

## Introduction: Colin Ward (1924-2010)

*Carl Levy*

I am personally not waiting for concerted action, for I am in my own person concerted action! I am not waiting for the revolution, for I am myself the revolution! Before the revolution comes, you must have the revolutionary. Before you consolidate the masses you must be sure of the individual.

From the papers of Sapper Colin Ward, December 1944<sup>1</sup>

This special issue of *Anarchist Studies* is dedicated to the life and thought of Colin Ward, one of the most significant thinkers and activists in the British anarchist movement in the second half of the twentieth century. Born into a Labour family (his father a primary school teacher and later headmaster and his mother a shorthand typist) in suburban Essex, Ward became an anarchist during the Second World War in that most authoritarian of institutions, the army.<sup>2</sup> Stationed in Scotland, he discovered the vibrant anarchist sub-culture of Glasgow, where he read Herbert Read and George Barrett.<sup>3</sup> He was swept up in the *War Commentary* trial of 1945, in which a group of anarchists (Marie Louise Berneri, John Hewetson, Vernon Richards and Philip Sansom) were accused of disaffecting troops, and Ward acted as a rather cagey witness (for years after he was ribbed as 'not categorically ward'). But from the trial he met a group of lifelong friends, who would later form part of the Freedom Press Group.

Ward did not prosper in school and started to work at the age of fifteen. His formative job was with the architect Sidney Caulfield, who acted as living link with the Arts and Crafts movement and the memory of William Morris. He became a draughtsman and worked in the 1950s and 1960s for a series of architects who specialized in schools and municipal housing. In the mid-1960s he retrained as a further education teacher and taught at Wandsworth Technical College; later he became education officer for the Town and County Planning Association (founded by Ebenezer Howard as the Garden City Association), and edited *BEE* (*Bulletin of Environmental Education*) for it. He was a prolific journalist, not only in anarchist

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circles (*Freedom* and then *Anarchy* [1961-1970] – perhaps the best Anglophone anarchist magazine ever), but also for *New Society*, the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian*, etc. His published books for adults (he also wrote two books aimed at teenagers, *Violence* and *Work*) started with the very successful *Anarchy in Action* (1973) (symptomatically, he wanted to call it *Anarchy as a Theory of Organization*), which summarized twenty years of journalism. From the 1970s to the 2000s he published (many times as a co-author) a series of books and pamphlets on modern urban life, the modern human environment (water), housing, squatters, cotters and campers, children and their urban environment, transport, education and play.<sup>4</sup> Although he produced books that focused on anarchism directly, not least his Oxford University Press, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (2004), he excelled in using the anarchist and libertarian method to address everyday life or the quotidian in the social history of Britain.

Ward was the product of a Britain that no longer exists, where a lower middle or working class individual could progress into a professional and intellectual career, without having pursued a university degree. His introduction to avant-garde thought, modernist literature and the contemporary arts was through political and friendship circles. But he was cognizant of the changes in education, and by the 1960s realized that a new generation of beneficiaries of higher education were the target readership for *Anarchy*. A generation older than the Baby Boomers, he nevertheless grew into middle age in the midst of the growth of the welfare state and the Great Boom of the 1950s and 1960s. Ward, the anarchist, was a fierce critic of the post-war welfare state. He argued that it ingrained inequalities and undermined the self-organised institutions of working-class welfare. It produced well-fed and relatively healthy fodder for the hierarchical capitalist system, where a veneer of social welfare kept the social peace but did not ensure social justice. He never departed from an appreciation of a civilization founded on mutual welfare, the path not taken when the Fabians' 'Minority Report' and Herbert Morrison's ways were endorsed by the Labour Party. But with the end of the Great Boom and the rise of neo-liberalism in the middle 1970s, he shared Richard Tittmus's animus at the philistine resurrection of 'economic man' (sic) in social policy.

