

FreeVoices



- scott crow on anarchist mutual aid
- Stephanie Murphy and Sharon Presley on modern mutual aid
- Josh Fulton on past mutual aid in the US
- Raymond Solomon on African-Americans in the Spanish Civil War
- Book reviews: Windmills and Anarchy; Towards Collective Liberation

Mutual Aid Issue

"The mutual-aid tendency in man has so remote an origin, and is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history." —Peter Kropotkin

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FREE VOICES

In memory of
Clara and Sidney
Solomon

*Free Voices carries on the anarchist spirit
that inspired the lives of Clara and Sidney*

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FREE VOICES MISSION STATEMENT

Our purpose is to provide anarchists, as well as those outside of the anarchist movement who are sympathetic to or interested in our ideas, with a magazine that will

- reflect the struggles facing us today
- attempt to present a critical analysis of these struggles
- envision the transition to a libertarian society.

Our goal is to present anarchism as a "living and working philosophy." We want to engage people who are organizing themselves in a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian manner and who are committed to combating all forms of prejudice and bigotry, including ageism, sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia within their communities.

Our agenda is inspired by the anarchist vision of a society of freedom and equality.

See the *Free Voices* website www.freevoicesmagazine.com/about.php for more information about our editorial policy and about Clara and Sidney Solomon.

Anarchism and Mutual Aid: Commentary and Overview

Mutual Aid—It's for Everyone

One of the most common criticisms of anarchism (and libertarianism) is that it is too utopian, too impractical; it can never work, they say. Few people can imagine how the services that people need in any society could be provided except by government. This is especially true of services for the poor—welfare, health care, etc. Only government is capable of helping the poor, they say. Yet such social services have in fact been provided by private groups before in American history and still do. There is a rich history of charity and mutual aid groups in the US that few people know about. Whether such groups could be substituted for government welfare is the subject of another analysis. The first step is be aware of and communicate about the services that have existed and do exist.

Josh Fulton looks at some examples of past mutual aid and fraternal societies that have existed in the US. People helping each other, in groups based on work, ethnicity, or other common bonds, providing health and even death insurance, and benefits in time of unemployment. African-Americans had health insurance groups that provided services for their marginalized groups at amazingly low costs. What happened to such groups? Around the turn of the 20th century, state socialism became the hottest new thing, infatuating many and eating away at traditional individualistic beliefs in self-responsibility. Under the Roosevelt regime, government programs became rampant. The private groups didn't fail; they were co-opted through the power of government.

But as Stephanie Murphy and I show, there are still many ways that mutual aid is practiced in this country. Stephanie shows through description of many everyday activities that are in fact examples of mutual aid that we have much more power than we realize to help each other. I look at some mutual aid organizations that have grown up in recent times—worker collectives, worker-owned companies, service groups for those who have little money, and—so unnoticed—the many nonprofit service organizations that provide many services for their communities, and especially the poor and disadvantaged. Too many people act like such groups don't even exist. They are invisible to the proponents of Big Government.

Scott Crow takes it a step further and describes the many ways that anarchists have created mutual aid groups. The most spectacular success was the Common Ground Collective in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Volunteers from all over the



country came to help the marginalized people that government ignored. But they didn't just provide charity; with the slogan "Mutual Aid not Charity," they helped the community to help themselves

rebuild. Common Ground was far more successful and effective at helping the people in need than were the laughable FEMA or the overwhelmed Red Cross. It is one of the most compelling statements in favor of private aid services ever seen. Yet how many people know about it? Very few. Some journalists were interested, some word got out but the average person doesn't realize that it was Common Ground that saved New Orleans not FEMA and the US Government.

For those who want to read more about the history of mutual aid and private social services, I've provided a brief reading list. The reading list is eclectic since the idea of private aid is appealing to people of many different political views, including conservative, libertarian, and anarchist. Not liberals, however,



they're still fantasizing about how if we just get the right guy in power, everything will be swell. No matter that they got the "right guy" and things are not swell at all. Government spying is worse under Obama than Bush. The US military is still in

Afghanistan. Obamacare, however well-meaning it was supposed to be, is poised on the brink of bankrupting the country even further and instituting a bureaucratic mess of gigantic proportions never seen before in an already heavily bureaucratized society. Liberals and progressives are the real Utopians in the worst sense of the word. They hunger for something that can never exist. Yet they hang on to their pathetic hope in what is really a religious fervor.

The real way out of the mess we are in is through people power—individuals helping each other; individuals working together on the community level; people who work together to provide a hand up not a handout.

—Sharon Presley, Managing Editor

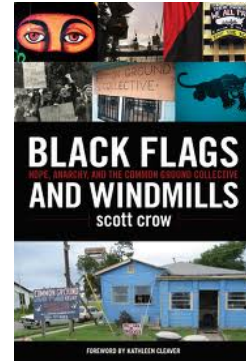
COMING NEXT ISSUE: ANARCHISM AND AUTHORITY

- Why People Obey Authority
 - Why People Resist Authority
 - Educating for Resistance
 - Anarchist Resistance
 - Emma, Sasha and Solzhenitsyn
- and more...

scott crow

Anarchist Mutual Aid

Mutual Aid in Times of Crisis: Ecological, Economic and Political



“The mutual-aid tendency in man has so remote an origin, and is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history.”

— Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*

“Every daring attempt to make a great change in existing conditions, every lofty vision of new possibilities for the human race, has been labeled Utopian”

— Emma Goldman

A Peek into Some Histories

This essay is to be seen as a cursory introduction, sketches if you will, to the long anarchist histories of mutual aid, specifically in the context of responding to disasters or crisis; so that we, as contemporary anarchist movements, may see ourselves as building on these long traditions in worlds where the unexpected is always with us. I encourage the readers to research these sketches for themselves to explore the rich depths of shared responsibilities that we have within our milieu.

Cooperation or mutual aid amongst various human and non-human animals has been documented across many diverse fields of science over the last 100 or so years from disciplines such as anthropology and social theory to politics and evolutionary biology. Animals across millennia have and will cooperate for mutual benefit and interest. This happens to include us humans as well. Despite living under economic and cultural systems that reward sociopathic behavior, self-interest and narcissism (see your average Fortune 500 CEOs and politicians for examples of these behaviors) and is continually reinforced by the media, culture industry and economists. Voluntary cooperation appears at every turn in many forms everywhere. People do care for each other when it matters and willingly work together for their mutual betterment in a variety of ways. From community gardens, cooperative work sharing, intentional communities, helping with child care, to sharing food and disaster relief and support to name but a few quick examples.

For anarchists, Peter Kropotkin’s seminal book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, published in 1902, became the starting point of naming the collective endeavors and giving them a social and political reference. These underpinnings provided a foundation for an outgrowth of anarchist philosophical and political

practices rooted in cooperation that was tied to collective liberation.

Anarchist Black Cross

Mutual aid in times of disaster appears in the early days of the Russian Revolution with the formation of the Anarchist Black Cross. The ABC broke from the relief efforts of the International Red Cross in Russia and the Ukraine shortly after the revolution due to the IRC’s refusal to support prisoners, especially anarchist political prisoners who were in dire need of medical attention and food. The ABC stepped in to alleviate this problem, with autonomous chapters springing up across the world. The purpose of the chapters was to support the efforts by donating material aid, money, and bringing attention to the plight of the Russian prisoners. Today over 100 years later, autonomous ABC chapters still support political prisoners worldwide in a variety of ways.

Spanish Anarchists

In the 1930s the fascists tried to take control of Spain, which caused a civil war with the military, fascists and the church on one side and the anarchists, communists, socialists and supporters of a free Republic on the other. Immediately anarchists, who numbered in the millions, began collectively organizing civil society in the cities and the countryside based on the concepts of mutual aid for collective liberation. The war was a disaster for everyone, with huge shortages of food, access to medical services or even just access to schools for children. Through decentralized collective organizing, many of the basic needs and more were met by sharing resources, skills and services. Shops, food sharing, farming, industry, communication and community defense were just some of the forms used. Through mutual aid, millions of people across Spain were able to participate in working together to fight fascism, but more importantly, to reorganize civil society with these practices to meet their needs and support each other along the way. They were ultimately crushed by the colluding fascists and Communists, but for three years, provided thousands of examples of how mutual aid could exist within an anarchist framework.



Street Medics/ Food Not Bombs

During the 70s anti-nuke movements, many anarchist practices were adopted for the first time in wide scale mobilizations (although still under the dominant shadows of Communist stranglehold of the Left). At this time decentralized organizing, power sharing, affinity groups, and the birth and growth of two strands of mutual aid: street medics and Food Not Bombs, began. Street medics (people with varying degrees of medical practice from first aid training to doctors) had been informally around at protests since the late 60s but they really began to take active roles in supporting people who had been tear-gassed, beaten, trampled, or hurt by law enforcement brutality at mass demonstrations.



Food Not Bombs, rooted in its decentralized network of autonomous chapters to feed people worldwide, began feeding people in the early 70s (and continues today). FNB feeding people became common around anarchist-led protests of the anti-nuke movements in the streets as well as in deserts of indigenous lands where people were working to defend them from extraction of uranium for nuclear weapons. Both of these networks carried on the tradition of mutual aid in times of crisis on small scales, keeping the flames alive till the resurgence of mutual aid was to appear at the turn of the millennium.

Rise of Anarchist Mutual Aid Post-Seattle

The influence of anarchism had been gaining ground in the US since the 70s, but was accelerating rapidly in the 90s, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and dissolution of the former Soviet Union. Communist and Socialist organizations that had dominated Left organizing were having identity crises while younger generations of activists, inspired by movements like the Zapatistas in Mexico, were looking for new ways to engage in political discourse without top-down organizing models. When the World Trade Organization met in Seattle in 1999, anarchists were at the forefront of the mobilization organizing efforts. Two major shifts happened around Seattle. First it kicked off a new round of massive summit mobilizations of activists that had been growing worldwide against undemocratic neo-liberal policies (corporate globalization). Secondly anarchism had its coming-out party in the US. These mobilizations were attended by thousands of people, using anarchist decentralized power sharing ideas and practices, including, affinity group models, street medics, legal observes/teams and Food Not Bombs.

Well, where did all of the street medics, legal teams, action teams come from? Informal anarchist networks. It was beautiful to see thousands of people participating in mutual aid by sharing resources, information, skills, and burdens together in these moments. We essentially created temporary autonomous zones of spaces that were ours for days at a time, only for them to close at the end of the summit meetings. And these spaces,

autonomous spaces, opened repeatedly at event after event, with these mutual aid networks reforming to take action then receding back once the event was finished.

