. Surely a lot of people were not at ease with freedom of speech, secret services were not dormant.

In Melbourne you said the Libertarian scene of the 1950s was more artistic?

Yes, they had contact with the Sydney Push but on individualistic bases.

So you met IWW people in the 1950s?

Yes, one of them was a member of the Sydney Anarchist Group. Armstrong was another regular Domain speaker till his death. Others were members of the unions etc. This was a

generation of old timers and they were disappearing. There were no young people to take over their work.

At various points you were active in the Unions. Did you become a delegate at any point?

No. A few times the opportunity crossed my road, but I refused to be seduced. I had seen many changes in those who joined union bureaucracies. To be one of them is easy, to be one of us, that is, on the side of the workers is much more difficult. One has to have in mind that union -parties structures were very rigid, and many delegates were to project into the struggle party's policy rather than exigencies of the workers qua workers. This certainly is a simplistic overview. Unionism where workers were not directly involved was not for me. I had always been in favour of solidarity strikes but this went against the grain of official unions. The exception here and there proved the rule. They were masters of division and not much interest was shown in rank and file issues.

One example. In the 1960s when I worked for the Water Board there was a general meeting of the Water Board Union in Trades Hall. Instead of trying to establish a common premise of action various sections were fighting for wage increases. The issues the union preferred. I was fed up with these internal useless squabbles and decided to tackle the issue from a different angle. While I was marching towards the loud speaker the workers were screaming at me " You fucken beatnik what do you know about work. You hippy shit". What I said was as follows: "I am a shitty hippy because, like you, I work a shitty job but, unlike you, I know it is a shitty job and I don't ask for six pence increase or six pence decrease. Let us not be divided by union policy of six pence for some or a dollar for others We have to stand together as a body of workers defending our common interests. These people who sit here" pointing to the bunch of union bureaucrats "are part and parcel of the Water Board. They defend the interests of the Water Board not your interests. Do not succumb to their manipulation. Did you elect any of them? I didn't! They are your enemies." There were wild applause "Goodonyou Beatnik. You're right." All ire turned to the bureaucrats. "Who voted for you? Who elected you? On which side you are on" etc. Any questions? Hundreds of hands wanted to ask questions but the bureaucrats closed the meeting by saying: "No questions, the meeting is closed."

Did you have trouble with police in these years?

Not really. Many times when approached I gave them any name and address that first came into my head. I used to sell anarchist papers, talk at the Domain and elsewhere but I never had a lot of trouble. Surely security police always used to take notes on what I was saying but I was never in real trouble except that I was refused naturalisation and therefore , could not travel or leave the country. I had a dossier.

What were the peace issues like in the 1950s -mainly communist fronts?

They were pathetic. To assume that the Soviet Union was for peace and the USA for war was to continue the dualistic theory of good and evil instead of critically examining the issue. The USA used the same approach to dismantle not only state communism but to destroy all the achievements of the workers. Surely the Vietnam war was one of the best unifying factors, but after that the wave of protest subsided.

Given the laws that were in place until 1967 did you meet many aboriginal people?

From my arrival I was interested in aboriginal people. Where I lived in Mareeba I contacted quite a few. Visited some in corrugated iron dwellings. But one had to be very careful because any serious contact was not welcome from authority's point of view and could lead to imprisonment for both aboriginal and me. I was shocked to see the plight of these people, the misery of their existence. I was warned by a black woman who said to me: "Son, don't do this and that or you will go to 6 month jail and so will I." Their movement was pretty limited while I thought that in a democratic country they would be free to move around. Shit these people were really down.

Was there much you felt you could do about this?

I tried to talk to people who knew their plight but there was not much interest, even if people

disagreed with the way they were treated by the law. The injustice was there but to crystalise it was not an easy task. And prejudices were pretty strong. In Inisfile I took an aboriginal girl to a cafe and they were reluctant to serve her. It reminded me so much of apartheid in South Africa.

In the early 1960s did things start to open up?

I remember an elder aboriginal told me in the 50s. "Son thanks to people like you and influx of migrants our situation will change. Go down there and spread the message". But things started changing generally. The communists began to lose their grip on people. The trade union movement started to go to pieces. The idea of Trades Hall as an unitary idea of the workers gave way to the atomisation of the movement. The radicals of the 50s were displaced and many changed their tune to accommodate themselves to changing conditions. In the 1970s many of the old guard were by passed. The new space that came from the crack of the old ethos was exciting, but evaporated soon after under the pressure of ideological correctness and belligerent concerted attacks of military, economic and political corporate world. Freedom retreated allowing inserting into the political arena of refurbished authoritarian dogmas suitable to the comodification of every day life. Instead of critical thought, mono thought is spreading, strangling and marginalizing any independence. Time and again society continue to function within hierarchical and authoritarian paradigms. The future is not promising.