Along with his American friend Paul Goodman and other libertarian socialist and anarchist mavericks of the 1950s and the early 1960s, Ward set the scene for a radical critique of consumer capitalism and the military industrial complex, transcending the logic of East and West, which burst on the scene in the middle and late 1960s: indeed Ward told an radio interviewer in 1968 that he could sense anarchy in the air. I first encountered Ward's work in the late 1960s as a teenaged university

student at the University of Buffalo, when I got my hands on some superb back issues of *Anarchy*. (Ward had long-term connections with the pacifist/libertarian/anarchist American Left, from Dwight MacDonald's *politics* in the 1940s to *Liberation* in the 1960s, of which I was an avid reader.) The covers of *Anarchy* by Rufus Segar were enough of an attraction, but the message of the magazine was even more important.

Young Americans at that time were consumed by the war in Vietnam and the war in the American ghettos, and many of my friends, fired by a fierce anti-imperialism, were attracted to the Pentagon's stubborn adversaries in Southeast Asia; feeling a moral necessity for solidarity with peoples our country was busy incinerating, they adopted an unthinking 'Third Worldism' and Marxism Leninism ('automatic Marxism' as Ward called it),<sup>5</sup> which was uneasily mixed with the wonders of illicit drugs, funny costumes or American Civil War fancy dress and po-faced concept rock albums.

By the tail end of the 1960s the formerly libertarian spirit of the first American New Left was drowning in 'vanguardism', sectarian psycho-drama and a posturing militarism, the last of which was a mirror image of the underlying brutality of mainstream 1960s America itself. For me Ward was a steadying hand: being an 'empirical softie', Ward realised that radicalism here and now could not dress in nineteenth century garb – Marxist or anarchist – but had to address the problems of our societies. ('I don't think you'll ever see any of my writings in *Freedom* which are remotely demanding a revolution next week', he explained in an interview in 1997.<sup>6</sup>) Ward's *Anarchy* combined a quiet, reasoned anarchism with a piercing critique of the Great Boom societies of the 1960s and an endorsement of direct action which was more than gesture politics or Maoism or Trotskyite gymnastics; and of course its strangely foreign and exotic language and concepts were alluring to an American. (What on earth were these adventure playgrounds? How could you squat buildings without getting your head staved in by a billy club (a police truncheon)?) And Ward introduced me to interesting names dead or alive: Gustav Landauer, Alex Comfort, Martin Buber, etc. Forty years later I still have copies of this wonderful journal.

The articles in this issue cover Colin Ward's life and times and analyze his uniquely approachable, open-ended and creative form of anarchism. Peter Marshall, David Goodway and Pietro Di Paola place the development of Ward's thought within the context of his biography. Marshall gives us a generous portrait of the man and in the course of it outlines the unique aspects of his form of anarchism. Di Paola discusses the importance of Ward to the development of the newspaper *Freedom* during the late 1940s and the 1950s, and foreshadows the appearance of *Anarchy* in

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1961. Goodway discusses the relationship between Ward, the Freedom Press Group and the British New Left of the 1950s and 1960s, and analyzes the nature of *Anarchy*.

One of the themes in Goodway's treatment, which reappears elsewhere in other contributions, was the Englishness of Ward. Of course Ward was a great internationalist: one need only recall the affectionate ties he fostered in Italy<sup>7</sup>, Scandinavia, Spain, North America and elsewhere; and the Freedom Group was a cosmopolitan conclave. But Ward's empiricism, his insistence that he did not do theory, and even his retiring but firm personality, were shaped by his Englishness; and it can be seen in the ever-present traditions of Dissent, and in William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (that is who Peter Marshall and Ward discussed the first time they met one summer's eve in the early 1970s), as well as in the subjects of Ward's invaluable historical detective work, which revealed the lost world of seaside do-it-yourself huts and other forms of hearty mutualism, the cotters and squatters, which invoked an anarchist take on the myth of the 'Free Born Englishman' (*sic*).