After Disasters and Crisis

Mutual aid for the 21st century, built on long anarchist traditions that had come before, began to look differently after the turn of the century and its rocky first decade. Disasters (man-made and ecological) both took their tolls on the psyche of the country, but a strange thing emerged along the way: grassroots, decentralized cooperation in dealing with these disasters outside of the state and the non-profit industrial complex. These efforts were rooted and nurtured in the post-Seattle anarchist movements and networks across the US.

Common Ground Collective

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in fall of 2005, people worldwide could see the failure of the US government's and the Red Cross's responses to the aftermath. The state criminalized desperate people, instead prioritizing

restoring law and order, rather than rescue and relief efforts. The Red Cross, with all its resources, was woefully inadequate and unresponsive to the dire needs, but managed to raise a billion dollars in donations in a few short weeks. All of which lead to a much greater disaster than the storm itself.



From the outset a few of us activists on the ground asked questions: Could these informal post-Seattle networks like street medics, Indymedia, Food Not Bombs, etc. be called to participate in disaster relief? Could street medics form a clinic; could that clinic become a hospital? Could Food Not Bombs feed people for the long term? It was questions like those that lead to reaching out to these mutual aid networks to bring supplies, people and resources. Decentralized relief efforts sprang up out of this chaos. One of them was the Common Ground Collective, the largest anarchist-inspired organization in modern US history.

Common Ground's foundational premises were simple: cooperation and support, mutual aid and solidarity, which were expressed through the slogan "Solidarity Not Charity." These informal mutual aid networks were called into action. Medics and health professionals of all types, legal teams, Indymedia reporters, open source computer programmers, micro radio installers, organizers and volunteers came, bringing supplies and people. Not just to help, but to work together with communities where lives had been destroyed, together in mutual aid and solidarity in providing relief and rebuilding. Common Ground cooperated with people for their futures. Over 28,000 volunteers came through in the first three years to support communities that had been devastated, neglected and ignored even before Katrina had ever hit. This was a mutual aid after crisis for the

21st century, built on long anarchist traditions.

Common Ground worked with individuals and neighborhoods on varied projects from community defense, gardens and trash clean-up to free schools, house gutting and eviction defense. What made Common Ground different than most other relief organizations was the conscious mutual aid component woven into its analysis and most of its practice. It was the simple ideas that marginalized communities just needed support and working together and that people can build collective liberation through mutual support.

Common Ground Collective was just another manifestation of these ideas, but it was to have a reverberating impact outside of the Gulf Coast as well, both through the stories of organization and the fact that tens of thousands of people had participated in the project over the years. These impacts would not be noticed until the next major disaster struck.

Occupy Wall Street

The next disaster was economic, not ecological: when Wall Street *banksters's* greed and financial ponzi schemes created a financial meltdown that drove the US into massive job losses, caused businesses to collapse, and life savings to evaporate, which all led to large scale home foreclosures and evictions. Spontaneously, it seemed, thousands rose up out of nowhere to retake public spaces by reclaiming the commons, gathering together in mutual aid in city after city. Millions of disaffected people supported the various movements under the umbrella name *Occupy* in September of 2011. Again, much like the efforts after Katrina, differing communities came together, working cooperatively to defend themselves, feed each other and to share experiences. Mutual aid emerged within campsites, eviction defense actions, in factories and in street protests across the country. Organizers who had been key within Common Ground (and many volunteers) during its heyday had gone back to their respective cities , and now were part of the Occupy decentralized organizing from coast to coast, building further on the ideas of mutual aid and solidarity.

The Occupy movements were the largest example of widespread mutual aid since the encampments of the 1930s during the depression just before the creation of the Works Program Administration where people worked cooperatively to stay fed, housed and exercised their power from below for support. Once the Occupy uprising began to recede, the people and organizations involved dissipated into new local organizing efforts which were to emerge publicly by late fall of 2012.

Occupy Sandy

As man-made climate change continues to make erratic weather patterns the new normal, many storms have gotten stronger worldwide. Hurricane Sandy, which struck the East Coast in late October, was one of those *super storms*. The devastation was across multiple states, affecting numerous cities along the



coastline and further. And much like Katrina, once the storm passed, the government and Red Cross response was dismal in smaller or more marginalized communities. The momentum from people within the Occupy movement founded Occupy Sandy. This effort was rooted in the models of the Common Ground Collective and other radical movements as personified by the slogan “ Mutual Aid Not Charity.” First responders went to the ignored communities, first setting up programs and projects built on cooperation and collective organizing in decentralized ways. After the immediate crisis abated, many within Occupy Sandy have stayed to support communities in their rebuilding efforts.

Disaster and Crisis Responses as a Conscious Path Forward

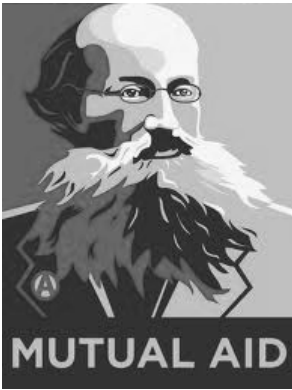
The ideas and practices of mutual aid are alive and well in the 21st century. Our capacity as humans to put our emergency hearts into action together will continue to propel us forward at mass mobilizations, in parking lots, within prisons, in community centers and disasters. We are wired for it and it's critical to maintain in our atomized civil society. Disasters especially will be at the forefront in some communities; being able to respond with mutual aid is central to helping at such times. Just as in larger civil society, no single organization or leader is going to do it.

As I write this, a massive tornado with the largest, most powerful wind force ever recorded to date just devastated parts of Oklahoma; more of the *new normal* created by rapidly changing climate. People around the country from Occupy movements and ex-Common Grounders, as well as other radicals and anarchists, once again set up decentralized mutual aid support with the communities affected for immediate relief and longer term rebuilding amongst the devastation. These spontaneous outpourings now have networks to rely on, histories to build from and people who have experience in dealing with crises.



Mutual Aid and the cooperation built on solidarity and collective liberation around disasters has become the *new normal*. For those of us engaged in anarchist organizing in the US it should consciously be added as one of the paths of how we engage within the prefigurative politics of trying to *build a new world in the shell of the old* and longer term organizing. These concepts, which are as old as life on this planet—that anarchists politically name as mutual aid—will continue to be needed for the survival and health of all of us in our day-to-day lives as we face uncertain futures; whether it's disasters , crises or just living.

scott crow has spent his varied life as an underground musician, co-op business owner, political organizer, trainer, strategist, consultant, writer and speaker advocating the philosophy and practices of anarchism for social, cultural, environmental, and economic aims. He is the author of the book *Black Flags and Windmills* (PM Press 2011). [See review, p. 20]



Stephanie Murphy

Mutual Aid for the Modern World

“In the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support – not mutual struggle—has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race.”

– Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*

What is Mutual Aid?

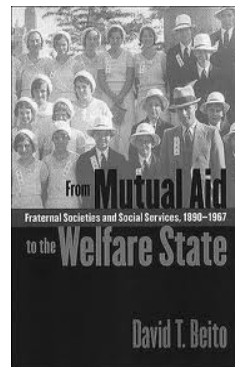
Mutual aid can be defined as the voluntary sharing of resources among a group for the benefit of all participants. “Mutual” refers to the idea that the sharing takes place in a reciprocal manner, and that associating with the group takes places on a voluntary and consensual basis. “Aid” references the nature of what is being exchanged: a resource that confers benefit to all those involved. It could be services, support, knowledge, items/physical goods, food, money, protection, other resources, or a combination thereof. Often, participants in mutual aid groups share a “common bond,” a value, idea, characteristic, interest, or something else that inspires them to connect with one another for everyone’s benefit.

Mutual aid is different from charity. The classic concept of charity is a gift of resources, meant to confer benefit or provide help with no expectation of direct return; mutual aid is a voluntary exchange with the expectation of reciprocal benefits for all those who participate.

The term “mutual aid” was coined in 1902 by Peter Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist writer who also dabbled in biology. In his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, Kropotkin wrote about instances of animals cooperating with one another for mutual benefit, instead of simply competing against each other for resources. He also saw this behavior in people, and argued that cooperation was crucial for the ability of species—including human beings—to evolve, survive, and thrive.

Historically, mutual aid has existed as a way to solve problems and meet needs in a voluntary manner, without employing a coercive government—garnering it favor among those who value human liberty. As David Beito argues in his book, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, governments gradually usurped many of

the social functions that were previously being fulfilled through mutual aid, including health insurance, life insurance, retirement



benefits, child education, transportation, and banking services. For many libertarians familiar with Beito’s and other works on mutual aid, the term conjures up images of lodge doctors, fraternal societies, and benefit clubs. Mutual aid was a way to increase the standard of living of all people. It was also a way to specifically uplift marginalized groups who may have faced systemic biases against them or had special needs, including people of racial and ethnic minorities, those with illnesses and

disabilities, queer people, and women.

The choice to participate in mutual aid projects was and has always been voluntary, so the historical prevalence of mutual aid organizations indicated their utility and success, since without robust participation they would not have continued. Whereas government is incapable of meeting the specific needs of diverse groups of people, and government welfare programs are not only entrenched in bureaucracy but also funded through coercive means (taxation), mutual aid projects are the opposite—specifically tailored to meet individuals’s needs, efficient, and completely voluntary. Mutual aid is and has always been a market-driven process. There are no central planners who dictate the formation of mutual aid groups or cooperatives. They arise spontaneously.

Today, it could reasonably be argued that the state has eroded much of the mutual aid activity that once took place and replaced it with the modern welfare state, at least in the developed world. However, I argue that modern technology has also opened avenues for new forms of mutual aid, and allowed us to re-envision the concept in novel ways for the benefit of all people. As a voluntary and market-driven process, modern mutual aid can take many different forms. It can have a very focused scope, for instance, a carpool or childcare co-op among a local neighborhood or a group of friends. Or, with the Internet, mutual aid can take place on a global scale—for example, micro-lending.

Examples of Modern Mutual Aid

Cooperatives are an excellent place to start when thinking about modern mutual aid; they provide fascinating examples of mutual aid in action, and they are currently quite popular. Most cooperatives today are still organized around seven core principles, sometimes called the Rochdale Principles, which can be traced back to the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers from 1840s England, which was also the first cooperative to first to pay a patronage dividend. The principles are:

- 1) Voluntary and open membership. Membership is a choice, but is open to anyone. Potential members are not excluded on a discriminatory basis. Since membership is voluntary, incentives are meant to encourage people to participate. They could be financial (such as dividends), quality of life related, even career opportunities.
- 2) Democratic member control. Each member has one vote in the organization—and the organization is owned by the members.
- 3) Member economic participation. The organization is member-owned and the owners have a stake in its future. The members have control over the assets and inventory of the cooperative. There are limitations on member compensation. Cooperatives are usually structured as organizations which are meant to be sustainable, but not for profit.
- 4) Autonomy and independence. Cooperatives are member-owned organizations for the mutual benefit of the members. If they enter into agreements with other entities such as for-profit organizations, the cooperative should retain democratic member control, and adherence to the cooperative's organizing principles.
- 5) Education, training, and information. Informing and educating the public.
- 6) Cooperation among cooperatives. Encouraging and participating in mutual aid with other cooperative organizations. Mutual aid on a meta-level.
- 7) Concern for community. Sustainable business practices; participating in activities that benefit the greater community (including non-members of the cooperative).

