

Chapter 12

Closer Links with Spain; Customs and Practice; Error and Terror; Satire; The Wooden Shoe; The Carrara Conference; The Vietnam Connection

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Closer Links with Spain

Through my contacts I had always known about the Spanish Resistance, but usually when they were already on trial for their activities. During the darkest days I managed to throw the occasional lifebelt of solidarity or publicity, but it was not until the worst of the postwar civil genocide was over, and the resistance of 1939-63 was finally crushed by Franco's police that my links became really close. Francisco Gomez had always been secretive, probably because he did not wish to compromise me too much. Most of the exiles in London were as out of touch as I

was. Sections of those in France were more knowledgeable, but I had no way of finding out which were which.

Customs and Practice

When Stuart Christie first came back to London, he had the sort of publicity for which aspiring film stars would give thousands of pounds, but not a penny in his pocket, so when the first flurry of excitement with the press was over, he came to work with me in the Coptic Street bookshop, then on its last legs, more to help bury than to raise it. When finally I turned it in and went to Fleet Street, he went to work for the gas contractors William Press, then converting the South of England to North Sea Gas. Special Branch had decided by then that, contrary to the hopeful stories in which they had acquiesced, Spain had not returned them a good citizen and they were convinced he would introduce 'terrorism' to these tranquil shores. Wasn't terrorism what Anarchists were all about?

This presumption, originating among the Edwardian fiction writers, had become a fixation of the secret political police and dominated my life for years. Even when I went on holiday abroad, I faced a grueling cross-examination and search every time I came back. It had the opposite effect of that intended. Instead of being intimidated, I complained up hill and down dale and even on occasions received apologies, though the system was in no way reformed.

Evie had always enjoyed such Customs searches, helpfully explaining on one occasion she herself was only a spy, not an anarchist. I fear humor was in short supply at Harwich, and they even took the car tires off for examination and still weren't satisfied. I got increasingly short-tempered at the wasted time after several such incidents. I could accept that in East Berlin or Moscow where there was an official censorship it was to be expected, and indeed a compliment, but here anarchist literature was subject to no restriction except when one passed an official point.

Anarchist literature only? On one occasion a friend, a remand prisoner, asked me to send him a copy of Lady Antonia Fraser's *Cromwell* and the jail authorities refused to allow it in. I wrote to the press about it, and a bewildered Lady Antonia intervened. I suppose the late Lord Protector might be regarded as a revolutionary by some but hardly this biographer.

Lest supporters of an infinitely worse dictatorship than Oliver's be discouraged by this, I hasten to say that there are not and never have been problems, even in war-time, in sending Hitler's *Mein Kampf* to any prisoner, convicted, remanded or interned.

Audrey, whose brushes with the authorities up to then had only extended to official disapproval of her constantly altering the date of birth on her US passport, and claiming she was sure Liz Taylor did the same without any bother, felt I was paranoid about Customs. Then one day, after a carefree week in France, she drove through with me in her car, instead of having to go separately (she in the non-UK queue) as we had to do when foot passengers. We had nothing dutiable and all I had were a few posters and a book but they were enough. She got closely questioned about plans for the Battle of Naseby she had picked up in a Paris bookstall. Even being an ardent Cavalier came under suspicion when coupled incongruously with anarchism.

My patience with Customs came to a head at Dover once, after spending forty-five minutes arguing about whether political literature printed legally in the United Kingdom could freely come back in without censorship. They finally, but reluctantly, conceded it could and quite irrelevantly -- I was sure maliciously -- also decided I would have to pay duty on a lone bottle of liqueur unmentioned before. On hearing this, I drank the lot on the spot instead while they were searching the car. Fortunately somebody else was available to drive home. I was out like a light until waking next morning with a splitting headache.

I never could persuade the Customs of the axiom "Gedenken sind zollfrei", so how could I persuade them about a bottle of Spanish liqueur? Once at Harwich when I quoted "Thoughts go custom free" they asked me who said so, and I replied "Goethe". I was told, for once courteously, that German law did not apply this side of the Channel.