In its initial years from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, many key personalities of the British New Left sought to employ non-sectarian libertarian socialism to understand the modern world, and Colin Ward was part of this intellectual milieu. Anti-Stalinist former Communists and the anarchists and those in between found common ground after the Hungarian Revolution, the Suez Crisis and rise of CND. An emergent humanist socialism, the sense of impending doom fostered by the East-West nuclear arms race, and the rediscovery of workers' control and non-party council communism, helped construct a new ideological force field on the Left. While many of the New Left's older generation could never quite abandon a sentimental attachment to communism (E.P. Thompson), which separated them from Ward's instinctive anti-Marxism, the theme of Englishness does bring Ward and the New Left together. Attitudes towards George Orwell reveal an interesting cross-cutting pattern. While Peter Sedgwick and Raymond Williams aligned with Ward's appreciation of Orwell's work (Orwell had supported the defendants in the 1945 *War Commentary* trial), however, this was not the case with the increasingly libertarian Thompson (see the dramatic changes in the two editions of his biography of William Morris (1955) and (1976)). But Thompson too was an empirical English 'softie' of sorts, since he shared Ward's suspicion of high theory – revealed in his vicious and delightful duels with the British followers of Louis Althusser<sup>8</sup> – and had undertaken a similar quest to rescue the common folk from the condescension of posterity. But, like William Morris himself, Thompson could never abide the label anarchist. More open to persuasion was Raphael Samuel, who in later life praised

Ward's social histories; and this appreciation was reciprocated by Ward. Perhaps it was the complex nature of Orwell's Englishness (was he in fact a misplaced 'Tory anarchist'?)<sup>9</sup> which Thompson found revolting. That being said, Ward's attraction to some forms of pluralist liberalism – in Isaiah Berlin or Alexander Herzen and his modern promoters – was alien to the mindset of Thompson and other New Leftists (perhaps with the exception of old Guild Socialist/pluralist, G.D.H. Cole, who also showed great sympathy to anarchism), because these two thinkers buttressed Cold War 'NATO' intellectual hegemony.

The signal influence of Kropotkin upon Ward is the theme of Brian Morris's contribution, and of course Kropotkin's love affair with English civil and voluntary society mirrors similar feelings in Ward's interventions. As Morris relates, in characteristic modesty, Ward believed that his life's work was merely an updated footnote to the Russian's *Mutual Aid*. But Morris outlines the similarities and differences in the work of both.

Ward's first major published works revolved around the post-war housing shortage and the rise of squatting. The New Criminologists of the 1960s were influenced by Ward and were published in *Anarchy*, and later in life he was the Centenary Professor of Social Policy at the LSE in 1995-96. Carissa Honeywell emphasizes Ward's pioneering historical investigation of the libertarian, decentralized mutualism of British working-class social welfare. She also raises interesting questions about the similarities of Ward's anarchism to such concepts as the informal self-service economy (and the work of the sociologist Ray Pahl), co-production, Local Exchange Trading Systems, social capital (and Robert Putnam), and even the mirage-like 'Big Society' and its 'Blue Labour' twin.

While Kropotkin's influence on Ward is well known, Honeywell emphasizes the importance of Proudhon's political economy. Ward felt that the British Left's fear of owner-occupation of housing was misguided (although he was firmly against the privatization of public goods such as water). Ward felt that owner-occupation, self-help and mutualism created a form of self-determined citizenship. His thoughts are not without relevance in the early twenty-first century. The American sub-prime 'Ponzi scheme' was stimulated by bi-partisan government policy to turn poorer Americans into owner-occupiers, but had the effect of turning house ownership into a cash cow. The ensuing crash of 2007-2008, leading to the bailout of banks and the sovereign debt crisis, had the paradoxical effect of weakening the already sickly welfare state on both sides of the Atlantic. It did not, as some initially predicted, strengthen Keynesian policy or signal a return to the post-war welfare state. And more generally, the decline of the welfare state was aided and abetted by consumer

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booms in the 1990s and 2000s, in which 'piggy bank' homes (through schemes of equity withdrawal) and credit cards counteracted the long-term depression in the rise of real wages since the 1970s. Now the chickens have come home to roost, but here it is best to remember that Ward always believed (like Proudhon) that there was a need to couple personal ownership and the artisanal or self-service economy with the *mutualization* of credit, a radical slogan which has great potential today if the Left could reclaim 'common sense' from European deficit hawks and the American Tea Party. Given the fact that the trans-Atlantic financial system is still largely owned by the State directly or propped up indirectly through Quantitative Easing, the mutualization of credit might be a democratic and popular policy, with enormous left-libertarian potential. It is a pity that Colin Ward is no longer with us.<sup>10</sup>