Food cooperatives and community-supported agriculture (CSA) organizations are examples of cooperative principles in action. They are alternatives to traditional grocery stores which saw a resurgence in the 1970s, and again in recent times. Food co-ops are another means of joining together with other participants to purchase food in bulk, procure unusual (typically

specialty, organic, or sustainably produced) items, and having the option to influence the management of the food co-op in a democratic manner. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organizations enable participants to purchase shares in a farm and receive the harvest proportionally to their shares. Many accept labor in exchange for shares. The popularity of

both of these types of institutions demonstrates the viability of

mutual aid as a strategy for procuring something as basic as food – or as complex as specialty food.

Credit unions are an example of financial institutions organized around cooperative principles, and they definitely have elements of mutual aid. Credit unions are an alternative to traditional banking and are structured in a member-owned, democratically controlled manner. They provide banking and financial services and issue loans and credit. However, unlike traditional banks, credit unions are typically not for profit, their members may share a “common bond” (for example, Service Credit Union exists to help current and former military members and waives international transaction fees on their debit cards), and they often have built into their organizing principles a commitment to engage in community development activities. As an example of the democratically controlled nature of credit unions, members of the Occupy Vermont movement recently won election to the board of the Vermont Federal Credit Union and pushed for greater openness of board meetings, a loan policy friendlier to other cooperatives (hearkening back to another cooperative principle –support for other cooperatives), and to give members a direct control of the credit union's charitable gifts.

Crowdfunding is another example of financially themed mutual aid that can enable people's success in business ventures. Many endeavors that would not be funded by conventional venture capitalists can enjoy wildly successful Kickstarter campaigns. In return for backing a crowdfunded project, backers may receive rewards, obtain early access to



the fruits of the project, have an ownership stake in the project, or receive other benefits. Examples of crowdfunded projects cover every type of business. Some examples: films, music, startup companies, journalism, technical products, and even community centers. Crowdfunding can also be used with non-business projects; in fact, the following story also represents an interesting example of mutual aid in healthcare as well as crowdfunding. A four-year-old girl with developmental delay recently had parts of her genome sequenced, which was paid for by crowdfunding through a nonprofit organization called the Rare Genomics Institute. Through the crowdfunded sequencing project, a new gene variant was discovered that was responsible for her condition, and research has begun on how to treat the disease. Funders contributed to the discovery of new medical information, from which everyone can benefit, and also received a psychological reward for helping the girl.

Micro-lending is another similar financial application of mutual aid that enables people in the developing world to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Small loans are issued to impoverished people or groups of people, who often are without collateral or credit history. Grameen Bank is widely considered the first micro-lending operation; a Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to it and its founder, Muhammad Yunus, in 2006. Grameen Bank issues credit to groups of borrowers to encourage group members to hold one another accountable and ensure the



loans are used in a responsible manner and repaid. Ninety-eight percent of Grameen Bank's borrowers are women. In fact, women are often the beneficiaries of micro-lending, which is sometimes the only way they can secure capital with which to start a business and gain economic empowerment. The internet has brought micro-lending global; lenders in the developed world can partner with local intermediaries to disburse and administer loans worldwide. Kiva is a popular micro-lending website which enables this. By contrast, another organization called Zidisha enables direct peer-to-peer micro-lending. Vittana brokers micro-lending transactions exclusively for the purposes of student loans. United Prosperity enables backers' money to act as collateral or a loan guarantee with a local bank, which then issues credit to a poor entrepreneur. Some micro-lending organizations not only offer financing, but training in business skills, such as Count Me In for Women's Economic Independence.



Bitcoin is an emerging technology which has incredible potential for the economic empowerment of all people. Bitcoin is an online, decentralized cryptocurrency. It transcends borders, enabling the sending and receiving of payments between anywhere in the world via the peer-to-peer bitcoin network, with optional fees much lower than any found in the legacy banking system. Bitcoin holds tremendous potential for the economic empowerment of all people around the world and enables many types of mutual aid projects to occur, where the traditional banking system falls short.

Many parents will say, if asked, that they often feel overwhelmed by parenthood and that one or two parents sometimes do not seem like enough to provide for the needs of a child. Mutual aid can significantly ease these burdens. Many workplaces, neighborhoods, and other groups have childcare co-ops where one parent cares for all of the children in the co-op for, for instance, one day per week, and the person in charge rotates to provide free time for the other parents in the co-op on their off days. In some cases, parents may even pool resources to hire a professional caregiver or teacher for their children within home education co-ops. In New York City, a known issue is that there are not enough pre-kindergarten schools to enroll all of the children whose parents want them to attend. So, parents get together and form their own preschool co-ops, in many cases organized around common bonds (as diverse as from living in the same neighborhood to wanting to serve organic snacks). This is done in spite of the fact that these co-ops often violate city laws. Soni Sangha writes in a *New York Times* piece titled "The Pre-K Underground," "In a co-op pre-K, parents work together to create a school that matches their educational philosophy and worldview. They also run it, finance it, staff it, clean it and administer it —whatever is necessary to keep costs as low as possible. Often, schools operate from members' homes. Some pupils are taught by parents; others by professional teachers... Oh, and in many cases, forming a co-op school is illegal, because getting the required permits and passing background checks can be so prohibitively expensive and time-consuming that most co-ops simply don't."

In addition to parenthood, mutual aid can make general life logistics a lot easier. Carpools are an excellent example of modern mutual aid to share transportation resources. It is common for students to use shared books and form study groups to help ensure their mutual success. Cohabitation, marriage, and marriage-like situations are examples of small-scale mutual aid, which enable those involved in the partnership to share expenses, combine their earning power, and share household responsibilities. Neighborhood associations and neighborhood watches may also provide examples of mutual aid in action to assist with life logistics. The concept of neighborhood watch began in the 1960s as a response to the stabbing of Kitty Genovese in Queens, New York. Thirty-eight neighbors either witnessed the stabbing or heard her screams but did not act to stop it. The goal of neighborhood watch is to deter attacks, not to intervene in a violent conflict that is occurring; they are not vigilante organizations but preventative ones.

Examples of mutual aid in health care abound. Mutual aid can provide great help in the event of emergencies and natural disasters. A *New York Times* article called "Where FEMA Fell Short, Occupy Sandy Was There" describes how volunteers from the Occupy movement came together after Hurricane Sandy to provide supplies, health care, housing, and counseling



services for those affected by the hurricane. "In the past two weeks, Occupy Sandy has set up distribution sites at a pair of Brooklyn churches where hundreds of New Yorkers muster daily to cook hot meals for the afflicted and to sort through a marketplace of donated blankets, clothes and food. There is an Occupy motor pool of borrowed cars and pickup trucks that ferries volunteers to ravaged areas. An Occupy weatherman sits at his computer and issues regular forecasts. Occupy construction teams and medical committees have been formed." In the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the US Military reportedly requested aid from an anarchist collective in helping hurricane victims. Writes Chuck Munson in *Peace Work Magazine*, "The volunteers are also working with people in the many surrounding areas that haven't yet been assisted by the Army, Red Cross, or FEMA. Malik Rahim is a local activist who has served as the catalyst for most of the rebuilding and mutual aid work being done by residents and outside anarchist volunteers. He reports, 'We've opened up a clinic and are opening up a mobile clinic. We've set up a food distro [distribution center] that has fed 300-400 people. We've distributed around 500 personal hygiene kits...' The Common Ground Clinic and other projects are being organized on a cooperative, non-hierarchical basis... This process requires lots of organization, communication and frequent meetings. The volunteers and residents have two meetings each day. The first meeting in the morning is similar to the spokescouncil style seen at activist convergences. It brings together people involved in the various collective projects: medical care, food, media, and community clean up. In the evening, clinic volunteers have a meeting that focuses on the running of the clinic."

Present Mutual Aid continued on p.17

More on Modern Mutual Aid (but we would need a whole book if we mentioned every example!)



Where did all the old mutual aid groups go? What happened to all the mutual aid groups that Josh Fulton writes about on p. 10? According to David Beito, author of *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, many of the features of benefit organizations today have been assimilated into organizations that rely on the corporate and political structures of our time. Insurance companies, religious charities, credit unions and democratic governments now perform many of the same functions that were once the purview of ethnic or culturally affiliated mutual benefit associations. Below are some of the ones now existing that have not been mentioned in the other mutual aid articles in this issue.

Charitable Helping Organizations

In a previous issue [Issue #8] I pointed out that government welfare programs have a poor record on both efficiency and cost. Estimates of the overhead alone run between 50 and 70%.¹ Do we really want a system that spends 50-70 cents of every dollar on the infrastructure of bureaucrats, social workers, and buildings and only 30-50 cents on the poor? Few private charities have that kind of overhead! Some of the organizations I mentioned then are worth repeating, plus a few more new ones.

The track record of small private charities is much better than government programs. For example, Strategies to Elevate People (STEP) in Richmond VA's largest public housing project, links poor mothers to services from some 30 local churches and faith-based organizations. It offers a wider range of services including mentoring, job training, and welfare-to-work-assistance. Although many of the women have serious obstacles like drug abuse, pregnancy and disabilities, STEP has achieved a remarkable 70% job placement rate.²

Or the St Martin de Porres House of Hope in Chicago which specializes in helping homeless women. They have to be drug free to stay in the program. It spends less than \$7/person/day compared to \$22/person in government-funded homeless shelters.³

Or the Gospel Mission in DC Drug treatment program. Nearly 2/3 of addicts remain drug-free compared to a government-supported drug treatment facility just three blocks away with only a 10% success rate yet it spends nearly 20 times as much per client.⁴

Private Community Services

Many examples of private community services are collected and described in the book *Uplift: What People Themselves* can do. It describes private community groups that provide services such as job training, medical clinics, low cost housing and much more. It compares them to government and shows that they are more efficient in helping people and do so at a much lower cost.⁵ Though the book itself dates back to the 70s, many of the organization in that book are still around after more than 30 years.

Here are some of the many examples of private community services organizations existing right now that give people a hand-up instead of a handout.

- Habitat for Humanity in the United States is a leading example of shared credit and labor pooled to help low-income people afford adequate housing.