Interview corrected by Jack Grancharoff

What the Secret Police have to say...

Jack Grancharoff.

ASIO File A6.119/79 Item 976

Date range 1964-1965

Jack Grancharoff, one of Australia's more well known anarchists has reached such a grand old age the State is willing to release a few bits of his A.S.I.O. files. Thirty years after these files were compiled the State has released sections of these files. The file consists of 17 heavily blacked out pages. It contains the cover and contents page of Red and Black. No.2 winter 1966, a publication Jack continues to publish and the contents page of anarchy No.2, the 1965 publication of the Sydney Anarchist Group.

This is followed by a page stamped SECRET at the top and bottom of the page (item No.15266) issued on the 2nd December 1966 that is very heavily blacked out. It has copies of letters and cables sent by William Dwyer to Jack. This note is signed by the Australian Attorney General (name blacked out).

The next file 53/7/11 20th July '66 is labelled the Vietnam Protest and Anti-conscription movements in Australia. Sydney anarchists and Libertarian Society at University of Sydney. This well thought out four page report by agent S.S.O. B1 gives a good overview of the philosophical nature of anarchism. This is followed by a number of pages that outline where various anarchists were living in Sydney at particular times. Jack's wanderings through Sydney in the 1960's are well documented in these pages. It's interesting to note that A.S.I.O had good links with the British Secret Intelligence Agency and exchanged information with them. Terms like "suspicious character" jump out at you between the blacked out sections.

In the file is also included a nice letter from Jack to an A.S.I.O agent who has subscribed to Red and Black and wants to attend anarchist meetings (hohum deja vu).

The most interesting part of the file is a 3 page report File no. 3/2/605 on the Bulgarian National Committee issued on the 31st March 1955, a memorandum issued from A.S.I.O Commonwealth headquarters to Regional Directors in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, A.C.T., Northern Territory and the territory of Papua and New Guinea. The report compiled by Senior Field Officer B1 looks at all aspects of the Bulgarian National Conference in Australia.

Section 12 states, among a few blacked out lines (still blacked out nearly fifty years after they were collected) "Also in Sydney is also a small group of Bulgarian Anarchists". The leader of the group is Kristu ENCHEVER "The group has a small private newspaper "will" circulating in Sydney. The printer is J. Grancharoff of 269 Bay street, Botany. The group is small but extremely active."

*By Joe Toscano,
Anarchist Age Weekly Review No. 415
28th August ♦ 3rd September, 2000*

Red and Black - an anarchist journal

Red and Black is a tribute to one human being's determination not to be intellectually crippled by mass culture. Jack Grancharoff, a Bulgarian anarchist who escaped from the spreading yoke of Bolshevism over fifty years ago, found himself a political refugee in an alien land. While most post world war two anarchist refugees who ended up in Australia were never able to break into mainstream culture, Jack did.

Jack Grancharoff was not interested in reliving the battles of the past, he wanted to live in the present, he wanted to be able to understand, interact with and change the dominant Australian culture he was part of. Jack has always participated in the life of the Australian anarchist movement. Initially as part of a small group of Bulgarian anarchists in exile in Australia, later on as an active participant in the re-emerging Australian Anarchist community.



**Jack the Anarchist
speaking at the Sydney
Domain in 1975**

In 1965, Jack launched Red and Black, a small anarchist journal that provided an anarchist analysis of what was happening in the world and which also published theoretical anarchist articles. Red and Black has been staunchly anti-communist and anti-capitalist. While other Australian radicals flirted with Communism, Jack's personal experiences in Bulgaria had taught him the reactionary nature of Communist politics.

Red and Black has been produced in fits and starts since 1965. Through Red and Black, Jack has been able to share what he believes are important ideas with the readers of the journal. In issue No.26 Jack talks about his feelings about revisiting Bulgaria fifty years after he escaped. Richard Kostelanetz writes about Anarchist Art, Ian Firth reviews the composer Richard Wagners involvement with the Anarchist Movement, James R. Bennett examines the Corporate State and the Bill of Rights and Pino Cacucci explains why the Zapatistas are an issue that concerns us all.

For almost 35 years Red and Black, an Anarchist Journal, has provided theoretical and practical insights into issues and ideas that concern anarchists.

Jack Grancharoff still publishes Red and Black - An Anarchist Journal. I encourage readers of the Anarchist Age Weekly Review to write to Jack for the latest copy of Red and Black. Subscriptions are \$10.00 per year. Cheques should be made out to J. Grancharoff. Correspondence should be sent to Red & Black, P.O. Box 12, Quaama N.S.W. 2550. Australia.

