Anarchist youth
Chapter 5: Notting Hill

Although I now had my degree I wasn't ready to leave Oxford: I'd been there for only eight terms after all and there was unfinished business to take care of. In particular, the anarchist group was about to go public as a listed university club with a senior member, the historian James Joll, and a full programme of open meetings. So for the first term of the new academic year I found a cheap room in a bohemian rented house, 139 Woodstock Road, peopled by like-minded students including Rip Bulkeley, a genial, bearded left-wing person who at six and a half feet towered above everybody else, later a published poet and award-winning science writer*.

*Also the editor/publisher of *Wrong-righting Years, Memoirs of the Oxford 1960s Left*, Oxford, May 2017, available online, rip@ripandjane.org

But first there was an active summer which started with the harassment* – no other word for it – by constant picketing of Queen Frederica and King Paul of Greece during the several days of their state visit to London in July 1963. In this case our tactics were not to court arrest but to avoid it so we could pursue the royal couple for longer. When the anarchist cartoonist Donald Rooum was arrested (see Chapter 4) he was actually walking away from a police cordon, having failed to pass through it, though he was carrying a banner saying "Lambrakis RIP". I was one of the last to be arrested: we were in the Mall marching from Trafalgar Square towards Buckingham Palace, surrounded by police.

*This was a response to the murder of Grigoris Lambrakis, a left-wing MP and peace activist, by right-wing thugs – on the street and in plain view of numerous people – with evidence of complicity by the Greek government. See the film *Z*, 1969, made, mainly in French, by the Greek director-producer Costa-Gavras.

A matter of weeks later a convoy of camper vans organised by the Committee of 100 left Britain to cross western Europe from the Channel to the eastern Mediterranean with the stated intention of arriving in Athens for the Hiroshima Day commemoration on 6 August. I didn't join it. I knew there was no chance of the far-right government of Greece letting the convoy cross the frontier from Yugoslavia and I also didn't fancy being cooped up in an old Dormobile van for days subsisting on a diet of lentils, lettuce and brown rice washed down with herbal tea or, at best, home-brewed beer.*

*I was right about the convoy being prevented from reaching its destination – it was harassed and blocked by the Austrian and Yugoslav authorities even before it could reach the Greek frontier. But I was quite wrong about the restriction to "herbal tea or, at best, home-brewed beer": in the event local sympathisers provided plenty of the real thing as the convoy proceeded via Belgium to Munich. See *Committee of 100: Athens Convoy* in *Solidarity* Volume 3, No 1.

But I certainly wanted to get to Athens in time for 6 August. So, naturally, I set off in good time and hitched. I didn't take the obvious direct route overland via Yugoslavia: it wouldn't have been clever to have been identified and stopped on the frontier by an alert Greek immigration official. Instead I went down the west side of Italy, then across from Naples to the port of Brindisi and on by ferry to Greece.

In Athens the Bertrand Russell Committee, organisers of the Hiroshima Day rally, were pleased to see me since by now the British peace convoy had been stopped on the Greek-Yugoslav frontier and turned back. They found me somewhere to stay and invited me to speak on 6 August (in English, of course: I didn't even have classical Greek, never mind the modern version). My host was a Communist ex-state schoolteacher, a casualty of the left's defeat in the Greek civil war of 1946-9: he was banned from public teaching posts and eked out a living giving private lessons. His way of feeding himself that summer was instructive. Every few days he stuffed various Mediterranean vegetables – peppers, aubergines, tomatoes – with rice and herbs and baked them in the oven. Supplemented by bread, that was his diet. In more affluent France, by contrast, stuffed tomatoes, featuring meat rather than rice, might be one course among several in a midday meal at a workers' restaurant.

The day after the Hiroshima Day rally one or two other English people and I met in a café and discussed how we might get to a second demonstration which we'd found out about. We had a street map of Athens and showed this to our taxi driver (we knew the demonstration area was likely to be cordoned off). He nodded and was about to drive away when the front passenger door opened and a plainclothes man got in and told the driver to go to the police station. Apart from some mild questioning nothing serious happened: we did have British passports after all. But it was a reminder of what living in a police state must be like.

And there was another reminder on my way out of Greece a day or so later. At the frontier with Yugoslavia I was stopped, questioned and then harangued by a senior uniformed Greek police officer who had excellent English but zero knowledge of British politics. "Bertrand Russell is a Communist," he ranted. "No, I'm afraid not," I replied. "You may disagree with him but you can't call him a Communist." There was no possible resolution of this conflict but when I saw a (perfectly respectable-looking) British car approach, I said to the driver: "Excuse me, can you possibly help? I'm having a disagreement with this gentleman. Is Bertrand Russell a Communist as far as you know?"