- Delancey Street has been hugely successful. Thirteen thousand people have been through its programs. The ex-addicts now run a dozen businesses, including a restaurant and a moving company.
- Community Action House is a nonprofit social services organization based in Holland, Michigan. The organization was founded in 1969. For over 40 years, the organization has assisted in feeding and clothing families, providing housing, and equipping community members with skills and resources to allow provision for sustainable living.

- Davidson Community Center in Bronx provides resources for minority poor. It serves underprivileged children, adults and senior citizens by mutual cooperation, training, education and advocacy.
- Urban Youth Action, Incorporated (UYA) is a youth education and development program emphasizing the importance of education, employment readiness, and community service. It uses a series of educational sessions, internship placements (work experience), and enrichment activities appropriate to the student's progression through the program.
- Southeast Alabama Self-help Association is a co-op that includes a credit union, economic development, technical assistance, and low cost housing.

Religious and Fraternal Societies, the Modern Mutual Aid Societies

- Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is now the largest fraternal benefit society in the United States. It maintains a network of nearly 1,400 local chapters and is also the only not-for-profit organization listed on the Fortune 500.
- Modern Woodmen of America is the third-largest (based on assets) fraternal benefit society, with more than 750,000 members. Total assets passed US \$9-billion in 2009. The membership organization sells life insurance, annuity and investment products not to benefit stockholders but to improve the quality of life of its stakeholders – members, their families and their communities. They accomplish this through social, charitable, and volunteer activities.
- Brethren Mutual Aid Agency has been in existence over 100 years. It serves the various insurance needs of the Anabaptist communities.
- Knights of Columbus
- Oddfellows

Beito also suggests that new technologies have provided yet more new opportunities for humanity to support itself through mutual aid. Recent authors have described the networked affiliations that produce collaborative projects such as Wikipedia as mutual aid societies. Rotating credit associations and micro-loans organizations like Grameen Bank working in modern Asia, and to a lesser extent in the US provide loans to the poor to help them with their businesses. Socially conscious capitalism like the Grameen Bank is doing far more for the poor than governments or even UN agencies are doing. Such programs don't just give money away, they help people get on their feet.

Other Kinds of Mutual Aid Societies

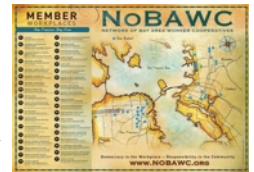
Many activists on the Left, including anarchists, have developed some new kinds of mutual aid societies. Here are just a few examples.

- Ithaca Hours is based on American individualist anarchist Josiah Warren's Time Store. It issues local currency based on work hours that are used for trade for other goods and service. [If you've read the *The Great Explosion* by Eric Frank Russell, it's a bit like the "obs" in the story set on the planet



Gand (short for Gandhi).

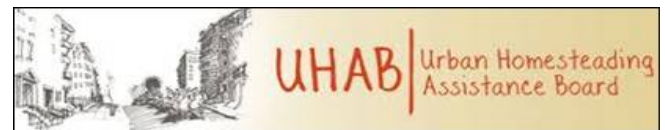
- Ithaca Health Alliance is a nonprofit member-owned health security system that has been in existence since 1997. It provides financial assistance for emergency medical and dental needs.
- Network of Bay Area Workers shares info and resources among worker coops over 30 diverse self-managed workplaces in East Bay and San Francisco.



• Northern California Land

Trust provides permanently affordable housing for people with no access to market rate housing and keeps costs low for second owners.

- Urban Homesteading Assistance Board runs programs to legally take over abandoned buildings in New York City and then sell them for sweat equity (people help rehab them). So far there have been 1300 buildings converted into limited equity coops, with 1264 units currently in pipeline. Most are in Harlem and the Lower East Side.



- Ujamaa Cooperative Economics for Women in Boston organizes low-income women to generate income and for community development. It has spun off successful sewing, house cleaning, catering and childcare coops
- Cooperative Home Care Associates is an employee-owned coop in NYC with jobs for more than 500 African American and Latina women, many of whom were previously on welfare

Many more examples can be found in *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements and Communalism in America* by John Curl, which we reviewed in Issue 9 and re-review on p. 21.

To those who say, we have to have government welfare, the many mutual aid projects and service organization mentioned in this issue of *Free Voices* suggest otherwise. We can't get rid of government welfare overnight but we *can* encourage and support the private helping organizations that exist. Maybe some of us can create new ones. Restoring dignity and doing so at a much less expensive price.

Sharon Presley is the Managing Editor of Free Voices.

Welfare Before the Welfare State



Many people think life without the welfare state would be chaos. In their minds, nobody would help support the less fortunate, and there would be riots in the streets. Little do they know that people found innovative ways of supporting each other before the welfare state existed. One of the most important of these ways was the mutual-aid society.

Mutual aid, also known as fraternalism, refers to social organizations that gathered dues and paid benefits to members facing hardship. According to David Beito in *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, there was a ‘great stigma’ attached to accepting government aid or private charity during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.¹ Mutual aid, on the other hand, did not carry the same stigma. It was based on reciprocity: today’s mutual-aid recipient could be tomorrow’s donor, and vice versa.

Mutual aid was particularly popular among the poor and the working class. For instance, in New York City in 1909 40 percent of families earning less than \$1,000 a year, little more than the “living wage,” had members who were in mutual-aid societies.² Ethnicity, however, was an even greater predictor of mutual-aid membership than income. The “new immigrants,” such as the Germans, Bohemians, and Russians, many of whom were Jews, participated in mutual-aid societies at approximately twice the rate of native whites and six times the rate of the Irish.³ This may have been due to new immigrants’ need for an enhanced social safety net.

By the 1920s, at least one out of every three males was a member of a mutual-aid society.⁴ Members of societies carried over \$9 billion worth of life insurance by 1920. During the same period, “lodges dominated the field of health insurance.”⁵ Numerous lodges offered unemployment benefits. Some black fraternal lodges, taking note of the sporadic nature of African-American employment at the time, allowed members to receive unemployment benefits even if they were up to six months behind in dues.⁶

Under lodge medicine, the price for healthcare was low. Members typically paid \$2, about a day’s wage, to have yearly access to a doctor’s care (minor surgery was frequently included in this fee). Non-lodge members typically paid about \$2 every doctor’s visit during this time period.⁷

Low prices for lodges did not, however, necessarily translate to low quality. The Independent Order of Foresters, one of the largest mutual-aid societies, frequently touted that the mortality rate of its members was 6.66 per thousand, much lower than the 9.3 per thousand for the general population.⁸

Lodges also had incentives to keep down costs. For instance, the Ladies Friends of Faith Benevolent Association, a black-female society, would pay members taken ill \$2 a week if they saw the lodge doctor, and \$3 if they didn’t. A visiting committee also checked on the claimant to guard against false claims. Members who failed to visit the claimant were fined \$1.⁹

Mutual-aid societies also enforced moral codes. In 1892, the Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics found that societies followed the “invariable rule” of denying benefits “for any sickness or other disability originating from intemperance, vicious or immoral conduct.” Many societies refused to pay benefits for any injury sustained in the “participation in a riot.”¹⁰ Some lodges even denied membership to people who manufactured explosives or played professional football.¹¹

Many mutual-aid societies branched out and founded their own hospitals and sanitariums. The Securities Benefit Association, or SBA, charged \$21 for an 11-day stay at their hospital in Kansas, while the average at 100 private hospitals was \$72.¹² Again, quality was not necessarily sacrificed for price. At the SBA’s sanitarium, the mortality rate was 4.5 percent, while the historical average for sanitariums was 25 percent. This is especially impressive considering that 30 to 50 percent of all cases admitted to the SBA’s sanitarium were “advanced.”¹³

A large number of African-American societies also created their own hospitals. In the early 20th century, it was not a given that African-Americans would be admitted into many hospitals. If they were, they frequently had to face such indignities as being forced to bring their own eating utensils, sheets, and toothbrushes and to pay for a black nurse if none was on staff.¹⁴ When the Knights and Daughters of Tabor in Mississippi, a black fraternal society with a reach across only a few counties, opened Taborian Hospital in 1942, membership nearly doubled in three years to 47,000.¹⁵

Mutual-aid societies also founded 71 orphanages between 1890 and 1922, almost all without government subsidy.¹⁶ Perhaps the largest of these was Mooseheart, founded by the Loyal Order of Moose in 1913. Hundreds of children lived there at a time. It had a student newspaper, two debate teams, three theatrical organizations, and a small radio station. The success of Mooseheart alumni was remarkable. Alumni were four times more likely than the general population to have attended institutions of higher learning. Male alumni earned 71 percent more than the national average, and female alumni earned 63 percent more.¹⁷

Of course, with so many services being supplied by mutual aid, many groups had reason to lobby government for its destruction.

The first major blow against fraternalism occurred when the American Medical Association gained control of the licensing of medical schools. In 1912, a number of state medical boards formed the Federation of State Medical Boards, which accepted the AMA's ratings of medical schools as authoritative. The AMA quickly rated many schools as "unacceptable." Consequentially, the number of medical schools in America dropped from 166 in 1904 to 81 in 1918, a 51 percent drop.¹⁸ The increased price of medical services made it impractical for many lodges to retain the services of a doctor. Medical boards also threatened many doctors with being stripped of their licenses if they practiced lodge medicine.¹⁹

The next most damaging piece of legislation was the Mobile Law. The Mobile Law required that mutual aid societies show a gradual improvement in reserves. Until this time, societies had tended to keep low reserves in order to pay the maximum benefits possible to members. High reserve requirements made it difficult for societies to undercut traditional insurance companies. The Mobile Law also required a doctor's examination for all lodge members and forbade all "speculative" enterprises such as the extension of credit to members. By 1919, the Mobile Law had been enacted in 40 states.²⁰

The requirement that all members undergo a medical examination effectively barred mutual-aid societies from the growing group-insurance market. Group insurance is insurance offered to a large group of people, such as all the employees at a company, without a medical examination. From 1915 to 1920, the number of people insured under group policies rose from 99,000 to 1.6 million.²¹ Some lodges, such as the Arkansas Grand Lodge of the Ancient Order of Workmen, tried to get around the medical examination requirement by offering group insurance at a higher price than normal lodge coverage, but this put them at a competitive disadvantage.²²

Mutual aid was hindered in other ways. Lodges were prohibited from providing coverage for children. This opened the door for commercial companies to offer industrial policies in which children's coverage was standard. The number of industrial policies rose from 1.4 million in 1900 to 7.1 million in 1920. By 1925, industrial policies surpassed the number of fraternal policies.²³ Group medical insurance also eventually became tax deductible, while private plans such as those purchased through a lodge did not.²⁴

Fraternal hospitals also came under attack. During the 1960s, the regulation of hospitals increased. Taborian Hospital in Mississippi was cited for "inadequate storage and bed space, failure to install doors that could swing in either direction, and excessive reliance on uncertified personnel." A state hospital regulator said of the Taborian Hospital, "We are constantly told that you do not have funds to do these things [make improvements], yet if you are to operate a hospital, something has to be done to meet the Minimum Standards of Operation for Mississippi Hospitals."