*By Joe Toscano,
Anarchist Age Weekly Review No. 301
25th - 31st May, 1998*

Revisiting Turkey - How Jack became an anarchist

Born, bred and educated in Bulgaria, I had never thought that one day I would spend most of my life in exile. The innocence of childhood precluded such ideas, since its niche was limited to the immediate environment. Carelessly absorbed in chasing butterflies, playing with the colours in the meadows of flowers was an unforgettable joy, even if in tatters of poverty and barefooted. In the delights of liberty, in a picturesque world where reality and fantasy fused, how could one perceive the evil omen hidden in the stormy sea of life that eventually would cripple imagination, thoughts, emotions and bodies.

Socialisation starts in the early stages of childhood since parents are anxious to see their physical features, as well as mental and emotional, reflected in their children, often with the intention of making them a paradigm example of their own vision. Thus a child's individuality is fashioned to fit certain rules and regulations. Hence, some desires are repressed, others invoked, some are described as good, others as bad. All in all a mechanism is set up to inhibit or encourage, to reward or punish. Even the most noble sentiments and affections are used often to create a dependency syndrome rather than to stimulate independence and the emotional enrichment of the person. Thus the child is entangled in multiple authoritarianisms, each trying to model him or her according to its own image by pruning objectionable thoughts, clipping the wings of imagination and sublimating the heart's desire into adoration of adult's icons. The castrated spirit is left wandering in the labyrinths of hierarchies in search of his or her own identity while leaden shadows weigh on the quest for self- realization.

A small, but relevant, event occurred when I was six years old. The house we lived in, consisted of a) a ground floor accommodating a donkey and a horse and their forage; b) first floor that humans occupied. It had a small entrance, a big room for all the family and a storage room. We ate, slept and lived in the big room. It was our study, dormitory, playground, especially in winter, and rest room. No chairs, no tables, no beds. The wooden floor was the mattress we slept on. It was here that my first sister was born. It was a cold night since I clearly remember the play of flames, lights and shadow. The midwife delivered the child close to the chimney. My face was covered to ensure that the birth scene would not have a corruptive influence on me. Crackles of the fire, murmur of the winds and the movement of the vestals intertwined to celebrate the birth of life. My little heart was throbbing with excitement at the thought of having a brother or sister.

In the morning, surrounded by a few women, the midwife announced the news to me.

- The stork brought you a baby sister.
- The stork?
- Yes, through the chimney.

I stormed out of the house. I was cheated out of the veracity of my own observation. A rage set in in my heart. A dense fog clouded the serenity of my childhood .My heart sank into taciturn despair. A behaviour that did not escape my mother's attention. One day she asked me:

- Are you sulky because of your sister?
- I am sulky because of your brazen lie that storks bring babies.
- Well, this is the story which we, usually, tell kids.
- A fairy tale when I've seen everything'?

Mum apologised and I was at the same time relieved of some undefinable weight and elated. Perhaps this unimportant episode, well engraved in my consciousness, had a lot to answer for in my subsequent suspicion of official truths and my subsequent rebellion to officialdom.

At the age of 13 I was locked in a police station for vandalism, more precisely vandalising some teachers' houses. It was an act of protest against the injustices perpetrated by the education system which favoured the middle class, if such a concept could be applied in a not prosperous town.

What infuriated me was the class teacher's statement that good or bad marks were irrelevant

to me since, coming from a poor family, I would not be able to further my education. I retorted:

-Why the hell am I forced to attend school? Why should I waste my time with a lot of bullshit instead of enjoying the mountains in company with my grandfather's sheep? At least I could do something useful. Here and now I am challenging these middle class brats (I mentioned the objects of my grievances) in front of the class. If I fail will be happy to repeat the year, but if they fail the pass mark should not be granted.

-It is preposterous to question the authority of a teacher -said my class teacher.

-Why should not I if justice is at stake?

The remark fell on deaf ears. Without much mental elaboration, I had resorted to retaliatory actions as above. Police interrogations were simply invectives against deviationist behaviour. I ought to respect elders, parents, teachers, established values, law and order and, if in doubt, ask the authority for guidance. Naturally authority itself was beyond any question. While in custody, I began questioning the power of God. If he was as almighty as presented to us then, if after an hours or so he were to fail to open the lock of the cell and Jet me out, it would mean that he was powerless. The miracle did not occur. God failed the test.

The head master called me to his office and, in the presence of ~ the teachers, asked me to apologise to my class teacher. I refused; 'adding that she was to apologise to me. On this note. and since I was within the age of compulsory attendance, I was expelled from school temporarily.

A profascist government was in power. The official creation of fascist organisations in and out of schools, was a bad social omen. My search for alternatives to fascism landed me in troubles. I was invited to a secret political meeting in the wood by a group which later I learned was very nationalistic. but for some inexplicable reason was detested by the Nazis. The Nazis were pretty violent and aggressive and had the support of the local police, at least at official level. It was incongruous that most of the people belonging to this group moved to the left. Whether it was a communist front, remains a mystery. It was the army that arrested and questioned us. A young officer. interrogated me:

-Look young boy, forget about politics and communism. Go home and continue your study. School is better than politics. Politics will get you nowhere but they definitely will lead you to either jailor losing your life. Anyhow you are too young for politics. Leave it to the others.