The unfortunate driver, looking puzzled, said something like "No, I don't think he is" – at which point the policeman, fuming and gesticulating, directed him to take his vehicle out of the main queue to be delayed and, presumably, interrogated for his pains. Feeling ever-so-slightly remorseful I walked on into Yugoslavia, relieved that my Greek visit was over.

My destination was near Beynac in the Dordogne, an international anarchist summer camp where I spent the next few weeks, as I did the following summer at another one near Alès in the Gard. The camps were organised by the Spanish anarchist movement in exile (their base was in Toulouse); they also attracted young French anarchists and a mixed collection from other countries.

There was a large communal tent for people who hadn't brought anything to sleep under but otherwise what was provided by the volunteers was what you'd expect in a fairly basic commercial campsite, things like cooking facilities, showers and latrines. There were some organised daytime activities – eg football with teams on national lines (Spain v France v Rest of the World) – but the main communal life was in the evening with lectures, debates and film shows (eg *Octobre à Paris*, on the massacre of Algerians by the Paris police in 1961, and *Fury over Spain*, newsreel footage of the first phase of the Spanish civil war/revolution with an anarchist commentary). Since the Spanish in the camp were all exiles – or the children of exiles – living in France, French was the language of discussion and I did some translating into English for the other foreigners.

There was the occasional cultural conflict. But the young French anarcho-nudists, when seeking the sun, kept well away from the sometimes strait-laced Spanish families who might have been disconcerted. That was tactful. The case of the "Ealing Anarchists" was something else. A middle-aged Spanish woman, utterly bewildered, asked me to explain the behaviour of two long-haired, bearded men who spent most of their time drinking in the sun then lying in the communal tent in a drunken stupor stinking of stale sweat, cheap red wine and urine. I confessed that I couldn't.

I got a lift back from the camp with Jay Ginn and her partner, Roger Etherington. Then in Oxford I needed to find some means of support since I was no longer a state-subsidised student. I did various things – a bit of gardening here, a bit of house cleaning there – but my main source of income was *Private Eye*. To explain: the established distributors of newspapers and magazines, principally WH Smith, were not keen on handling *Private Eye*, which was scurrilous, irresponsible – and likely to involve them in costly libel actions. In the autumn of 1963, although the *Eye* was riding high on the back of its coverage of the Profumo scandal, Smiths still refused to distribute or sell it. Solution? Direct sales on the street, eg at Carfax in the middle of Oxford where we had recently won the right to sell *Peace News*. I sold the *Eye*, which paid the rent, and the anarchist/pacifist stuff as well. Fortunately the police left me alone.

John Profumo, the minister for war in Macmillan's Tory cabinet, had resigned after the revelation of his affair with Christine Keeler. The osteopath Stephen Ward, who'd introduced them, was tried at the Old Bailey on a trumped-up charge of living off immoral earnings and killed himself before he could be "found guilty". I reviewed the Denning report on the affair in *Isis* commenting that "Profumo was better employed sleeping with Christine Keeler than supervising the deployment of weapons of mass destruction" and making the fairly obvious point that Ward was hounded to his death. There was an astonishing reaction from the Cambridge literary don David Holbrook – yes, him again – who wrote a three-page diatribe full of psychoanalytic jargon attacking Ward for his "hate-filled" self-destructive tendencies, which apparently explained why "the judiciary, representing society, had to find him a criminal". Fortunately, I had the last word, pointing out that even if Ward *wanted* to be hounded to death, he was still hounded.

In the now officially registered Oxford Anarchist Group, we had an impressive list of speakers that first term, starting with historian James Joll and including Colin Ward, the editor of *Anarchy*, non-violence guru Gene Sharp, novelist-journalist Colin MacInnes and broadcaster-journalist Ray Gosling. When the jazz singer George Melly came to talk about the Dada art movement I told him that he was expected afterwards at a second gig – the university jazz club – and walked him over to the venue. He ended the evening belting out his signature song, *Frankie and Johnny*, curled round the stand-up microphone.

Members of the group mentioned by the historian David Goodway in his survey of British libertarian thought* also included Richard Mabey, the wildlife and botany man, and Carole Pateman, a political theorist. David himself has kept the faith and continues to publish material on aspects of anarchism.

**Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, Liverpool University Press, 2006

We changed the title of *Anarchist Student* to *Anarchist Youth* in the third issue noting that "not all our writers or readers are students". Several themes dominated: the attempt to develop a positive anarchist theory of non-violent action; moves to federate the various British anarchist groups and

inevitably Spain where repression continued and assassinating Franco was still being seriously discussed – and sometimes attempted. The other editors over the five issues we published were Adrian Cunningham (a Cambridge student), Charles Radcliffe (later a Situationist), Mark Hendy (of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation) and Leo Valle (FIJL, Spanish anarchist youth). In an article entitled "Spain and the anarchist movement in Britain" I argued in favour of a non-violent approach and said that "so-called 'propaganda' bombs are bloody bad propaganda".

The SWF, although not numerous, was a lively organisation committed to the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism which had inspired the Spanish anarchist movement. It was formed in 1950 after the break-up of the Anarchist Federation of Britain which split over various personal and political issues. Its dominant personality was Tom Brown, a Geordie veteran, who'd grown up on Tyneside, become an engineering shop steward and then a powerful propagandist for anarchism and syndicalism in print and on public platforms. Meetings were held in a King's Cross pub but the nerve centre of the SWF was a grotty building off the Harrow Road housing an ancient hand-fed printing press which (in its own good time) produced the monthly paper *Direct Action*. On my first visit there I met Ken Hawkes, a sports journalist who later became a TV producer, and I wrote the headline for the front-page lead: "AGAINST ALL BOMBS".

The article was about nuclear weapons but we were both aware that the sub-text of the headline was a comment on the disagreement between traditional anarchist bomb-throwers and the new wave of non-violent revolutionaries. The SWF accommodated members of both groups, though sometimes it wasn't clear which one somebody belonged to: unlike some other anarchists we tried to avoid internal conflict.

Another example of the eclectic nature of the SWF was the membership of Bill Egan, an Irishman who had joined the IRA as a teenager in the 1950s, had been interned in 1961, and had read his way into anarchism by the time he was released in 1962. He describes his influences as, first, Ken Hawkes and then people like Dwight Macdonald and Alex Comfort.* Bill, who was then a merchant seaman, jumped ship in Athens in August 1963, not knowing that the Committee of 100 peace convoy was on its way there. He left behind him on board copies of *Direct Action*, including a piece by me on the July demonstrations in London. As an illegal immigrant and a member of a subversive organisation he was lucky to hitchhike successfully through Greece from Athens to Corfu without being challenged.

*See *Understood Backwards* by Bill Egan, wegan@pcug.org.au

A curiosity that struck me at the time (or maybe it was to be expected) was that we anarchists included more than our fair share of media professionals. In the SWF besides Ken Hawkes and me, Mark Hendy worked in book publishing as a copy editor and so did Donovan Pedelty (later the author of *The Great Deception: How Parliamentary Democracy Duped the Workers,* Christie Books, 2013) while Bill Christopher was a print worker. Outside the SWF Philip Sansom was a magazine journalist, specialising in production; Nicolas Walter a writer, subeditor and editor; Albert Meltzer a newspaper copy taker. Stuart Christie, after his release from prison in Spain, was a writer, subeditor, editor and publisher. But an anarchist "team of all the talents" wasn't really an option since there were too many personality conflicts with Nicolas and Albert leading the way.

The SWF was part of an international anarcho-syndicalist body, the International Working Men's Association (IWMA)*, formed in 1922; an international congress was held in Paris in December 1963. With Laurens Otter I hitched to Paris to represent the SWF at the congress and also spoke at a public meeting of anarchist militants dominated by Spanish veterans from 1936-9 and their children. It was the only the second time in my life as an anarchist that I had an audience of hundreds of people at a political meeting (the first was in Athens on Hiroshima Day). I said that in Britain the anarchist movement was flourishing and that it particularly owed its recent growth to the recruitment of Committee of 100 supporters committed to non-violent methods.

*The IWMA later updated itself and became the International *Workers'* Association.

The reply to me came from Federica Montseny, who had been an anarchist minister – of health – in the 1936 popular front government in Madrid. She restated the traditional view held by anarchists that gains made in a revolution should be defended, if necessary by force of arms. What she didn't do, however, was argue in favour of assassinating Franco.

Back in London after Christmas I gravitated towards Notting Hill where the local anarchist group was the strongest and liveliest in London. It met at the flat of Brian and Margaret Hart and at various times various people, including Stuart Christie and me, stayed there. But I soon moved in to share with Mark Hendy who was looking for somebody to help with the rent. When I left to live with a girlfriend, Stuart replaced me.