The Hill-Burton Hospital Constuction Act of 1946 also hurt many fraternal hospitals, especially black hospitals. The act required that hospitals receiving federal funds use a portion for indigent care and that services be offered "without discrimination on account of race, creed, or color." Although this enabled many blacks to get free service at hospitals previously unavailable to them, it also cut into the membership base for black fraternal hospitals. Additionally, some hospitals, such as Taborian Hospital and the Friendship Clinic in Mississippi, received no funds, while their nearby competitors received millions.²⁶

The advent of Medicare also hastened the decline of fraternal hospitals. MIT economist Amy Finkelstein estimated that Medicare drove a 28 percent increase in hospital spending between 1965 and 1970 by encouraging hospitals to adopt new medical technologies. Smaller hospitals, such as many fraternal hospitals, were not able to adopt new technologies as quickly as larger hospitals and were driven out of the market, another finding supported by Finkelstein.²⁷

Some fraternal societies escaped the attack of the state by converting into traditional insurance corporations. Both Prudential and Metropolitan Life have their origins in fraternalism.²⁸ Many societies, however, simply died off.

Although millions of Americans are still members of fraternal societies such as the Masons or Oddfellows, the organizations no longer have the importance in society that they once did. The history of fraternalism serves as a reminder of the power of human cooperation in a free society.

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Notes

1. David Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890–1967* (University of North Carolina, 2000), p. 3.
2. *Ibid*, p. 21.
3. *Ibid*, p. 22.
4. *Ibid*, p. 2.
5. *Ibid*.
6. *Ibid*, p. 52.
7. *Ibid*, p. 117.
8. *Ibid*, p. 119.
9. *Ibid*, p. 115.
10. *Ibid*, p. 45.
11. *Ibid*, p. 44.
12. *Ibid*, p. 175.
13. *Ibid*, p. 164.

Past Mutual Aid continued on p. 16

Miriam Rosenberg Rocek
[aka Steampunk Emma Goldman]

Dorothy Day: Pissing off the Church by Acting Like Jesus



Dorothy Day was a Christian. That doesn't seem like much of a statement; Christianity is kind of a big deal these days, has been for a couple thousand years, and there are a lot of people out there who call themselves Christians, often loudly and publicly while exhorting everyone else to do the same; but if we use the word "Christian" in its most literal sense, as a person who actually follows the advice and instructions of that guy they call Christ, we find a lot fewer people. Probably because a lot of the stuff that Jesus guy said to do—selling everything you own to feed the poor, helping the sick, hanging out with people shunned by society, and refraining from judging people while at the same time harshly judging yourself, are all time-consuming and fairly difficult. Not to mention pacifism; turning the other cheek can be really difficult, it turns out. But when I say that Dorothy Day was a Christian, I mean that she actually did all of those things. Except maybe for the not judging thing, but she generally did a good job of *treating* others as though she wasn't judging them, which is close enough for most people. (I don't know if it's close enough for Jesus. I haven't asked him.)

Ok, so, she was a Christian. The particular flavor of Christianity she went with was Catholicism, which is nice if you like funny hats, and bad if you like birth control, but where it gets weird is that she was also an anarchist. The Christian anarchist thing doesn't seem so odd if you go with Quakerism or something, and there are people out there prepared to argue that there is no way to be a Christian *without* being an anarchist (though fewer, I'm guessing, than prepared to argue the inverse), and it's certainly not unprecedented for the two to go together, but the Catholic Church is one of the most hierarchical institutions you'll find outside of the military. So, how does someone hold Catholicism and anarchism inside one human brain at the same time without causing a messy explosion? And, more importantly, how does someone live the ideals of both Catholicism and anarchism?

The life story of Dorothy Day is basically the answer to that question. A shorter answer would be "by having a lot of arguments with pretty much everyone."

Dorothy Day did not begin life as a Catholic. (Or, for that matter, an anarchist.) She was actually brought up in a fairly secular environment, something she seems to have resented when she got older, feeling that she had had "no one to teach"

her about Jesus. Her childhood was not a particularly bad one, but her family went through periods of poverty, and she lived through the famous San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, and she was both deeply traumatized by the devastation, and inspired, at the age of eight, by the number of people she saw coming to the aid of their neighbors. (Christian charity, or anarchist mutual aid? If you're Dorothy Day, you don't *have* to decide!)

Dorothy's father spent quite a bit of her childhood out of work, and her family struggled as a result. Possibly because of that, or maybe because sometimes people just do, Dorothy found herself being drawn to religion starting at about the age of ten. By the time she was twelve, though, her father was working again, her family was doing better, and Dorothy shifted her focus to other things. Like, for example, boys. The distraction that they provided never quite pushed religion from her mind, though, and as a teenager, Dorothy spent a lot of time musing and agonizing about the nature of faith, spirituality, and fulfillment. Weirdly enough, teenage Dorothy Day did not come up with much that was awesome.

Writing to a friend at the age of fifteen, she said "it is wrong to think so much about human love. All those feelings and cravings that come to us are sexual desires. We are prone to have them at this age, I suppose, but I think they are impure. It is sensual and God is spiritual. We must harden ourselves to these feelings, for God is love and God is all, so the only love is of God and is spiritual without taint of earthliness. I am afraid I have never really experienced this love, or I would never crave the sensual love or the thrill that comes with the meeting of lips...Oh, surely it is a continual strife and my spirit is weary."

So yeah, she was probably not the kid you'd want to sit with at lunch. I promise Dorothy Day did some really great stuff later in her life, and I am not ever going to judge someone for something they wrote when they were fifteen (Dorothy herself looked at that letter years later and said that it was "filled with pomp and vanity and piety"), but if you're waiting for her to get less...well, talking like that, then you're in for a disappointment.

There may have been a (to Dorothy) regrettable lack of religious influences in her life, but she was definitely getting good reading done. She read Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Tolstoy, and Kropotkin, in addition to the lives of saints and all that other

stuff. She decided, quite correctly, that Eugene Debs was one of the best guys around, and when she went off to college she decided that socialists, rather than churches, were actually interested in helping people. She came to view religion as a source of complacency and an obstacle to action, and swerved temporarily away from her faith. Like many young people who turn away from religion while in college, she did a little nude modeling, and when she graduated, headed to New York City, where she began working as a writer, contributing to, and for a time taking charge of, radical papers including *The Call* and *The Masses*. Her main concern was poverty, but she also got involved in opposition to the First World War, or, as they were calling it then, The War, and the draft.

While protesting for women's suffrage in Washington D.C. in 1917, Dorothy was arrested for the first time. Closely followed by the second and third time. After the third arrest, she and her comrades were sentenced to thirty days in jail. Once there, she and the other women promptly began a ten day hunger strike, in protest of the fact that they were being treated as common criminals rather than political prisoners. (I could write a whole essay on why THAT'S super f--ked up, but I won't right now, because I'm in the middle of a story.)

Anyway, prison had the effect of radicalizing Dorothy, and when she got out, she was way more of an anarchist. She became more involved in the anti-war movement, and trained as a nurse, in order to directly help people who had been screwed over by society. Her gradual shift towards greater religiosity was continuing on its course as well, but then, as happened when she was younger, she found herself distracted by a dude. This dude's name was Lionel Moise, and as dudes go he was not a good choice. It all ended in tears and back-alley abortions; Dorothy found she was pregnant in 1919, and Moise promptly left her, skipping town without leaving a forwarding address, even though she went and had herself a sketchy abortion in a last-ditch effort to save the relationship.

Dorothy would come to regret that abortion pretty deeply, and it's no surprise; she quite clearly got it for the sake of her failed relationship, not because she didn't actually want to have a baby. Later, when she turned to Catholicism, she would become extremely anti-abortion. It's hard to say where the religious reasons for that and the personal reasons begin and end.

A brief marriage and some travels in Europe, followed, as well as one seriously sad attempt to rekindle her relationship with Lionel. She moved around a lot, living in Chicago, New Orleans, and eventually back to New York, working as a journalist. Some of that was actually pretty cool; like the time she went undercover as a taxi dancer, and wrote about the experience. She also wrote a memoir called *The Eleventh Virgin*, which told the story of her life up till then (this was in 1924, so she was only like twenty seven, which is weirdly early to write a memoir, in the opinion of this currently twenty seven year old person), and while it wasn't all that good, the movie rights ended up getting sold, which gave Dorothy a little money to live on. Which might have helped with the burning shame of having written it; Dorothy

would later express a wish to track down every existing copy and burn it. Similar to how George Clooney feels about that Batman movie he made, I think, and he doesn't even have religious fanaticism to comfort him.

She ended up back in New York, and getting introduced to her next partner, Forster Batterham (pronounced Foster, because he said so), an anarchist. By this time, anarchism would have probably been the most accurate word for her ideals as well. She bought a cottage on the beach on Staten Island, where she lived with Forster, writing trashy romances for magazines, and just kind of enjoying life. To her own surprise, this happiness brought her closer to religion once again, and she found herself praying every day. Despite her lack of Catholic background, she wound up using the rosary a friend had given her a few years ago, and when she ended up pregnant again, and this time going through with it and giving birth to a baby she named Tamar Teresa, Dorothy made sure to have her child baptized in the Catholic church. It was the true start of Dorothy's conversion.

Despite his skepticism about the whole "having a baby in the kind of world that just went through the First World War" thing, Forster ended up loving Tamar, and their parenthood did not do much harm to his and Dorothy's relationship. Her newfound religiosity, on the other hand, did. Remember back at the beginning, when I said that most people find anarchism and Catholicism tough to reconcile? Forster was one of the "most people." That group, as it turned out, also included the majority of her friends; one of them even suggested she seek psychiatric care when she started talking about religion. Others reminded her of the political implications of the Catholic Church, which was and is a hugely powerful, wealthy organization. Dorothy countered that it was the church of the working class, and went through with her and her daughter's conversion.

Dorothy now had the two main philosophical influences of her life well in hand; Christianity and anarchism. As has been previously noted, those can be tricky to reconcile, but fortunately, there was a guy out there already who had it pretty much figured out, as far as he was concerned. His name was Peter Maurin, and after hearing about her and her ideas, he sought Dorothy out in 1932. He was a Catholic social justice advocate and pacifist, and he took Dorothy under his wing in a major way that resulted in her taking her newfound sense of Christian anarchism and putting it into action.



First, she and Peter got to work establishing a paper called *The Catholic Worker*. It was full of a radical, social-justicey version of Catholic thought, as well as news and calls to action. The paper was sold on the streets for a penny a paper. Still is, actually; the price has never gone up, so that it remains accessible to anyone who wants to read it. Most disturbingly to those who liked their Catholicism traditional and fancy-hat-focused, it included a heavy emphasis on the elimination of poverty, and on pacifism.