Freed, I went home. But from that point of time, my interest in communism began. Freedom to read subversive literature was a proscribed act and, therefore, was a kind of underground activity. A friend of mine lent me a book of poetry by a communist writer which I at the time, and now, appreciated a lot. He lent me the book on condition that if the police raided my place I would never mention his name. Such was the social climate in which alternative ideas had to operate. Anybody could be arrested, tortured. sent to jail, concentration camp or hard labour: the price of intellectual awakening. Also by fluke I had discovered some communist literature belonging to my uncle. Thus I came to realise that my uncle. as well as my father, was a communist but neither of them had ever mentioned anything to me. It was not advisable to openly air ideas that were biased against the government. The weak point of Fascism was that its aim of total domination was apparent rather than real since it had failed to penetrate the psychology of the masses and to become amass movement. There was a newspaper with leftist leaning where the undesirable thoughts appeared in disguise. as the dreams of our subconscious mind, to escape the censor.

Nonetheless I had established contacts with communists, moved within communist circles, read communist literature but, despite all this. somehow I remained skeptical about communism as a practice in the Soviet Union. In other words I had preserved my independent critical thinking. There were a few aspects that troubled my mind. The blind faith in the leadership was Indistinguishable from the Nazi adoration of the Furher. but I considered it to

be a temporary discrepancy. Hierarchical organization was another questionable aspect but, under the circumstances, it seemed acceptable. Anyhow my humble contribution was supplying bread to political prisoners. A task facilitated by the fact that I was working in my uncle's bakery which was close to the Prison.

In 1943 the winds began to change. Stalingrad signalled the defeat of the German might. This was the opinion of workers and peasants, with some exceptions -the German strategists and rabid Nazi and fascists. Anti- fascist activities increased and so did the activities of the gendarmerie in pursuit of partisans and subversives.

In September 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria and invaded the country. Fascism had already collapsed and the Red Army encountered no resistance. People were generally rejoicing to what was referred to as "liberation". All power was in the hands of various committees which sprang up on all aspects of social and economic organisations. Many political organisations, unknown to us, came into existence. The partisans came down from the mountains. Prisoners were freed. The Fatherland Front (Popular Front) was established as a government. Euphoria of freedom. Proliferation of ideas, flourishing of activities, creativities and catharsis. Emotional and intellectual upheavals. a revolutionary ethos and praxis. Assertiveness in all spheres of life. Society was adopting more and more libertarian practices. Society was moving to the left. But the revolutionary euphoria prevented us from seeing the menacing tentacles of a new reactionary force masked as communism. Its aim was to occupy the vacant throne of monarcho-fascist power . Incorporate the former into its own structure, and establish complete social control.

I was asked by an ex-Nazi to attend the inaugural meeting of the communist youth. It gave me quite a shock to see a Nazi transformed into a communist activist within 24 hours. I declined the offer. Asked to explain my behaviour I told them that I had nothing to do with turn-coats as communist emissaries. I was flabbergasted to be told that their consciousness was transformed and that they were good comrades. For a little while I stood aloof from party politics. Later on I intentionally joined the Agrarian Party so that a youth organization could be formed in the town. A party equivalent to the Russian Socialist Revolutionary movement, at least in my way of seeing it then: factories to the workers. land to the peasants. The communists hindered its formation by some flimsy pretext that two antifascists had to be at the head of the new youth organization. I was one of them. My ex-comrades were outraged and began an aggressive and abusive campaign against me. I was a reactionary, sold out to Anglo- American capitalism. Even worse, they hated my guts because I became the Agrarian Youth representative on the Popular Front.

Behind the slogans of socialism, Popular Front Unity, people's democracy and workers' control were lurking the real features of communism: total social control under its fist, hammer and sickle. Anyone who disagreed with its policy was a dupe, a traitor or an agent of some or other kind of capitalism. In reality it was the communist bureaucrats and leaders who were agents of Stalinism and stooges of the Soviet interests. Maf;-xism was an ideology, Lenin was the saint, Stalin the hero, the vicar of Marxism on this earth. He was beyond criticism. Taking over the Ministry of the Interior, they set on to chain the mouth of qissent, to repress the difference in thinking and, most importantly, to transform the proletariat into a cog of an oppressive machine.

Due to the Communist Party's pressure to establish its hegemony over the Popular Front, the latter split into two factions. Those in Government, including the communists, and the Opposition without them. The scenario was set for a struggle to a bitter and tragic end for the Opposition and for the Bulgarian people.