My first paid employment was in a market research firm processing questionnaires. You needed to be careful but it was pretty boring. Then I got lucky. Geoffrey Cannon*, who was working at *New Society*, had written an article which both praised Granada for the quality of its news and current affairs, citing its flagship programme *World in Action*, and had a go at TV criticism in the national press. Much of it was superficial and ignorant, he said; most of the critics didn't seem to know very much about television. One reason suggested for this was that journalists tended to become TV critics accidentally rather than by design, in some cases as a result of an actual accident. Sidney Bernstein, the boss of Granada, had been impressed by the piece and had commissioned Geoffrey to investigate the TV criticism angle further and write a book about it. He could provide publishers for the book, since Granada owned several, and pay researchers to investigate in detail. Two people were appointed and I was one.

*Geoffrey was editor of *Radio Times* from 1969 to 1979 and later specialised in the politics of food, health and exercise; he is the author of various books including *Dieting makes you fat*, Virgin 2008 (revised edition).

It was a fairly loose set-up. Peter Hunt, whose ambition was to become a TV director/producer, and I were formally attached to the film-buying department in Granada's Golden Square offices. The man in charge was Leslie Halliwell, an amiable, solidly built fellow with a pronounced chin who, to anyone brought up on the *Eagle* comic, looked a lot like Harris Tweed, Extra-Special Agent; his sidekick at Granada was Philip Jenkinson, who eventually succeeded him. We had a weekly Soho lunch with Geoffrey who provided lists of people to be interviewed and lists of questions for them. The interviewees were mainly TV professionals and journalists, critics and their editors, but also relevant politicians and public pontificators, such as members of the Pilkington committee on the future of broadcasting.

Alas, Geoffrey's book never materialised but I found the interviewing work both fun and instructive. In a way I carried on with what I'd started at Oxford: meeting people in the media and political world and finding what and how they thought. There were some moments to treasure. Frank Allaun, a left-wing Labour MP with a reputation for fellow-travelling, insisted that my tape-recorder had to be switched off before he would admit that he read the Communist *Daily Worker* (we asked everybody which newspapers they read). Anthony Wedgwood Benn, then Labour spokesman on media, was still focussed on a conventional political career (he hadn't yet reinvented himself as Tony Lefty-Benn) and took it and himself very seriously. When I proposed an interview, he said he was of course extremely busy but he could perhaps spare me a few minutes in his Holland Park house at 9am while he was opening his post which was likely to be extensive. It was. Joyce Grenfell, actress, comedian, monologist, Pilkington committee member, answered all the questions then insisted on turning the tables and interviewing me about my anarchist attitudes and opinions. This exchange with me became the basis of one of her monologues – see *Joyce Grenfell* by Janie Hampton, John Murray, 2002.

To interview Sidney Bernstein and other Granada people Peter and I were flown up to Manchester in the company's six-seater executive Dove, the first time aged 22 I had ever been on an airplane. Bernstein himself was a forceful and chatty character and keen to clarify the company's image. "Last year," he said, "we took on six people at Granada. They all went to grammar school and they all went to Oxford." Alas, I concluded, no chance for me – one out of two isn't really good enough.

Of all the impressive people I met doing these interviews (as well as Bernstein and Sir John Pilkington himself, there were TV critics like Philip Purser and Peter Black) one stands out. John Freeman qualified for the survey on just about every count: professional broadcaster (famous for his *Face to Face* TV interviews with celebrities from Gilbert Harding to Adam Faith); politician, or rather ex-politician (he'd resigned from Attlee's government in 1951 with Aneurin Bevan and Harold Wilson over the imposition of prescription charges); now writer and editor (of the *New Statesman*). He replied to the set questions – anticipating the follow-ups – in clear coherent sentences without being prompted. On the tape I think I needed to speak just twice.

Then there was Dennis Potter who I met for the third time. As an Oxford graduate he'd previously come to report on university debates for the *Daily Herald*, soon to become the IPC *Sun*; now he was its TV critic. In one way Potter illustrated the accident thesis of how TV critics are made: he'd moved to television criticism from reporting when he was hit by an extreme form of psoriasis. But in another he undermined it: as it happened he was totally absorbed by television as a medium; he'd already written drama for it; and as he emphasised to me in the interview he considered it far more important than cinema or theatre precisely because it could deliver a mass working-class audience. It wasn't an accident that, leaving criticism behind, Potter became the outstanding TV playwright of his time. Perhaps it was messy cases like Potter's – was he a TV critic by accident or by design or both? – that undermined Geoffrey's thesis and caused the project to be abandoned.

Meanwhile the 1964 Easter CND march was a truncated affair lasting only one day. But it had its moment of drama when the radical section, led by the red-and-black flags of the anarchists, split off and turned into Monck Street, Westminster, where the Rotunda buildings were suspected of being the HQ of the London RSG (regional seat of government). In a narrow street we found ourselves blocked by row after row of police officers.