This would eventually land them in trouble with, roughly speaking, everyone. In the 1930s, the Spanish Civil War was going on, and the Catholic Church took a strong pro-Franco stance. Meanwhile, lefties and radicals everywhere, including the United States, took a strong pro-Republican stance. The *Catholic Worker* and Dorothy, of course, took a pacifist stance. Which just pissed *everybody* off. But I mean, what's a bunch of pissed off anarchists, right? Anarchists being mad at other anarchists is pretty much a regular day in anarchism, but when one group of people who call themselves Catholics disagree with another group of people who call themselves Catholics, the ones who have control of the hierarchy and the hats, that can get dicey, and people sometimes throw around words like "heresy." In 1951, the church would pressure Dorothy to change the name so as not to imply official Catholic endorsement of its ideas. Dorothy didn't because being a Catholic is all well and good, but being a Catholic *anarchist* apparently means that you're allowed to tell the church leaders to fuck off on occasion.



But the *Catholic Worker* was more than just a newspaper. It developed into a collection of communities, farms, and "houses of hospitality," where members of the movement fed, clothed, and housed those in need, generally living and working alongside of the people they were helping. Dorothy saw

these as a way to both help the poor, and also to lead them away from the lure of communism, and towards a more voluntary-association, mutual-aid, type philosophy. And also towards Jesus, obviously. These houses came under a lot of criticism for the fact that they weren't particularly concerned with whether people "deserved" help or not; alcoholics, drug addicts, sex workers, anyone who needed help got it. People who preferred their charity to be in the form of soup handed out from a condescending arm's length along with a lecture on Protestant work ethic did not approve, but Dorothy didn't really give a shit, because hungry people were getting fed.

Due to her anarchist philosophy, and opposition to the state's tendency to be aggressively non-pacifist, Dorothy refused to get registered properly with the IRS and file for tax exempt status. This pissed off the government way more than sounds reasonable to me. Not to mention, the Red Scare eventually happened, and the houses of hospitality and Dorothy herself ended up under severe FBI scrutiny, but despite all of that, a lot of these houses still actually exist, all thanks to Dorothy Day, who established the first ones and worked like crazy to keep them (and the communal farms outside the city) up and running.

So, just to add up that list, Dorothy had pissed off the left, the Catholic Church, anarchists, and the government.

Dorothy worked incredibly hard on the paper, the houses, and the farm, often going without good food, heat, a decent bed, and any number of other comforts. She lived in voluntary

poverty alongside those she wanted to help, partially out of practical considerations, and also because she found it spiritually fulfilling to do so. Who doesn't love fasting and mortification of the flesh? She also kind of disapproved of every method of recreation or relaxation; casual sex, drugs, alcohol...she even kind of disapproved of movies and books if they were too much fun and too much of a distraction from harsh reality.

She did enjoy prayer, though, and spending time in quiet contemplation out at the farm, so that was nice for her, I guess, though it makes it a little hard to take when she rants in her writings about people distracting themselves with the pleasures of all these various forms of entertainment she didn't like, while at the same time talking about the hours she spent in an ecstasy of prayer.

So that might be considered a little bit hypocritical, and extremely judgmental. Dorothy Day, it happens, was almost as good at being judgmental as she was at helping



people. In the 60s she wrote "there is an element of the demonic in the air we breathe these days...evil is everywhere in the guise of sex and drugs, and words – "beautiful" – "love" – the "new family," etc. Much lying and deceit and self-justification an arrogant taking over, a contempt for the old people, or tradition..." Now, to be fair, she said this in the context of having a bunch of hippies in one of her Catholic Worker apartments, and I can see how that could make anyone cranky, and she eventually kicked them out in what members of the Catholic Worker movement came to remember as the Dorothy Day Stomp, which also sounds like a cool new dance move that someone should invent. Despite her annoyance with hippies, she was happy to attend and support protests where young men burned their draft cards. As long as no one was having too much sex, drugs or using words like "beautiful," or "love," I guess.

Dorothy more than made up for her occasional grouchiness by being generally awesome. For instance, in 1957, she was visiting a racially integrated commune in Georgia. Now, if there's two things rural Southern racists in the 50s hated, it was racial integration, and communes. Dorothy was into it, though, and volunteered for night guard duty. By this point, she was nearly sixty years old. In the middle of the night, a car drove up, and an unseen racist asshole shot at her, shattering the windows of the car she was sitting in and very nearly hitting her. If she'd been a little slower to duck she would have probably died.



As another example of Dorothy's badassery, take her opposition to mandatory civil defense drills during the Cold War. During these events, Dorothy would go out into the streets with

her comrades, instead of engaging in the mandatory shelter-seeking, and publicly pray for peace. She wound up doing this and getting arrested so many times over the course of six years that she actually ended up serving ten days jail. For praying in public. She reported that her stay in jail was very enjoyable, which was probably true, since it was mostly likely the closest thing she had to a vacation in years.

And if you needed further proof that she was awesome, there's always her FBI file, which was several hundred pages long and weirdly claimed that she was being "consciously or unconsciously" used by communist groups. Remember, she set up her houses of hospitality partly because she didn't want communism to be the only option for poor people to turn to. Communism rejected Christianity, which, I think it has been amply demonstrated, she was pretty into. But of course, she did like sharing, and I get that that's a pretty suspicious thing in and of itself. The FBI's never been known for their astute, nuanced, political analysis. And she went to Cuba once after the US government had said that wasn't ok. J. Edgar Hoover called her "irresponsible" and "erratic," which is not how I would describe someone who successfully established and maintained a newspaper, a communal farm, and houses of hospitality, but then I am notably not J. Edgar Hoover. Anyway, I think having J. Edgar Hoover personally take time out of his day to say something mean about you is a pretty high honor.

At the age of 75 she spent two weeks in jail after being arrested at a demonstration of farm workers led by Cesar Chavez. As hardcore as that was, even she couldn't keep it up forever, and her health eventually started to decline. She spent the remaining years of her life being close to her family and friends, including Forster "Call me Foster" Batterham, the father of her daughter. Though they hadn't been close in years, he was the last person she'd had a real romantic relationship with, and he supported her as she battled cancer. She was being honored by the Catholic Church by this time, for her work with the poor, and getting various honorary degrees and awards. I guess it's easier to honor the work that a good person does when you are not too busy supporting Franco, huh, the Catholic Church?

She died at the age of 83, and it was only a few years later that people started trying to make her a saint. I think they mean that in a nice way, and her case is still up for review, or in limbo, or whatever you call it when the Catholic Church hasn't yet decided if someone was a saint or not, and she is currently considered a Servant of God, which is apparently like, two or three steps down from sainthood, I guess. I'm not sure what kind of hat it comes with.

In any case, I don't think Dorothy would much approve. She once said "don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed so easily." I take that to mean that she would feel that her



canonization would imply to the rest of the world that the way she lived her life and the good work she did was somehow beyond the capabilities of ordinary humans, as if her successes were the result of miracles rather than hard work and dedication, and that the ideals she espoused were unattainable, and meant for heaven, not for earth. So obviously the Catholic Church can make her a saint if they like (weirdly enough, I don't seem to be on their list of people to consult for approval on these matters), but I think Dorothy would, if she were alive, give them a piece of her mind for even trying.

Sainthood bid aside, I very much doubt you'll find more than a handful of people in the world who would agree with Dorothy Day on everything she stood for and did. It's interesting the way the Catholic writers who write about how virtuous and spiritual and humble she was never really mention the whole anarchism thing. I can kind of see why. As someone who admires her, but is not so into religion, I find myself inclined to mentally downplay her religiosity, and have to keep reminding myself that that would clearly be a shitty thing to do.

I think the reason for these inclinations is that a lot of people, with incredibly different worldviews, feel drawn to Dorothy Day for the undeniably, objectively great stuff that she did. As much



as we may act all open minded, if we admire someone, we don't want to think bad things about them, and for pretty much all people, "bad things" includes not agreeing with everything we think. And that's clearly a huge problem, and one that I struggled with in writing about Dorothy Day. I admire the hell out of a lot of the things she did in her life, and I think she was a truly amazing woman. Because of that, I find myself wanting to gloss over the fact that she was also

anti-birth control and abortion, and in many ways anti-feminist, or the judgmental attitudes she took towards other people's sex lives and preferred forms of recreation. Basically, I found myself being a fan of Dorothy Day the anarchist, but not of Dorothy Day the Catholic. In thinking that way I was doing her a disservice, because her religion informed her anarchism and vice versa. Which is a good reminder of that thing that I know, but don't always keep in mind: that even people with whom I profoundly and fundamentally disagree can also be people that I deeply admire and support.

So yeah, writing about Dorothy Day has probably made me a slightly better person. Not in all the way she most likely would have wanted; I still don't believe in God or think that birth control is wrong. But because she made me a slightly better person, I feel it's only right to end with a few notes for how she can help some other folks be better people too.

White American Christians are fond of claiming to be a persecuted group. Acts of persecution against them apparently include the teaching of biology in public schools (including both evolutionary theory and sex ed), the adoption of children who

are in no way connected to them by couples they do not approve of, people they don't know getting married, and retailers telling them "happy holidays." I'm not sure why they are so eager to be persecuted; most people who have lived under persecution don't have a lot of good things to say about it, but the good news for them is that I have found a way for them, as Christians, to be persecuted in America. Despite being, you know, Christians in America.

These last paragraphs will therefore be addressed to contemporary white American Christians who have persecution complexes. The rest of you are free to read them too. Please do note though that they will interpret your reading something reserved exclusively for them as an anti-Christian hate crime.

How to Be a Persecuted White Christian in America Today:

It's easy; be a Christian the way Dorothy Day was a Christian. Feed the hungry, and don't file for tax exempt status. Don't support or participate in warmongering. Stand against injustice, and with minorities. Spend all your money, time, and energy trying to help people. Live with the bare minimum of comforts. Anything you sell, operate at a loss so that more people can get their hands on it.

The good news is, you'll live in poverty, you'll face government scrutiny, be called disloyal and unpatriotic. You'll be accused of supporting alcoholics, criminals and drug addicts, not to mention the enemies of your nation and its traditional way of life. Play your cards right and you may even wind up getting shot at by the Klan. You'll probably go to jail, like Megan Rice, Greg Boertje-Obed, and Michael Walli, a radical nun and two residents of modern-day Dorothy Day houses, who broke into a nuclear weapons plant in an act of pacifist protest.

That's a lot of persecution.

The bad news is, you'll be so busy helping the downtrodden and fighting the state that you won't have time to complain that science and gays and holiday-well-wishers are persecuting you. The good news is, you might finally be someone who Jesus would actually want to hang out with.