I was the first in my town to publicly declare support for the Opposition by bill-postering. For this act I was arrested and delivered to Popular Front Headquarters. I was held for four hours. Threats, cajoling and bribes were the methods of interrogation. They told me repeatedly that I was treading a dangerous path. I was reminded of my progressive past, of my proletarian origin. As a communist, a bright future and excellent opportunities waited for me: a grant to

study in the Soviet Union. But only if I was to change my mind. I bluntly rejected all offers. They were infuriated: "There is no future for you in Communist Bulgaria. Think seriously!" To which I replied:

-As long as I am healthy I don't care. I can do any kind of work.
-There will be no jobs for you! -was the response.

Thus the destiny of a proletarian peasant was sealed: enemy of the people, enemy of communism, enemy of the State. I was at odds with my father too. I had missed the chance of my lifetime. I could escape poverty, persecution, damnation. I knew I broke my old man's heart. I broke his hopes and, inadvertently, his life and the life of my family who paid dearly for my actions. But I could not betray the support of the peasants I had in my district nor could I betray myself. This would have been equal to suicide. I looked at my father. His face sank in despair while I hardly could hold my emotional outburst at seeing the eradication of his hopes and the loss of his son. It was also the point of realization that I had lost my father, mum and my sisters. It was a matter of time only.

Participation in the Popular Front, first as an activist for the government and, secondly, in opposition to it, I acquired a clear vision of wide differences between those in power and the powerless majority. Also the magic spell and real corruption that power exerted on its holder and the way it changed the human psyche for the worse. It dawned to me that the emancipation of peasants, workers and people is not to conquer political power, but to abolish it. That freedom, land; bread and peace for all could not be achieved by delegating power to government or institutions but by directly participating in decision making and taking our life in our own hands. Talking about it to one of my female comrades she quipped: "But then you are an anarchist." Then I told her that if that was anarchism then I was an anarchist. I read some of the anarchist publications but it was difficult to obtain them since the stationers were mostly controlled by the Communist Party. Anarchist literature was never displayed. To buy an anarchist newspaper I had to buy the communist one too. The anarchists were the first to be suppressed by the Popular Front government. Anarchism was feared by the communists since it was a reminder of an authentic socialist consciousness. Fascism, nazism, imperialism were catch words to mobilize and manipulate the masses, whereas anarchism was feared because it was carrying in itself the hopes of the proletariat, of the people: the seeds of the Social Revolution, already in inception.

To cut the story short I ended up in a concentration camp, euphemistically referred to as a "camp of reeducation". If in Nazi Germany "Work makes you free", then in socialist Bulgaria "Work educates you. It changes the reactionary bourgeois consciousness into a socialist one, as understood by the Party". It was in these camp that I, for the first time, met anarchists and joined their group. It was the acme of my political struggle, the synthesis of thoughts, dreams, emotions and ethics in pursuit of social and personal justice and freedom. At the end of 1947, at the request of the Popuiar Front of my town, I was freed. On my way home I decided to pay a visit to my communist uncle. I told him of becoming an anarchist.

-Anarchist now!
This genuine communist looked at me with amazement and bewilderment.
-You are mad! Do you know what you are doing? You've signed your death warrant!
-But we fought for communism, didn't we? -I retorted.
-Look son, this is not communism, this is Stalinism. They don't play games, they kill!

Later on this was the reaction of my father too.

Three weeks after my arrival home I was arrested. But the temporary freedom I had enjoyed was to my advantage. From the first day of my arrival, the secret services were collecting information about my plans, movement and thinking. I was aware that the real danger would come from the inner circle of my friends. Two of them confessed to be police informers and I used them as a vehicle for informing about myself. Knowing what the police knew about me I

succeeded in being temporarily released which gave me the chance to escape from their clutches and cross the border into Turkey.

It was at the end of 1947 that I touched the soil of Turkey. Sense of relief!

Death was cheated! I crossed the Bulgarian border, my Rubicon, not with fanfare, but stealthily, not to conquer but to inhale freedom. The die was cast. The curtain fell and I found myself in Limbo with tears in happiness and happiness in sadness. Suddenly the world behind me vanished, engulfed in the flames of nothingness and turning the soul into ashes. In the pyre of destiny I sacrificed my comrades in concentration camps or prisons, my parents and sisters.

The old memory, forced into exile in the recesses of the brain, lingered for a long time tormenting my consciousness. On the other side the inception of a new memory, within the confined space of the "Free" world's cell was not a good omen either. The only dream-like future lay in the ashes of nothingness, as a potentiality like the resurrection of the Phoenix. Nonetheless a resurrected Phoenix in the "Free World", if pursuing freedom, justice, social and economic equality could well be sacrificed to the altar of political expediency: but hopes lingered.