At the front the marchers stopped. There were conflicting calls to “Sit down” and “Move on”. The calls to sit down won. Then a debate took place with a megaphone being passed between the speakers: effectively, should we try to charge and push through the cordon or stay sitting down? Ron Bailey, who later became known as the leader of the squatters’ movement, and Del Foley, both members of the *Solidarity* group, argued for the charge; Peter Cadogan and I argued against. Inevitably we won the argument because the momentum of the marchers had been lost. We hadn’t gained very much admittedly but at least we had avoided a pointless punch-up. As we all walked away afterwards I spotted Chris Pallis, the leading light of *Solidarity*, who characteristically had taken no part in the debate since it was a public one: as a prominent medical professional, a neurologist, he preferred anonymity and published his political stuff under pseudonyms. Chris was wearing a long face – he clearly regretted what had happened and told me so. (A year later there was a second demonstration at the Rotundas, which was better attended and better known.)

The *Solidarity* group, which published a magazine with that title and numerous pamphlets, is best described as “libertarian Marxist”; its origins were in Trotskyism and it particularly appealed to those on the fringes of anarchism who felt they needed the intellectual security blanket of post-Marxist jargon (which they called theory). However, it was practical rather than theoretical in emphasis and its members made a very positive contribution to the radical politics of the time including the Committee of 100 and the Spies for Peace.

A fortnight after Easter I took part in a national anarchist conference hosted by the Bristol anarchists and attended by about 80 delegates from local groups. It re-established the Anarchist Federation of Britain as a loose association concentrating on pooling information and joint propaganda activities. I was elected to the six-person bureau as international secretary. Since an election was due later that year, an anti-parliamentary campaign was an obvious idea. We swapped slogans like “Vote for Guy Fawkes, the only honest man to enter Parliament” and “Why vote? It only encourages them”.

It was a busy time. I was approached by Stanley Hyland, a BBC2 producer planning a series of interviews with minority youth groups (others included Moral Rearmers and Communists) called *Let Me Speak*. He’d read my introduction to anarchism, which had been reprinted in *Anarchy*, edited by Colin Ward, and invited me to find six more young anarchists to be interviewed by Malcolm Muggeridge in July 1964. We were paid £25 each with an extra £25 for me as the organiser of the panel.

I suppose I could have tried to exclude people I disagreed with but I didn’t and in any case my brief was to make the panel as representative as possible. So two of the six I recruited were Vincent Johnson from Liverpool (who you probably haven’t heard of) and Stuart Christie from Glasgow (who you probably have) – two traditional anarchists in the sense that they supported “propaganda of the deed”, that is trying to assassinate the enemy *pour encourager les autres*. And in the period from 1936, when the war in Spain started, until 1975, when he died from natural causes, General Franco was the anarchists’ number one enemy (nobody knows how many anti-Franco plots there were* but they all failed, obviously). The four others, all Committee of 100 supporters, were Kate Saunders and Martin Small, both Oxford students, Adrian Cunningham, a Cambridge student, and Ian Vine, an engineering apprentice from Bristol. Martin, who wrote copiously for *Anarchy*, died a few years later from lung cancer after teaching history at a comprehensive school in Putney.

* and not just anarchist ones: an abortive communist one featured the British double agent Kim Philby (see *A Spy Among Friends*, Ben Macintyre, Bloomsbury 2014).

I was well aware of Stuart's views – we were members of the same anarchist group, after all. But what he didn't tell me when *Let Me Speak* was being recorded was that he had already been recruited to put these views into practice. By the time the programme was shown in early September 1964 Stuart was in a Spanish prison having been arrested in Madrid carrying a rucksack packed with explosives. During the recording Muggeridge had asked him if he meant what he said: would he, for example, given the opportunity, try to assassinate Franco? And Stuart had of course answered yes. He'd then gone back to Notting Hill – Mark Hendy's flat – picked up his rucksack and set off for Paris, where he collected the explosives that were intended to do precisely this.

In his own account of these events* Stuart admits to second thoughts: "Presented with the same question today, with a little more wisdom, I'm not sure that I would do the same thing. I didn't know exactly what I was signing up to. I thought I knew the risks I was running personally (although, as it turned out, I had underestimated the odds against me) but I must confess, I did not spend much time considering unforeseen consequences – the possibility of innocent victims or the unleashing of an even more horrific repression on the people of Spain." (pp122-3)

**Granny Made Me an Anarchist*, Scribner, 2004. In spite of a few inaccuracies this is a good read – highly recommended. The book and three more detailed accounts on which it is based are now included in the Stuart Christie Memorial Archive, housed in the MayDay Rooms, Fleet Street, London. Stuart died from lung cancer in 2020.