When I raised the whole matter with the Customs and Excise in London they told me with a shrug that "people look at these things differently in the sticks". But my complaints were of places like Heathrow, Gatwick, Dover, Harwich, all major international points of entry. I was enabled to raise these matters with written evidence before a Parliamentary Commission, but heard nothing further. The last official word I had on the subject was that nothing would be done about it until after

we entered the Common Market, which did indeed enable one to move freely about Europe but otherwise altered the system not one iota. It would seem the principle that used to be laid down to would-be declared Freethinkers by the Army still holds, "You're free to think what you like but once you're here you've got to put C of E or something else sensible on your tag".

If the Special Branch Customs checks were bad enough before I teamed up with Stuart Christie, they increased afterwards. To go with him through the British points of entry in those days would try the patience of a saint. They did not even expect to find anything but merely asked questions that led nowhere. On returning from a Venice conference, we had a lengthy argument in which we asked repeatedly what interest there could be on books which were free of tax. They seized triumphantly on a book dealing with Lesbianism in the feminist movement, in the baggage of one of the women with us, saying "You can't possibly seriously expect to take this into England". She countered with an unspoken but unanswerable comment of opening the book displaying that it came on loan from Brixton Library.

I suppose the crux of foolishness came once, when I was traveling alone, and a young Customs official told me I could not bring (perfectly sober) books on anarchist theory into England and asked if (the ultimate horror) I had the intention of reprinting them here. This after 150 years unbroken publishing of anarchist books! I asked her to show me the regulations and she pointed out one relating to horror comics. I exploded at this nonsense, and she apologized, saying she had got the wrong paragraph, "an innocent mistake", pointing out instead the regulation relating to pornography! "It all comes under that", she explained helpfully. I threw the regulations at her angrily and she brought out the Special Branch officer, an expert on these matters. He picked up a (bourgeois) book on the Spanish war and solemnly explained "a lot of blood was shed there at the time". Maybe as this also applied to the Battle of Naseby it clarified why maps of it might be too exciting for the twentieth century lest it give ideas, and why Cromwell was too risky for an Irish remand prisoner to read about instead of the normal prison diet of American horror comics.

Going into Ireland by the Welsh car ferry, I was held up while they searched the car after finding one or two books in the boot. They ultimately found a beret which Miguel Garcia had lent me once when it was raining. It hadn't fitted. I had put it in

the boot and forgot about it. "This is somewhat provocative to take into Ireland," remarked the alert Special Branch officer, making me feel thankful I hadn't got a mackintosh as well. I showed him the inside label, and pointed out that it was a Basque beret anyway. Basque? I couldn't have said anything worse. "They're terrorists too, aren't they?" he asked immediately, and this even before he asked me how to spell it (I naturally said B-A-S-K, I wasn't going to let him get the credit of sending in a literate report from "the sticks").

Error and Terror

This dictum of the authorities that anarchism was synonymous with terrorism, or terrorism with anarchism, so that the admission of being one was an admission of the other, was gradually to find its way into the judicial jargon. In two important trials, in which I was to figure, it was certainly held by the judges and prosecuting (even defense) counsel, and refuted by myself (brought in solely as a witness), but I will deal with that later. Meanwhile whenever I appeared as a witness or bailee, the same old dreary arguments were heard.

In one case an elegant Old Etonian counsel asked a Post Office worker and an anarchist Dave Morris (years later featuring in the McDonalds libel case) if his beliefs entailed "burning down the Post Office" (it hadn't been burned, he was just a witness in an obstruction case). Dave retorted, "What a stupid thing to say! If someone burned down the post office, no one would get any letters. We believe in workers control of the postal system". The magistrate tactfully ignored prosecuting counsel being addressed as stupid, a privilege normally reserved for outside the court afterwards and then involving defense counsel.

The press had invented the shock-horror anarchist in the first place at the turn of the century. It depicted the attacks by anarchist workers against bloody repression by their rulers as unprovoked and senseless attacks by crazed individuals elevated into a philosophy. The press got itself into a twist, using the Portuguese Republicans at a particular period as their archetypal anarchist, but also confusing the Russian nihilists and populists with anarchists. Basically, though, it was the fight by the pre-WWI French, Italian and Spanish workers using individual actions against mass repression that excited the imaginations of the press. Surely nobody could be so wicked as to hold the actual individuals wielding power responsible for the

actions they personally ordered? If there were such malefactors, they must be crazed, criminal and depraved monsters, believing only in violence for the sake of violence! The just response to the wickedness of dictators was the slaughter of millions of the subjects they had conquered. That remains the official doctrine until this day.