After a few months at "leisure" in Political Police Headquarters, then Birinci Sube, we were found jobs and let free. Out of the pen, in the open air, freedom exhilarated the spirit, but it recoiled when faced with the bronze face of brutality, of slavery and exploitation. A society that combines the filthy opulence of a few with the opulent immiseration of the many is a parody of democracy and freedom. Beginning with Ataturk, Turkey was moving towards modernisation but the western cold war produced condiments that had made it subservient to the political expediency of the USA policy of encirclement of the Soviet Union. Instead of diversification and democratization of society the American presence hastened its militarization.

As refugees we were privileged because, not understanding the language, we were seen as innocuous observers of the spectacle. And to a great extent that was the case. For most of the migrants Turkey was seen as a transit country, all eyes were looking westward. The majority of the refugees were settled in hotels and hostels provided by the government, with the help of UNRA. Ghettoisation of the mind, self-imposed censorship not to offend the host country and the lack of language as a tool of communication with the locals, prevented undesirable thoughts contaminating the gentle ripples of malcontent.

In a country where the media was daily vomiting anti-communist slogans, emphatically stating the evil of the red menace, and a government affected by CIA cold war bacillus, the slightest hint of something approximating leftism was to be silenced or liquidated. As was the case of Sabatin Ali, a well-known journalist in Turkey, who was killed in an alleged attempt to escape to Bulgaria. A great number of students who dared to voice their thoughts were drowned in the wells of the city of Istanbul.

Politically speaking the Bulgarian refugees were divided into two main groups: Agrarians, the majority, and then Nationalists and others. Within these groups subsisted various trends, sometimes antagonistic and irreconcilable which led to inner struggles, splinter groups, to accusation and counter-accusation. The struggle against communism degenerated into internal squabbles. Deracinated, separated from the mother earth, with broken illusions, a life vacillating between nostalgic depressions and a future without horizons, they were often pitiful toys in the hands of cruel destiny. Frustrated by the life of coercive familiarity, simmering with rage, some expressed the most dark aspects of their submerged world: using violence to arbitrate disputes, and the hated methods of their enemies to silence dissent. Obviously, in the bosom of their being they harboured authoritarianism, intolerance to otherness and others' ideas, antagonism to any free thought and fear of freedom. Some succumbed to the pressure of Anglo-American and the State's security services to form diversionist groups in order to destabilize the established communist governments. The repercussions of this policy played into the hands of communist oppression, providing them with sufficient justification to uproot

whole families. But often these dupes of foreign interests would be betrayed by the hands that had fed and armed them, and consequently eliminated by the Bulgarian security forces. Thus many lost their lives being pawns in this dirty game. But this game was elevated to a patriotic scenario to placate the guilt of traitors and collaborators.

At the time the Turkish Trade Union movement was invisible since it was Identified with communism. The Eight Hour Day was exceptionally rare. The working day lasted from 12 to 16 hours, sleeping on the premises and poorly paid. I worked and lived in Kuchuk Langa (then market gardens, in a huge cardboard box in a shed covered with corrugated iron to protect us from rain) in Aksaray and sometimes worked as a plumber on building sites. This gave me some opportunities to meet socialist oriented workers who could not understand why an atheist and a kind of socialist would escape from Bulgaria. Trying to prove the incongruity of my stand, some of them took me on a guided tour of Istanbul, a town virtually within the walls of old Konstantinopolis: walls which gave shelter to many poverty stricken, to those who lived in the garbage bins of society.

I had difficulty in putting a socialistic critique of socialism, to make them discern the contradictions between socialism as a theory and as a praxis, to those who had unwavering faith in socialism. My explanation was hindered by language limitations. To what extent I succeeded in clarifying that socialism as a theory, and the Stalinist "socialist" import, are contrarities, I was not sure. ..

Nonetheless, I insisted that socialism that had the State as its master; that managed nationalized and private capital; where decision making was made by top dogs and imposed on the underdogs; where labour was glorified while bu reaucrats and apparatchiks reaped the rewards: was socialism in name but not in virtue. A society where workers' critical faculties had been crushed, where workers were mere numbers, where their contribution was measured by productivity rather than participation in social affairs, had no claim to socialism. It might occupy volumes of endemic exercises, entertain the egos of Ideological elites but it remained irrelevant to socialist praxis.

When my Turkish comrades (I called them comrades since they harboured sincere socialist feelings) pointed at the mosques as crystallization of ignorance and argued that religion was the opium of the people, we were in agreement. When I stated that socialism as the function of the State is the opium of the proletariat or, at least, a soporific pill to quiet discontent and smooth the burden of exploitation, they were rather sceptical and perplexed.

Despite everything, they had made my stay in Turkey pleasant and gave some significance to my new becoming. When I departed the country, I was sad to leave behind those who, in stealth, argued the virtues and vices of socialism, never to see or hear from them again. Thus another page was closed forever. But the memory has remained.