When *Let Me Speak* was broadcast, Stuart's contribution was edited out because of his self-incriminating words. But simply by appearing in a British TV studio in July he had raised his own profile and made it much more likely that his activities would be monitored by Special Branch. And as he reports, information was routinely passed on by the British to their Spanish counterparts. "We have a lot of information on you from Scotland Yard's Special Branch as well as our own people in Britain and France," he was told after his arrest.

The monitoring could have started even earlier. Stuart describes an encounter with the branch's anarchist specialist, Detective-Sergeant Roy Cremer, at a London demonstration in June 1964 (so before the recording of *Let Me Speak*) – "the first time I had been arrested (for shouting abuse and not moving on when threatened by the police)". (p115) And long before that (p72) Stuart describes taking part in an attempt to pull Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell off the platform at the 1962 May Day demonstration in Queen's Park, Glasgow. Stuart was "unceremoniously ejected from the park" by the police and "an identifiable picture of me made the centre spread of the *Daily Record* the next day".

In fact, there was nowhere in Britain where an anarchist interested in the Spanish question would be more likely to become known to the Spanish authorities than Glasgow where "the anarchists organised regular demonstrations against the arrest and torture of Spanish labour militants in the office of the Spanish Vice-Consul, which more often than not ended with our occupying the building and handing over petitions". (pp106-7)

From Stuart's account there's no doubt that the assassination plot had been infiltrated since the American Express office near where he was arrested was full of plainclothes policemen waiting for him when he collected his mail. But then he was used as bait to keep the planned meet with his contact, presumably because they didn't know the person's identity. So I'm still not quite clear exactly who knew what and how they knew it.

I found out that Stuart had been arrested on my way back from the Alès anarchist summer camp (in Bayonne I'd bought the only available English newspaper, the *Daily Express*, mainly to check the cricket scores). So I hitched down to Madrid where he was being held, called in at the British embassy, was refused permission to see Stuart in the infamous Carabanchel prison, then made my way back to London. There I joined the defence committee for him and the Spanish anarchist arrested with him, Fernando Carballo Blanco. We organised pickets and marches, concentrating on the authoritarian nature of Spain's regime and the fact that Stuart and Carballo were being tried by a military court and faced the death penalty by garrotte. There were those, notably my friend John Rety, an editor of the anarchist paper *Freedom*, who for some reason started off naively insisting that Stuart couldn't possibly have done what he was accused of – but gradually even John got the obvious message.

Then came the trial, which lasted all of three hours, the guilty verdicts (hardly a surprise) and the sentences – 20 years in prison for Stuart, 30 years for Carballo. In the event Stuart served a week or two more than three years and was released in September 1967 in response to a general campaign for clemency and in particular a personal letter to Franco from his mother. His return to Britain was greeted by a media scrum at the airport with Stuart being rescued from the heavies of the *Scottish Daily Express* by an equally robust group of anarchists including John Rety, Albert Meltzer (an ex-boxer) and Mark Hendy (who was arrested for punching a reporter)*. Next day Benedict Birnberg, the radical lawyer, who had handled Stuart's case from the beginning and had flown to Madrid to escort him home, asked me to negotiate the sale of his story. Stuart needed the money "to recover some of the legal expenses and the money Mum had sent to me in prison". (p256)

*Mark adds: "I was released without charge after the man, from the *Daily Telegraph*, accepted that, contrary to what he'd been shouting at us, we weren't thugs there to capture Stuart's story for the *Express.* I apologised for the thump and he for the abuse."

Sitting in Ben's London Bridge office I spoke in person or by phone to various journalists. Stuart's preference (and mine) would have been for Paul Foot who was then freelancing for the *Sunday Times* as well as working for *Private Eye*; we both knew him and I was confident that he would write an accurate and sympathetic piece. But unfortunately the *Sunday Times* could not (or would not) compete with the tabloids when it came to buying stories: Paul's suggestion of "expenses" up to £125 fell well short. Of the papers that were interested, the *Scottish Daily Express* was definitely not what Stuart wanted – and their man only offered £300 anyway. So the deal went to the *People* for £600 (about what you'd pay then for a modest new car) for three articles on successive Sundays.