Robert Graham discusses Ward's anarchist theory of organization. Ward was not particularly interested in focusing on the theory and practice of anarchist organizations. If he had had his way *Anarchy* would have been called *Autonomy*, but more sectarian comrades objected. The age of Bakunin and Kropotkin had passed, and by the 1960s Ward anticipated the concepts we now associate with post-anarchy. Thus radical action was not informed by a quest for perfectionism or a reckoning with the present order (Ward wrote, 'there is not a final struggle, only a series of partisan struggles on a variety of fronts').<sup>11</sup> Or, as Ward argued, one could never reach a free society, but one could struggle for a 'free-er' society. And we should also recall the fragment at the beginning of this introduction, with its hint of Gustav Landauer: one needed to form a libertarian personality in which to ground self-determined citizenship – which anticipates the arguments of Richard Day and a host of post-anarchists in the early 2000s.<sup>12</sup> Well before the American New Left coined the phrase, Ward understood that the 'personal was political'. But Ward's form of 'post-anarchism', or more accurately radical autonomy, was guided by the political lodestars Alexander Herzen and Isaiah Berlin, rather than an acquaintance with post-structuralism. Indeed, as Goodway shows, Ward asked Berlin to write a piece for *Anarchy* on Zeno of Citium (he gracefully declined but expressed his admiration for *Anarchy*). Thus Ward embraced the two waves of anarchism in the post-1945 period: from the 1950s to the 1970s he was a libertarian gadfly of the welfare state and embraced the growing rank and file insurgency of the working class; and later, when neo-liberalism and the decline of heavy industry ushered in a new political economy, Ward was prepared for the self-service economy and DIY alter-globalization politics.

Ward, Graham argues, combined an appreciation for Bakunin's concept of federalism and for Kropotkin's stress on the voluntary nature of engagement in

federations, or, more accurately for Ward, networks. But in order to counteract the trends towards bureaucracy, stasis and top-down decision-making which earlier anti-organizationalist anarchists detected even in anarchist political organizations, Ward's ideal-typical organizations were voluntary, functional, temporary and small; indeed for Ward the Freedom Group of the late 1940s and 1950s was the template, which combined a friendship circle with interlocking networks of expertise. Ward sought those fleeting pockets of anarchy that occur in daily life. And, like Kropotkin, he adopted a dualist approach to the study of history – to return to a point highlighted in Morris's contribution – a history in which decentralizing and bottom-up movements clashed with 'Roman' statist centralizers.<sup>13</sup> As Graham reminds us, Ward the historian and commentator noted the spontaneous order of the revolutionary interregnum, something that is present in the dynamics of the Arab Spring – and, one could add, the other 'Springs' and 'Summers' which have encircled the globe in 2011.<sup>14</sup> Thus in 1997 Ward praised Hakim Bey's concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone, unlike his old friend Murray Bookchin (whose pioneering articles on ecology and anarchism were published in *Anarchy* in 1967), who, as Marshall reminds us, Ward, in his typical low-key but forceful manner, felt had grown sectarian and egocentric in his later years.

In the final contribution, Stuart White examines the relationship between Ward, social anarchism and lifestyle anarchism. As should be clear by now, Ward blended these two forms of anarchism.<sup>15</sup> We have already seen that by the 1950s or 1960s classical anarchism for Ward was inspiring but of historical interest; instead, as White explains, he endorsed George Molnar's interventions in *Freedom* and *Anarchy*, where Molnar argued that anarchism was a form of permanent protest, which carved out zones of liberation. But this form of anarchism was not merely 'bumming around', as one contributor in *Freedom* put it in 1963 (an early expression of what Bookchin would find distasteful in 'Lifestyle Anarchism' so many years later). Anarchism as permanent protest had a long-term aim. Like the 'classical anarchist' Errico Malatesta, Ward saw anarchism as a gadfly of the Left and the status quo (Malatesta's biographer was Vernon Richards, Ward's Freedom Group comrade and dear friend; while Richards's father, Emidio Recchioni, had been a close comrade of Malatesta, who had also spent many years in London exile).<sup>16</sup>

Anarchism should not be a dour religious millenarian sect. As Di Paola shows, Ward appreciated the eighteenth-century cobbler who was inspired by radicalism of the early Baptist or Quaker sects, but disavowed the sectarianism of the latter-day Exclusive Brethren he knew too well. So a touch of Hakim Bey was not to be shunned; a taste of the good life here and now was essential to nurture a libertarian

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personality: we are not merely, as White writes (sounding very Herzen-like), ‘tarmac, as it were on the highway of history.’