After fifty years I decided to pay my second visit to Istanbul. The visit exceeded my expectation in spite of the fact that the new Istanbul, a phallic jungle like other big cities, had obliterated most of the bench marks of my memory. While the first visit was a necessary outcome of a harassed soul in search of respite, the second was an attempt to step twice in the same current of life and resurrect the unresurrectable.

Turkey, despite attempts towards secularization, reform and openness, could not erase the elusive religious-secular authoritarian armour imbedded in the collective consciousness that helped to derail the original intentions. The smell of power transformed Kemalism into a rabid nationalism reasserting Turkish centrality within the boundary of Modern Turkey. Shifting the capital from Istanbul to Angora (Ankara) was to the point. Centralisation of power undermined the genuine will for reform, strengthened the hands of bureaucracy and allowed the resurgence of reaction in new attire.

Thus on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire a new imperialism was born headed by the radical bourgeoisie which had channelled the revolutionary zest to its own power proclivities. It forged national revolutionary images to quiet the bewilderment of the doubtfuls and to marginalize

the recalcitrants.

Turkish nationalism was strengthened by a booster injection in allowing the USA to establish bases on its territory, and by becoming a pawn in the hands of the US military strategy. In this scenario multi-cultural life had eroded. Turkey was not Serbia or Iraq, a thorn in the USA's endeavour to hegemony. That some ethnic groups were on the verge of disappearance due to the process of assimilation or violence was irrelevant since the USA and Turkish interests converged.

The largest ethnic group, the Kurds, are referred to as the Turks of the mountains, implying either some kind of inferiority or lack of civilization, and therefore, have to be domesticated, assimilated or eliminated. In this case, human rights means dehydration of life since they opposed the USA and Turkish oppressions. Ethnic groups which are not subordinated to global and local capitalism or which hinder the profitability of multinational investments are not desirable inhabitants of the global village. Since Kurdistan is failing to satisfy such prerequisites, therefore its integration into Turkey was an ought. Emotional exhilaration with liberation, self determination and independence are marketable commodities if they are in the service of Capital and Power. Otherwise, the rebels are terrorists, the victims delinquents and the people subversives. They are of no value to the State. The army, police and gendarmerie have values. They enjoy carnage. It is their occupation. Their massacres are not crimes against humanity or acts of terrorism. They are acts of law and order. Violence against terrorism is enshrined in the Neo Liberal Order. And it is pretty obvious by humanitarian wars, impoverished uranium missiles, intelligent and smart bombs on impoverished people.

Revisiting Turkey coincided with the capture of Ocalan. The "evil" man was delivered to his "good" captors, especially trained to deal with dangerous political criminals who threaten stability, tranquillity and the peace of the country. What stability? Stability of the rich to use people as manure of capital gains? Stability of order that condemns millions to pauperism? What tranquillity does rebellion disturb? Tranquillity of those who, hiding behind the law, calmly suck the blood of the exploited? Tranquillity that justifies pillage? Tranquillity that sends youth to the battle fields to fight the dirty war of governments and Capital? The real danger to social cohesion, stability, tranquillity and peace are the pillars of the government, the army, the police and the merchants of human souls. They are the enemy of society!

At the same time, Turkey was in the grip of election fever. A comic show of clowns and display of the voluntary servitude of the masses. It looked like a fancy dress party for the outside world to show that democracy in Turkey is not simply apparent, but also functional. The election was a match between patriots-nationalists. On the one hand, were the fundamentalists whose absolute moral virtues were incarnated in Allah; on the other hand, secularists having as a reference point, Atatürk.

Within the climate of electoral euphoria, tension and oppression were easily detected. Istanbul University was surrounded by the police and the army in full combat gear. Inside there were more detectives, with guns hidden under their coats, than there were students. Any visitor to the bastion of learning, free inquiry and impartiality was checked thoroughly - and this in the house of intellect? It was obvious where the real power lay. But behind the scenario of oppression lurked the dark figure of the avatars of globalization, and the invisible hand of the CIA.

Like a wild beast, Ocalan was chased from Syria, through Athens to Moscow, where the latter refused him political asylum since tsar Boris preferred a plate of golden metal to saving the life of his destitute ex- comrade-in-arms. From Russia to Rome where another ex-communist rejected his status as a refugee and sent him back to Russia, Ocalan's life was a life on tenterhooks. Back to Moscow, then Greece, Minsk, unsuccessful attempts to enter Holland, back to Greece: the circle tightened around him, The CIA greyhounds smelled blood and victory after Pangalos decided to "boot him out" of Greece and deport him to Kenya, On 15th of February Ocalan ended up in the hands of the Turkish Security Services, The newspaper "Huriyet" as quoted by The Economist {20-26 February, 1999 p, 34} boasted that "Turkey

showed the world it was a great state by capturing the baby-killer" .Ecevet was quick to assure that "justice is very free in Turkey. . . It need not last too long because the PKK's leadership are well known" (Time, March 1, 1999)

To top it all off, was the discovery that: "Ocalan has a brutal, capricious and autocratic record, even within his own movement" and "his arrest, may allow the group to refashion itself in a more civilized, democratic guise" (The Economist, as above).