Miriam Rosenberg Rocek is a writer living in New York City and an amateur Emma Goldman impersonator. She is an active participant in the Occupy Wall Street movement. She regularly writes about 19th century political activism at her blog at <http://anachro-anarcho.blogspot.com>.

I have long since come to believe that people never mean half of what they say, and that it is best to disregard their talk and judge only their actions.—Dorothy Day

Past Mutual Aid continued from p. 11

14. Ibid, p. 183.
15. Ibid, p. 185.
16. Ibid, p. 63.
17. Ibid, p. 86.
18. Dale Steinreich, "100 Years of Medical Fascism," *Mises Daily*, April 16, 2010.
19. Beito, p. 177.
20. Ibid, p. 142.
21. Ibid, p. 212.
22. Ibid, p. 213.
23. Ibid, p. 211.
24. Ibid, p. 214.
25. Ibid, p. 196.
26. Ibid, p. 197.
27. Amy Finkelstein, "The Aggregate Effects of Health Insurance: Evidence from the Introduction of Medicare," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2007) 122 (1): p. 137
28. Beito, p. 24.

We believe in loving our brothers regardless of race, color or creed and we believe in showing this love by working for better conditions immediately and the ultimate owning by the workers of their means of production.
—Dorothy Day

Russian Nightmares, American Dreams by Edith Saposnik Kaplan

Edith's memoirs tells both of her escape from pogrom-ridden Russia and of her life in America as a struggling immigrant

Pb, 144 pp, \$12.95, 2000

Solomon Press
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Street medic groups, such as the Black Cross Health Collective, BALM (Boston Area Liberation Medics), and others, are well known for assisting radicals and activists (often at protests where police brutality is occurring) by providing medical aid in crisis situations.

Support groups are a classic example of mutual aid with a modern twist. They exist to provide a myriad of types of support: alcohol and substance addiction, weight control, HIV/AIDS, grief support, group therapy, coming out, many different diseases and conditions, and even support for those who are caregivers to others. Meetings for some support groups, for example, Alcoholics Anonymous, can be found at any hospital in a local area. If however, someone is seeking support for a rare condition and cannot find a local meetup group, it is now possible to network with others online. A quick Google search for “online support groups” reveals mutual aid help for everything from depression to cancer to chronic pain to weight loss to post-traumatic stress disorder. One website, dailystrength.org, lists over 500 online support groups for various medical and mental health conditions and life circumstances.

Conclusions

Mutual aid is a strategy to help meet the needs of all people in a voluntary and non-coercive fashion, and is crucial to human freedom. Readers of this piece may now be realizing that they have participated in mutual aid—perhaps without even having been aware of doing so. Those who value cooperative voluntary interactions, have compassion for others, and are willing to give and receive help for mutual benefit may be inspired to start their own mutual aid projects or participate in existing ones. By working together for one another’s benefit, we can make the world significantly freer.

Stephanie Murphy, PhD, is a biomedical scientist, talk radio host, and voiceover artist. She is Director of Operations at Fr33 Aid, an all-volunteer charitable and educational organization which provides first aid and does health and safety outreach to the public. She co-hosts the nationally syndicated talk radio show Free Talk Live, an open phones show that covers current events from an individual liberty angle.

“Be cautious of the ruling authorities, for they draw a man close only for their own purposes. They wear the guise of friends when it profits them, but they do not stand by a man in his hour of distress.”

—Rabban Gamliel III Son of Yehuda HaNesi, *Ethics of the Fathers* II:3

many were victims of the anti-Communist Cold War hysteria.

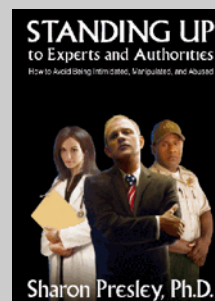
As for brave and long suffering people of Ethiopia, during the Second World War the Italian fascists were driven out of Ethiopia. With British forces in the lead, led by British Serving Officer Orde Wingate, a strong Scottish Calvinist, and Abraham Akavia, a key soldier of his whom he had trained in pre-state Israel.⁴ In 1942 the small Gideon Force (led by Wingate and Akavia) of no more than 1,700 men took the surrender of about 20,000 Italians toward the end of the campaign. At the end of the fighting, Wingate and the men of the Gideon Force linked with the force of Lt. Gen. Alan Cunningham.”⁵

The role of African-Americans in the Spanish Civil War is largely unknown today. This book tells many stories of bravery and historical events that should not be forgotten.

Footnotes

1. *London Times*, July 1, 1936, and the *New York Times*, November 26, 1936 cited by J.B. Neilands in *Harvest of Death; Chemical Warfare in Vietnam and Cambodia*, by J.B. Neilands, Gordon H. Orians, E. W. Pfeiffer, Alje Vennem, and Arthur H. Westing. New York: The Free Press, 1972.
2. Ernest Hemingway’s famous novel about the Spanish Civil War is *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
3. George Orwell’s book about his experiences in the Spanish Civil War is *Homage to Catalonia*.
4. See *Fire in the Night: Wingate of Burma, Ethiopia, and Zion* by John Bierman and Colin Smith. New York: Random House, 1999.
5. Wikipedia

Think for yourself!



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Sharon Presley

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PRIVATE ALTERNATIVES TO GOVERNMENT SOCIAL SERVICES:
A Partial Reading List
compiled by Sharon Presley

People from several different points of view have written excellent commentaries on mutual aid and private social services. They all have something useful to say.

Historical and Current

From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services 1890-1967 by David Beito. Chapel Hill NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009.

A libertarian historian describes the history of mutual aid in the US which helped million of people, including poor blacks, and how this was systematically displaced by state welfare.

The Voluntary City: Choice, Community and Civil Society edited by David Beito and others. Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002

Examples of many kinds of private service that have existed in America, Australia and England, including courts, mutual aid societies, private protection and more.

Black Flag and Windmills: Hope, Anarchy and the Common Grounds Collective by scott crow. Oakland CA: PM Press, 2011

The story of Common Ground and other social anarchist efforts to help in times of need, including Hurricane Katrina.

For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements and Communalism in America by John Curl. Oakland CA: PM Press, 2009

From a left communalist point of view, the author presents a rich history of past and present voluntary and mutual aid organizations, including food and job coops, worker-owned businesses, nonprofit health organizations and much more that help the poor and help the community. More than you ever realized went on!

The Tragedy of American Compassion by Marvin Olasky. Washington DC: Regnery, 1992

A conservative looks at American history and how private concern for the poor worked in the 19th c, then was co-opted by the pro-government Progressive movement. It stresses the crucial role of actual involvement in benevolence and individual responsibility, not merely giving money to distant bureaucrats who don't know the people to whom the money goes.

After the Welfare State edited by Tom Palmer, Ottawa, IL: Jameson Books (distributed through Students for Liberty), 2012

This compact anthology discusses the history of mutual aid societies, what went wrong in Italy, Germany and Greece, philosophical objections to state welfare and much more. Includes essays by David Beito, Tom Palmer, Michael Tanner and others. More reading suggestions in this book. Download a free copy at <http://studentsforliberty.org/after-the-welfare-state/> [Scroll down to near the bottom of page till you see "Download the free PDF by clicking here!"]

Uplift: What People Themselves Can Do by Washington Consulting Group (commissioned by the Jaycees). Olympus Pub. Co., 1974

Though out of date, it has many examples of nonprofits (many still exist) that help people more efficiently and at less cost than comparable government programs.

Practical Suggestions

How to Be an Everyday Philanthropist: 330 Ways to Make a Difference in Your Home, Community and the World by Nicole Bouchard Boles. New York: Workman, 2009.

Lots of practical ideas about how to make efficient use of your giving dollars, not just to charities but to organizations that give the poor a hand up (not just a handout). It even includes ways to start your own giving circle online.



FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: "This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do"

Edited by Danny Duncan Collum and Victor A. Berch
[researcher] A project of The Abraham Lincoln Bri-
gade Archives of Brandeis University
G. K. Hall & Maxwell Macmillan 1992
Reviewed by Raymond Solomon

*"All you colored people be a man at last.
Say to Mussolini. You cannot pass."
— Langston Hughes, from this book*

In 1935 Mussolini's Italy invaded Ethiopia—one of sub-Sahara Black Africa's then two independent nations. There was outrage among many people, especially African-Americans. Mussolini's Italy even engaged in gas warfare. However their ability to take action was limited. As Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie said, when speaking to League of Nations: "...the Italian command followed the procedure which it is now my duty to denounce to the world. Special sprayers were installed on aircraft so that they would vaporize over vast areas of territory a fine, death-dealing rain." One of Ethiopia's Emperor's Haile Selassie's war commanders said: "I am not a savage... anyone who will employ such a substance is a savage. I know nothing of gas, because I have not the savage learning."¹ The League of Nations voted against Italy's invasion, but that did no good.

This was at a time of great turmoil in the world. The fascist nations of Mussolini's Italy, Nazi Germany, and imperial Japan were taking more and bolder aggressive actions. It was also a time of great racial, economic, legal and cultural discrimination against African-Americans in the United States. There is still more. There was the Great Depression in the United States and Europe. In such a climate, African-Americans were more than sympathetic to Ethiopia—they in fact greatly identified with the Ethiopian nation. But the first opportunity for large numbers of African-Americans to do some things meaningful against fascism's rearing head in Europe, Asia, and Africa was the Spanish Civil (1936 to 1939).

In a pre-arranged move, with the governments of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, Spanish Generals, led by Generalissimo Francisco Franco, launched a rebellion from Spanish Morocco against the democratically elected government of Spain, in July of 1936. The Spanish Generals expected easy victory. But there were three things that happened which the Spanish fascist generals had not taken into account:

- (a) There was massive spontaneous popular resistance in Spain.
- (b) The Spanish Navy remained loyal to democratic Spain

- (c) The Catholic province of the Basque remained loyal to democratic Spain.

Franco's side, known as the Nationalists, received a massive amount of military aid, and troops, and aerial support from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

People throughout the world became directly, indirectly, and vicariously involved—this included leading writers who went to Loyalist Spain (also known as Republican Spain and Government Spain) in one capacity or another. These writers included:

- (a) Ernest Hemingway²
- (b) George Orwell³
- (c) Arthur Koestler
- (d) Langston Hughes
- (e) Richard Wright

The last two, of course, were African-Americans.

People were organized and came to fight for Loyalist Spain. They came from France, Britain, Belgium, pre-state Israel, the United States, refugees from Nazi Germany, refugees from Fascist Italy, and other countries. Among the groupings that organized volunteers for Loyalist Spain were the British Independent Labour Party, Trotskyites, Democratic Socialists and Anarchists.