Part of the agreement was that the proofs of the articles would be checked to avoid naming somebody who might suffer as a result, eg by being identified as a "terrorist". But that was the only concession – what Stuart had signed up for was a version of events over which he had no control. As he put it: "Any resemblance between what I told Dennis [Cassidy] and what was published in the *People* was coincidental. I was portrayed as some kind of prison baron who led the life of a sybarite,

waited on hand and foot by flunkies..." (p258) On the first pre-publication Saturday night, since Stuart was still in the hands of the hacks, I went with Margaret Hart of the Notting Hill anarchists to the *People*'s printers in Covent Garden to check the proofs – but all we could do was satisfy ourselves that nobody vulnerable to prosecution had been named.

There was a PS to the *People* story, not mentioned in Stuart's book. He later gave Paul Foot an account of how the material for the articles had been gathered which was published in *Private Eye.* As the editor Richard Ingrams later explained, the two reporters assigned to the story "accompanied Christie back to his home city of Glasgow. The three men spent the night on the town, ending up in a brothel where Christie had sex with a prostitute at the *People*'s expense." When the *People* reporters sued for libel they had their alibi shot to pieces and their evidence described as "unsatisfactory" – though they were still awarded £500 damages each.*

*"One in the Eye", Richard Ingrams, *Guardian ,* 1 October, 2005

Britain's general election came in October 1964, the month after Stuart's conviction. In North Kensington the Notting Hill anarchists took an energetic part in the anti-parliamentary campaign working jointly with the west London working group of the Committee of 100. The idea wasn't just to persuade people not to vote but to use the occasion to campaign for what we believed in. We published a "Why vote?" leaflet, which I wrote, ran public meetings in the Portobello Road market and – most fun of all – launched a night-time campaign to get the message across by putting our slogan "Why vote? It's a double X" on the walls of North Kensington. My partner in this particular crime was Jay Ginn*, who drove the getaway vehicle, a small campervan. We used a wooden board with letters cut out of foam; then we lowered the board gently onto a flat open tin of white paint and applied the board to the wall. Voila! Truly the most sophisticated and literate graffiti in London.

*Jay also appears in Chapters 4 & 9.

When the results came in, Harold Wilson's Labour party winning the election with a tiny national majority, we congratulated ourselves because turnout in North Kensington had gone down from 67.8% in 1959 to 61.32% in 1964; the Labour MP, George Rogers, kept his seat. However, if you look up the 1959 results, you'll see that there was an extra candidate then, Oswald Mosley, which must have affected the general turnout.

By this time I was a supply teacher in east London, though only briefly. Out of the blue I had a phone call from an Oxford friend who'd done some reporting shifts at the *Daily Mail*. "They're running a graduate training scheme in their Manchester office," he told me. "It's started but they're one short – why don't you apply?" I couldn't think of a reason not to so I did. I was interviewed by Derek Ingram, then deputy editor but soon to leave the *Mail* when he refused to implement the paper's new pro-white Rhodesia policy. Since Ingram was a liberal, I seemed on the surface to be the kind of recruit he was looking for; fortunately he didn't ask about the Committee of 100 and my convictions, in either sense of the word. And I did have a reasonable CV for an absolute beginner: some holiday work experience on my local weekly newspaper, the *Sevenoaks News*; interviewing practice, as described above; and lots of published pieces in student papers. So in a bewilderingly short time I found myself on a train to Manchester to become for nine months a trainee reporter.

What I didn't realise then was that my fellow trainees had all spent some time on local and regional papers where they'd learnt the basics of professional news reporting – and that at the *Mail* there wasn't going to be much of an organised training programme. Effectively "trainee reporter" meant somebody we can afford to pay less than a trained reporter (and naturally we hope they turn up trumps).

On the political front, although I went to some anarchist meetings in Manchester and London*, I gradually stopped seeing myself as a militant – because clearly I wasn't one any longer. Decision day came a month or so after I started at the *Mail* when I got a call from reception saying there was a police officer downstairs who wanted to speak to me. He'd travelled up from the Harrow Road police station in London with a warrant for my arrest if I didn't pay the £25 fine I'd incurred for invading the Marham air base some 18 months before. I didn't hesitate. Fortunately I had my chequebook with me and I wrote out a cheque for £25 (exactly one week's wages). It was obvious that the PC was extremely relieved that he didn't have to escort me all the way back to west London – with or without handcuffs.

*For example, in March 1965 I took part in the second annual conference of the Anarchist Federation of Britain, though I was no longer international secretary. It was held in the congenial surroundings of Ronnie Scott's jazz club in Soho.