Yet many of the same newspapers in their literary columns became fond of the term "the gentle anarchists" when writing of the occasional self-confessed anarchist who wrote a book or was written about. The Listener wrote an article on Stuart Christie as a "gentle anarchist" but reminded its readers that under a charming exterior he was a hard-liner who was in touch with international anarchists. It was clear that for them it was his association with foreigners that did the trick.

The phony anarchists coming out of the peace movement preferred to refer to themselves as "nonviolent anarchists" which added to the judges' view of anarchism as violent. One learned judge even asked me once which sort of anarchist I was, "violent" or not. Imagine him asking the question of a socialist or a conservative! If one denied believing in violence as such, yet accepting its need on certain occasions, one was echoing the view of possibly 99.9 per cent of the population which neither believed in extreme nonviolence nor were mad axmen, but apparently anarchists were not allowed the luxury of ever being in line with the majority viewpoint.

Satire

In 1965 a group of us had got together and started publishing occasionally a review *Cuddon's Cosmopolitan Review*. The reference was to Ambrose Cuddon, whose review may have been the first consciously anarchist one to appear in English, and who was possibly the first in the English speaking world to be an anarchist in the modern sense. He was certainly a connection between the Luddite and Chartist movements on the one hand, and the newer non-Parliamentary Socialist groupings on the other. Our historical judgment was criticized as based only on anecdotal history from veterans but knowing how conventional history is concocted I doubt if it suffered from that.

We carried on *Cuddon's* for a year or so, off and on, Ted Kavanagh editing, and it became a focus for people interested in the international struggle even though it

refrained from mentioning it. We never quite decided whether it was to be entirely satirical, political or humorous, but the mixture made for interest and gathered a nucleus which later became an important pivot of active anarchism. One decision, though, not to publish more than was sold, so as to encourage people to read it rather than file it, and not to have back copies for reference, meant once it was gone it sank out of sight which was a pity. Some generations on, it would be good to reprint some of the witty pieces.

Cuddon's was one of the first of the satirical magazines later in vogue, not that we ever were, but nothing I was ever associated with ever got into the market place, even when I wanted to be. However, it led to some aspiring careerist pupils at the upper-class Winchester School setting up their bid for journalism in the school magazine, on the basis of a series of stories mimicking the supposed anarchist set-up. Its humor consisted of using the forenames of actual people, an in-joke which must have bewildered other Wykehamists who couldn't possibly have known them.

The leading character was a bankrupt swindler, "Uncle Albert", which was supposed to be me, and the cream of the jest was "Stuart" -- who could that be? -- as a crazed terrorist. The schoolboys' contributor, a failed artist working as a bus conductor, was in his late fifties at the time. The schoolboys, who aimed at becoming *Private Eye* contributors and ended as advertising agents, had their fun with the author for the price of a few pints. It never occurred to Arthur Moyse, the person concerned, that he was in any way grassing with giving distinguishable forenames, but perhaps he thought fiction excused all. Unfortunately, some people took him seriously and my home was attacked one night by a bunch of yelling public school yobs in a van from Winchester School. The neighbors, a Black family having an all-night party, thought it was racists coming to break it up, and before I could get out of bed they had rushed out to give the gentlemanly twits a good beating. It took some persuasion to make the police understand my version, but not being the West End where money spoke loudest, they eventually did.

Next day my friend Annie, who had also been woken up, felt if practical jokes were in order she should have her ten cents worth too, sent a telegram to Moyse to say I had died in an attack on the house and would he attend my funeral at a far distant cemetery at 7 a.m. in the morning. He shamefacedly turned up to a non-existent

meeting-point which quite ruined his day. There was no way she could interfere with morning prayers at Winchester School or she'd have had them there too.

The Wooden Shoe

One result of *Cuddons* was that Ted, with Anna Blume and Jim Duke, set up the Wooden Shoe Bookshop. It was still possible to open shops, this one in the heart of West Central in unreconstructed New Compton Street, with neither capital, premium or deposit. Even so, it was desirable to have enough put by to pay the rent and rates when due, which finally scuppered this bookshop as it did my commercial ones.