Leadership implies brutality, sometimes in suave colours to enhance popularity! Capriciousness to assert authority on wavering souls and to create fear by its unpredictability! Autocratic, if he is to be a successful machiavellian prince to dominate, manipulate, impose and humiliate. But its success depends also on the servile consciousness and wilful submission of his subjects, Ocalan in power, would not be an iota better than the Ecevet or Clintons of this world, As to the baby-killer, how many babies have died and are dying in Iraq, due to Turkish invasions from time to time in north Iraq in order to wipe out the Kurdish partisans, and to American wilful bombing and non-violent embargo?

The Kurdish question was created by the great democratic tradition based , as any power, on the Roman "civility": Divide and Rule. It was England and France, which, with the treaty of Sevres in 1920, cut Kurdistan into pieces to ensure their imperialistic interests, the petrol. Was it not England that crushed the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq in 1918? And when, after the Second World War, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), supported by the Soviet Union, was formed trying to establish an autonomous republic, it was another "great" democratic country, the champion of self-determination and human rights, the USA, using Iranian troops, that buried any hopes, The abdication of the Shah in 1979 changed nothing. Around 50,000 Kurds and 5,000 peshmergas lost their lives fighting for liberation. And in Turkey, avant post of American Strategy, from 1960 to 1991, 100,000 Kurds were incarcerated, not to count those killed.

While the Kurds are stuck in the permanent Limbo of ethnic cleansing, the democratic press, with few exceptions, is silent. The USA which is financing, modernizing and arming the Turkish army, has no time for the Kurds. The latter's fight or claim for freedom, independence or autonomy run contrary to American and other capitalist interests. Undermining the sovereignty of a friendly State, the Kurdish struggle is presented as terrorism, Human rights? It is a con job, They only have value if they are at the service of the New Liberal Order and function in accordance to its prescriptions.

Despite the gloomy picture I have painted of the damned, where poverty, exploitation, servitude. ethnic cleansing and war are endemic, there are many human beings that continue to dream, defying the heavy odds of global economics, financial and political criminality and carry the flame of a libertarian utopia. In Turkey there are hearths of such groups that radiate light in the darkness of the political night, that plough furrows in the consciousness of the oppressed and sow the seed of rebellion, freedom and radical imageries. They are young, enthusiastic and within the alchemy of modern politics. carry a fevered revolutionary imagination without the fanfare of exhibitionism. Surrounded by rabid nationalists, religious bigotry , fundamentalists and the concubines of the liberal World Order , they live. function and work in harsh conditions. Harsh! Certainly harsh, since tyranny is not born in Anarchy but springs forth from the shadows of Authority.

A small event to remember. A tiny basement room crammed with books - such familiar names: Bakunin, Kropotkin, etc. Here the weavers of the revolution spin the thread of Ariadne to get out of the catacombs of marginalization. Here they write, publish, distribute and read books with anarchist contents. My friend and I have come here several times and enjoyed their company and hospitality as we sip tea and coffee, smoke and debate. A friendly place! No weapons! No bombs\ Only thoughts, ideas and struggle. Now we enter again. But this time two impeccably dressed gentlemen are taking "notes". Seeing us, they ask: "Who are they?" The answer is spontaneous: "Friends, visitors". My friend is naively amazed. "What an orderly and quiet meeting" she whispers to me "How carefully they take the Minutes!". "Naturally" -I said later -"It was the Thought Police, the limbs of the law. Judges of subversivity. They were

taking Police notes, not Minutes". They question, investigate, order and indict. One comrade was charged with sedition because he wrote an article dealing with the Kurdish issue. The editor was given an option: either resign or face jail; either freedom to be silent or the limbo of free slavery. Is it not terrorism to regard thoughts and ideas as subversive acts that have to be suppressed?

Nonetheless, it was a pleasure to see the pale face of anarchism, this faint spark that might one day ignite a rebellion. Rebellion accompanied by a process of liberation which will ensue, not in substituting one power for another, but in radical changes in favour of the oppressed. As for me the dialogue with these genuine comrades was an existential experience that captured my heart and strengthened my faith in anarchism.

Jack

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Further Information

- [Bulgarian Anarchists in Sydney](#) - Notes from interview with George H. by Bob James, 1985, from *Anarchism in Australia*.
- A Visit to Bulgaria - Report on 1993 Bulgarian anarchist conference
http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/eastern/bulgaria_93.html
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