By now (late autumn 1964) the Committee of 100's life, as a vibrant part of the anti-nuclear movement, was coming to an end, although activities in solidarity with the Greek peace movement continued. On 2 April 1967 50-60 demonstrators carried out "a non-violent invasion" of the Greek embassy in protest against weasel Wilson's immediate recognition of the far right government that followed the Colonels' coup d'état. But increasingly in the 1960s the Vietnam War replaced the bomb as the target of the entire British left from the Communists to the anarchists. As Grosvenor square replaced Trafalgar square the Committee of 100 wound itself up.

So far as I know there is no history of the Committee of 100 as a separate phenomenon, though it figures in various broader accounts, notably *Against the Bomb, The British Peace Movement 1958-1965*, Richard Taylor, Oxford: Clarendon, 1988, and it's an important element in various memoirs, the latest being Natasha Walter's *Before the Light Fades*, Virago, 2023. In a sense that's appropriate since the Committee didn't come out of nowhere and nor did it fizzle out without influence on what happened afterwards. As many people have pointed out, Committee activists went on to all sorts of radical campaigns from squatting to the underground press, not to mention the anti-war movement (Vietnam, Northern Ireland etc). And there is an unmistakable thread that connects the Committee with the Greenham Common peace camp and Extinction Rebellion. But here are a few points that occur to me.

1. The illegal September 1961 occupation of Trafalgar Square by 12,000 (or even 15,00 according to some accounts) demonstrators is seen as the Committee's highest point. But nobody knows how many people were only there because the demo had been banned. Certainly one Oxford student I knew told me at the time: "I'm only here because the government says I can't be." And Natasha Walter quotes Diana Shelley as saying: "I went on it because it had been banned. It was a civil liberties issue for me."
2. On the positive side Committee demos made civil disobedience accepted, even routine. But for most people this was a weekend activity: you could sit down in Whitehall on Saturday;

pay your fine and be back at work on Monday. The wild and hopeful rhetoric of "when arrested don't cooperate: don't give your name; fill the jails" was a hopeless failure from the beginning. After Brize Norton (1961), there were just five of us in Oxford prison: two veterans of the DAC (Will Warren and Laurens Otter) plus three students. And after Marham (1963) I was the sole Oxford student in prison on remand (a St Clare's student who was sent to Holloway was pressurised into accepting bail).

3. The foot soldiers of the Committee (as opposed to mature/aging luminaries like Bertrand Russell, Herbert Read and Barbara Smoker) tended to be born in the early 1940s. Here's an account by Nicolas Walter of the April 1961 sitdown: "By 3.45 about 2,500 people were defying the police order to disperse...Our average age can't have been much over 20." And it's striking that, of the six women interviewed by Sam Carroll for her *Oral History* article, one was born in 1943, three in 1942 and one (Jay G) in 1939 (Barbara S is the outlier, born in 1923). In the Oxford Committee the point is even clearer and more emphatic: apart from DAC veterans like Will Warren and Laurens Otter we were all war babies born in 1939-45. As students, we were relatively free to act (only occasional ones had dependants) but that would only be true for three years or so. In my case going to prison as a student was possible; a prison sentence while working would have meant unemployment.
4. In political terms young people, and particularly students, can be volatile. There are copious examples from Oxford. Richard Kirkwood had recently discovered anarcho-syndicalism, joined the Committee of 100, became a Marxist & joined what became International Socialism. Gaby Charing was a founder member of the anarchist group but a year after leaving Oxford had become a gay activist instead. One Jewish member of the anarchist group went to Israel in the Long Vac & discovered the kibbutzim which became a replacement for him. Martin Small reversed my journey (from Catholicism to anarchism) & became a fervent Catholic. Inevitably, this volatility had an effect on the membership of something like the Committee of 100, which was always a loose and shifting set-up.
5. Whereas the original "official" ideology of the Committee was a blend of non-violence and non-hierarchical politics (gradually becoming less gentle and more anarchist), many of those who took part in the demonstrations did not share these views. Natasha W quotes Stuart Christie on the changes without noting that he had effectively swapped banning the British bomb for smuggling the parts for an anarchist one into Spain. I'm not even sure that the majority of students who supported the Oxford Committee were libertarians. Judy Green, for example, was a card-carrying CP member, as were various others, particularly at Ruskin. She wrote to me from Somerville when I was in Norwich prison after Marham: "Let me tell you that the party thinks you and Marham are super & has given lots of coverage." And Richard K was not the only IS member to be a strong Committee activist.
6. Finally, external events inevitably had a big influence on the whole peace movement. The Cuba crisis of October 1962, which had activists like Pat Arrowsmith running for the hills, led to disillusionment, lassitude, a general feeling of hopelessness. And the limited test ban treaty of 1963 gave anybody who wanted out the perfect excuse to retire from anti-nuclear politics.