A few years later the Wooden Shoe might have been a viable if not profit-making proposition with its policy of selling books relating to Anarchism and related topics. But at the time there was little variety to offer, and what there was could be found on the bottom shelves in other establishments. To get customers it had to find more stock and this had to be Marxist or nonpolitical literary, and meant running up debts to publishers which eventually swamped the venture. Before Ted and Anna closed down with a cryptic note saying "Gone fishing" there were a few far-reaching events. As a meeting place rather than as a bookshop, it influenced the beginnings of new squatting movement, created a least a diversion on the anti-Vietnam War movement and led to the black flag flying over the barricades in Paris. Not bad for an under-capitalized, mismanaged and loss-making bookshop that scarcely existed a year!

The French Connection

Impressed by the attention suddenly, flatteringly and quite undeservedly given to the anarchists by the press over the Vietnam demo (to which I will come), a few French students came to London to find out how it was done. As we now had a center, they could come to the Wooden Shoe bookshop, and they turned up for discussions. The only advice we gave, or could give, was to point out it was organized workers, not students preparing for bourgeois careers, who would be able to change society. They also met the Situationists, who told them the exact reverse.

When the students went back they followed their own instincts and the result was the rising in the Universities that sparked off the workers' rising and barricades in

Paris leading to the black flag flying from public buildings, a roadshow version of the Paris Commune of 1871, if not as important as political commentators deemed it to be. One of the students concerned, certainly the most voluble of those who came to the Wooden Shoe, was Daniel Cohn-Bendit (like 'Red Emma' he got called 'Danny the Red' because of his hair, but people concluded it was because of his politics) got the full glare of publicity as if he had been solely responsible for the mini-revolution of 1968. In fact, he was singled out as a 'leader' by the press because he was a German Jew, and they hoped this would prejudice the workers, but it didn't, and by misfiring made him a 'petit grand homme'. The British press did the same thing with Tariq Ali more successfully, claiming he was a student, or even a revolutionary, leader, though he only led a minor dissident Trotskyist group. Both were surpassed by the German press which, though it had no racial target left to shoot at, induced the actual shooting of the alleged 'student leader' Rudi Dutschke.

The Carrara Conference

The marble workers of Carrara, who quarry the sculpture for the majority of Roman Catholic churches in Europe but were always the most rugged skeptics and opponents of Church and State, came to accept anarchism in its very earliest days. Bakunin and Cafieri had given expression to what was a fundamental conviction of the local workers, many of whom had by emigration spread the idea to other countries. It had resisted the pre-war monarchy and its demands for human sacrifice for its wars of aggression. It had fought back against the fascisti who came as strike-breakers and stayed as a virtual army of occupation after the Mussolini conquest of Italy. But it never succumbed. At hillside festivals, families still met after their halls were seized. Partizan acts were planned during what seemed carefree picnics. When the opportunity came during the war, local partizan bands were formed, and people from Carrara and similar towns were wiping out fascist resistance long before the Allied troops turned up.

After the war it seemed as if all Carrara was anarchist. Gradually over the years the impetus was lost -- as everybody accepted the idea, what was the point of propaganda? Though electoral abstention meant the Communist Party was able to dominate the municipal administration, most municipal matters of significance

were controlled by local co-ops. Carrara was the obvious place to choose for an International Anarchist Conference. Its hall in the center of town originally seized from the fascisti during the re-occupation of Carrara even appeared on the picture postcards sold in the town, and there were statues of local and international anarchists in the main squares.

However, the international committee that had organized the conference had much the same ideas as those who for some years had controlled the anarcho-syndicalist international. They had no organizational base and were responsible to nobody, but for years their purely literary reputation as 'anarchist writers' had maintained them as a kind of invisible leadership on the basis of what can only be described as a personality cult. Kropotkin in WWI, answerable to nobody, caused immense harm to the movement by his ambivalent stand. Rocker, Rudiger, Souchy, Shapiro, had moved to a position scarcely distinguishable from social-democracy, if not some of them to a position wholly reactionary, yet were regarded as sacred cows one should not question. This had been possible in the days when the bulk of the movement in the Latin countries consisted of ill-educated workers who respected intellectuals, or in France, Italy and among the Spanish exiles where the rump of a civil war leadership kept the organization together. In modern conditions this had to give way.