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**NOTES**

1. I would like to thank Pietro Di Paola for alerting me to this document which was found at the National Archives, Kew, London. It is a from a report on Colin Ward, from the Special Branch, 4 January 1945, seized from the papers of Sapper Colin Ward in December 1944 by Captain E. Davies, Royal Engineers, Millfield Camp, Stromness, Orkney Islands (National Archives, Subject: ‘War Commentary & Freedom Press’, 347/14/29).
2. For biographical overviews of Colin Ward, see David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow. Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) pp. 309-325; Stuart White, ‘Making Anarchism Respectable: The Social Philosophy of Colin Ward’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12, 1 (2007), 11-28; Ross Bradshaw, Harriet Ward and Ken Worpole (eds.), *Remembering Colin Ward 1924-2010* (Nottingham: Five Leave Publications, 2011); Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition. Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward* (London: Continuum Press, 2011), pp. 133-182. For a good overview of Colin Ward’s published work, see Chris Wilbert & Damian White (eds.), *Colin Ward. Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility: The Colin Ward Reader* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011).
3. George Barrett, *Objections to Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1921).
4. Some of his books and pamphlets were devoted to applying the anarchist method to social life. See: (with Anthony Fyson) *Streetwork: The Exploding School* (1973); *Tenants Take Over* (1974); *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (1976); *The Child in the City* (1978); *When We Build Again, Let’s Have Housing that Works!* (1985); *The Child in the Country* (1988); (with Ruth Rendell) *Undermining the Central Line* (1989); *Welcome, Thinner City: Urban Survival in the 1990s* (1989); *Talking Houses* (1990); *Freedom to Go: After the Motor Age* (1991); *New Town, Home Town: The Lessons of Experience* (1993); *Talking Schools* (1995); *Talking to Architects* (1996); *Havens and Springboards: The Foyer Movement in Context* (1997); *Reflected in Water:*

- A Crisis of Social Responsibility* (1997); (with Peter Hall) *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (1998). Three co-authored monographs and one single-authored monograph were devoted to social history. See: (with Denis Hardy) *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (1984; (with Denis Hardy) *Goodnight Campers! The History of the British Holiday Camp* (1986); and (with David Crouch), *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* (1988); *Cotters and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History* (2002).
5. Colin Ward (ed.), *A Decade of Anarchy (1961-1970)* (London: Freedom Press, 1987), p. 8.
  6. Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds*, p. 320.
  7. For instance, he was widely published in Italy by Elèuthera.
  8. E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory: and other essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978).
  9. P. Wilkins, '(Tory) Anarchy in the UK: the Very Peculiar Practice of Tory Anarchism', *Anarchist Studies* 17, 1 (2009), 22-44.
  10. Guido Giacomo Preparato, 'Of Money, Heresy, and Surrender (Part I): The Ways of Our System, An Outline from Bretton Woods to the Financial Slump of 2008', *Anarchist Studies* 17, 1 (2009), 18-47; Guido Giacomo Preparato, 'Of Money, Hersey and Surrender, Part II: A Plea for a Regional and Perishable Currency', *Anarchist Studies*, 18, 1 (2010), 4-33; David Graeber, *Debt: the First Five Thousand Years* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2011).
  11. Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1973), p. 26.
  12. Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).
  13. I discuss the dual nature of history in Carl Levy, 'Social Histories of Anarchism', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 4, 2 (2010), 1-44.
  14. Mohammed Bamyeh, 'Anarchist, Liberal and Authoritarian Enlightenments: Notes on the Arab Spring', *Kuturaustausch*, Sept, 2011, forthcoming; and, more generally, see Mohammed Bamyeh, *Anarchy as Order. The History and Future of Civil Humanity* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2009).
  15. Laurence Davis, 'Social Anarchism & Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unhelpful Dichotomy', *Anarchist Studies*, 18, 1 (2010), 62-82.
  16. C. Levy, *Errico Malatesta: The Rooted Cosmopolitan, the Life and Times of an Italian Anarchist in Exile* (forthcoming).