But, the overwhelming majority of volunteers who came to fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War, came under Communist auspices, organized in The International Brigade, also called the International Column. The American branches of this group were then known as the Abraham Lincoln Battalion and the George Washington Battalion—retroactively known as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. They consisted of about three thousand men and a few women. About one-third of them were Jewish—hoping to fight against fascism.

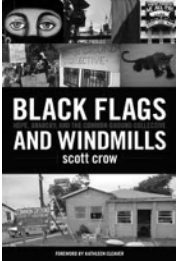
About 100 of the members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were African Americans. "This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do." That's what African Americans in the Spanish Civil War was about. It gives voice to these people, many of whom came back with life-altering injuries, including amputees. In Spain they found a lack of racial prejudice. Many were perplexed that dark-skinned Moors from Morocco were fighting on Franco's side. Many thought that the fighting in Spain was a continuation of the fight against racism in the United States. This book also discusses, and again, gives voice to the life experiences of these men in the United States before the Spanish Civil War and after their return—for those who returned alive.

During the 1930s Communists were very active in organizing Black Americans. Many felt, this book reports, that the Communists did not take into account the specific African-American experience, but tried to lump it all together as part of an overall working class struggle. Many of these men were active in labor unions—including the Industrial Workers of the World before their time in Spain. After their return to America, in addition to facing racial discrimination,

African Americans continued on p.17



BOOK REVIEWS



Black Flags and Windmills ***Hope, Anarchy and the Common*** ***Grounds Collective***

by scott crow

PM Press 2011

Reviewed by Sharon Presley

As you will see from the essay by crow on p.2, he was the one who co-founded Common Ground Collective, the anarchist group that did so much to help the marginalized people of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. This is his story about what happened with the largest anarchist-influenced project ever. But it is much more than that. It's also a story about him as well—how he came to be an organizer, what motivated him to get involved with the disaster in New Orleans, and how he personally reacted to the horror of what he found.

In places the book reads like a good suspense novel—what would he find next, would he be shot at, would he had to shoot someone trying to kill him? Yes, things were that bad and worse. Whatever you have read about Katrina, it was worse than that. Unimaginable suffering and devastation. People left to die by a government too disorganized and uncaring to try to rescue the marginalized nonwhite people of New Orleans. Police and “free-lance” vigilantes shooting black guys for no good reason. In straightforward, no-spin prose, crow brings out the true cost of Katrina.

Crow's account also shows how utterly unprepared and downright stupid FEMA was, let alone the local (and notoriously corrupt) police. Speaking of FEMA's arrival in town, he writes: “Big trucks crawled up and down the block's with pomp, and fanfare, and, of course, the military and Homeland Security in tow.” FEMA had no idea how to deal with a disaster of this magnitude (or perhaps any magnitude). They brought in “massive loads of equipment and lots of personnel” but not what people actually needed—food, water, medical assistance. You know, things that you think would be obvious to even the untrained. Instead, FEMA set up to take them through an “intricate bureaucracy of federal services” that wouldn't be available to people for many years if at all. Or as crow puts it: “Through the brilliant puppetry of administration they were going to save the masses—but on the way to the coliseum they forgot to ask people what they needed.” Our tax dollars at work...If you want real life anecdotes to convince people how incompetent government is, this is the book for you.

But wait, it gets better. FEMA “expected elderly and dis-

advantaged people, who had no access to computers in their homes much less Internet access even pre-Katrina, to know how to use a computer, access the Internet, and then figure out how to navigate their bureaucratic maze.” Right. FEMA finally had to send many people to the Collective's media center where people could help their every step of the way. One of many examples of the stupidity of government bureaucracies but the ability of private volunteers to rise to the tragic occasion. The regional head of FEMA even came to Common Ground's clinic to get some minor but immediately needed medical assistance. Says crow: “Upon leaving, she repeatedly remarked that it was the best medical service she had received or even seen in the region.” Who would have ever guessed, huh?

The real “star” of this book and of Hurricane Katrina was the Common Ground Collective itself. Yet how many people have even heard about it besides anarchists? FEMA did very little, the Red Cross was only slightly better. This Collective and related groups of volunteers were the real heroes. Crow tells the day-by-day store of how Common Ground slowly built up its level of assistance, getting help from all over the country—more volunteers, food, medical supplies and medical personnel. Rescuing people, picking up garbage, the day-to day things that had to be done. Some days were scary—the police were out of control, harassing and intimidating them constantly. Crow often wondered whether he would survive the day because the cops, one guy in particular, were crazy enough to shoot him or others. Fortunately that didn't happen but it could have. Honestly this book would make an exciting movie—not that Hollywood would ever touch it or would we want them to do so. It's got everything—suspense, action, drama, good guys, villains. A real page turner!

But more important is the message—what ordinary people were able to achieve. Not through leaders telling people what to do but through volunteers learning to work together toward a common goal. Common Ground reached out to the people that the government had ignored, not as “saviors” but simply as helpers. They helped the people of this community to organize themselves. With their slogan, “Solidarity not Charity,” they showed what can happen when people work together to help each other.

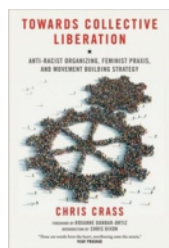
Naturally Common Ground was under constant surveillance. How dare this bunch of “hippies” upstage the government. Toward the end of the book, crow talks about learning about his FBI file. In it he is called “terrorist” and “animal rights extremist.” There are even people in his file he has never heard of. Crow includes a quote from his FBI file on the book jacket: “crow is a puppetmaster in direct action.” Funny, yes, but then...are we to laugh or cry at the colossal denseness and stupidity of these words? Did they read his book? Try to understand? HA. The FBI has to look at everyone who questions the status quo as a threat.

I had my experience up close and personal with the stupidity of anti-terrorist surveillance. In the 70s I co-owned an anarchist bookstore in New York City (Laissez Faire Books, selling both

individualist and social anarchist books). About once a year someone from the NYCPD Red Squad (their equivalent of the FBI) would show up in “disguise.” Snicker. We always knew it was them. The guy would always ask for *The Anarchist Cookbook*. Since NO ONE ELSE ever asked for it, we always knew. I would always smile sweetly (and I looked very sweet and innocent in those days), say no and start my spiel about how most anarchists were not violent. I doubt they bought it (even though it was true) because they kept coming back hoping to catch us. So yeah, I needed no convincing about how dumb these spying organizations are. They just can’t see us in anything other than “they are the enemy” mode and every perception gets distorted to reflect what they want to see. [Though honestly, I think that no matter what ideology people have, some of them tend to see people of other views as “the enemy” and read in what they want to see, not necessarily what is really there. I see social anarchists doing it to a LOT to libertarians and individualist anarchists, and often vice versa too. As a psychologist, I’m hardly surprised but damn, it’s stupid to do.]

This is a book not only for every activist but for anyone who wants to know more about how private efforts can work effectively. The rescue of New Orleans is proof that ordinary people *can* help themselves. It also shows us how incredibly poor government is in responding to disasters. It’s one of the most uplifting books I’ve ever read and I recommend it highly.

See a trailer for this book at <http://scottcrow.org/>



***Toward Collective Liberation:
Anti-Racist Organizing, Feminist
Praxis, and Movement Building
Strategy***

by Chris Crass.

PM Press, 2013

Reviewed by Sharon Presley

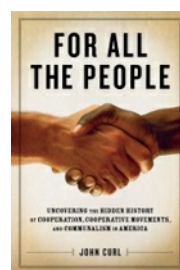
I love practical books. Theory is great and all, and we need it, sure. But things don’t change by themselves. People have to *do* things, educate, change ideas and attitudes, both without and, yes, within the movement. Readers of *Free Voices* may remember that Crass is the one who wrote that terrific essay about male feminism in Issue #8 and how he had to look closely at what *he* was doing. [that essay is included in this book.] He discovered he was part of the problem. That takes real insight and that’s what this book has a lot of.

One of the first essays in this book tells the story of the San Francisco branch of Food Not Bombs. But not just history; Crass writes about the problems they had, the lessons they learned—all important information to know about for future organizers. And he doesn’t just write about what the men did, he gives women their fair share of credit too.

Unlike leftist movements of the 60s, the modern writers now are more sensitive to issues of sexism and racism. In addition to the one FV reprinted (“Going to Places that Scare Me: Personal Reflections on Male Supremacy”) there is also “Against Patriarchy: Tools for Men to Help Further Feminist Revolution” and “By All Means, Keep on Moving: Toward Anti-Racist Politics and Practice.” The next section of the book consists of essays and interviews with people doing anti-racist organizing.

Crass ends the book with an essay titled “We Can Do This: Key Lessons for More Effective and Healthy Liberation Praxis.” He shares the excellent lessons he has learned over his many years of activism. His valuable advice is fleshed out based on the following key suggestions: 1) Cultivate a developmental organizing approach—look for patterns and common dynamics; 2) Set goals—explore why the goals are important; goals should include concrete and measurable outcomes as well as less tangible ones like making people feel more empowered; 3) Focus on assets rather than deficits—don’t just talk about the mistakes but about what your group does well; 4) Focus on opportunities rather than problems; 5) Practice both/and thinking to develop out of dichotomous thinking that forces complex realities into simplistic right/wrong categories—to help break out of fear of making mistakes, waiting for the perfect movement or the perfect organization; 6) Embrace the beauty and joy of the world—don’t just see injustice, see the good things too; 7) Be in your power and encourage others to be as well—everyone can shine and use their talents; and 8) Remember that our ultimate goal isn’t to effectively protest injustice, but to win and create a just society—moving to practice legitimate authority based in systems of liberation.

This is a practical book that can help activists organize without having to reinvent the wheel. It should be read by every anarchist activist who shares Crass’s vision of a just and nonoppressive society.



***For All the People
Uncovering the Hidden History of
Cooperation, Cooperative
Movements, and Communalism
in America***

by John Curl

PM Press, 2012, 2nd Ed.

We reviewed this book in Issue # 9 (Labor) but we have to mention it again. It is chock full of information about the enormous numbers of cooperative and mutual aid groups in that have existed and still exist the US. There was no way we could list them all so if you are interested in this topic, we urge you to read this book. Curl goes into detail about many of them, sometimes telling is why they failed. A lot to be learned from this book.

“The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?”

— Dorothy Day

“The mutual-aid tendency in man has so remote an origin, and is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history.”

—Peter Kropotkin

“I would rather die a dreamer than live as a cynic.”

—scott crow, *Black Flags and Windmills*

“Perhaps most important is the belief that we can do things for ourselves as individuals and communities. That we absolutely do have the collective power to make sweeping changes across the world and in our lives without appealing to Power. Perhaps most important is the belief that we can do things for ourselves as individuals and communities.”

—scott crow