As there was a kind of loose annual get-together of a conference in Britain, referred to as the Anarchist Federation, at that time as large and no more disorganized than that in France and equally ineffective, we were invited to attend. The *Cuddon's* group were responsible for putting forward two delegates, one of them Christie, who had been having enormous press publicity, and the other Cohn-Bendit. The committee had made sure he was excluded as a French delegate for the wrong reasons, not on the true grounds he was only ephemerally an anarchist, but because he was too much associated with anarchist activism, which meant something at the time, in Paris and elsewhere.

We accordingly granted him British citizenship to become our delegate -- when they protested at the "English sense of humor" we asked if they thought only the Queen had the right to grant citizenship. Federica Montseny, the ex-Minister, who had thought she would be the star attraction as the last of the personality cult, was particularly discomfited, especially when Christie and Cohn-Bendit got all the press

and public attention. The effect of the conference was to mark a breach with both the old bureaucratic tradition of established dissent, and the new pacifism, as opposed to genuine anarchism with its working class roots. The effects of the 'punk revolution' were yet to come and to change the anarchist scene disastrously. We never expected Cohn-Bendit to last the course -- he was too much the self-conscious star turn and eventually settled down to take his place as a careerist cashing on a youthful experience like so many pseudo-socialists -- but he was a useful symbol for a clash at the time. After the conference the International First of May movement was able to establish its contacts with one another having seen precisely where they differed from the rump of the old movement that had established one niche in society and the specter of a different one that was going to transform a far larger niche under the pretense of dropping out of it.

The Vietnam Connection

The highspot of the New Left was the famous anti-Vietnam War demonstration in 1968, organized by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, a movement of Trotskyist students who later became mandarins themselves. For months the press built up fantastic tales of what would happen. As it was going to be dominated by Trots and especially Tariq Ali's faction, we were pretty well determined to boycott it. We got a lot of fun out of the press following up their own inventions, having confused realities with a serial fiction story running in the *Evening News*. There was talk of guns being smuggled into London, though was never clear what they were to be used for. A coup, with this lot? Every journalist was on the look out for new sensations, most of them centering around Tariq Ali or Stuart.

The joke was that far from having guns, the anarchists then had practically no people. The weekenders were a closed book to us six days of the week. The student movement was more of a joke to us, though the *News of the World* managed to unearth that the anarchist 'leaders of the students' such as Stuart had not been to university themselves. They didn't notice they weren't purporting to lead any students either, nor did they. But as the old phony John Gordon admitted to me in a letter, when I pointed out to him that in his *Sunday Express* column he had confused Marxists and anarchists, they were all the same to him. He tried "not to be too pedantic".

The various left groups denied the stories of the guns, but none of them could be sure about the dreaded anarchists. Every one of them made reservations about what the anarchos might do, while for our part we cheerfully told the journos we not only had hidden arsenals but rogue elephants if they insisted on pestering us. One leaflet I issued, meant as a sarcastic comment on the *Evening News* story as followed up by the press, finished in the *Sunday Times* in full as an example of what was intended on the dreaded day. It included digging up Kew Gardens, playing American football on Lords cricket pitch, spreading the story in Irish pubs that they were poisoning the Guinness and blowing up Peter Pan's statue replacing it with an inscription, 'Fairies are a bourgeois illusion', all as part of a plot to destroy the English way of life. This was in all seriousness taken as an example of what 'the loonier sections' of the left were planning to do. Sadly they drew the line at our suggestion of using rogue elephants, no doubt thinking it unlikely we could obtain them in time.

Notwithstanding our being determined to do nothing about the anti-Vietnam War demonstration because it was so heavily dominated by supporters of Ho Chi Minh, in the finish as many anarchos turned up as if we had decided to participate, cheerfully chanting counter-slogans and attracting all the weekenders of those days. The *Daily Mail* had been sarcastic about the march because of its close association with Ho Chi Minh and said it could respect the people as believers in peace only if they opposed both sides. In point of fact, the anarchists did, and this led to a physical clash in the march reported in the selfsame *Daily Mail* under the headline "ANARCHISTS ATTACK PEACE MARCHERS".

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