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RADICAL BOOKSELLING HISTORY

Newsletter

Issue 11, November 2025

Contents

Editorial

No apologies for opening this *Newsletter* with a domestic announcement - that Dave Cope has sold his bookselling business Left on the Shelf to one of his customers, Mark Thwaite. Up to now our project has been hosted by LotS: in future the two will be entirely separate (but good friends of course). The Radical Bookselling History project will, for example, have its own website instead of having a page on the LotS website. Not just yet, though - watch this space.

Our main article, from Dave Cope, is a look at the darker side of radical bookselling: attacks – physical, political and legal – from the people and organisations who see us a threat to their power, privilege and reactionary politics.

There's a striking – unplanned – connection between Dave's article and Carla Schäfer's report from September's international Bookselling Research Network conference, which, similarly, highlighted the ways that booksellers have been subjected to hostility, vandalism and intimidation, often by the state, and the ways they have courageously resisted.

Both these articles draw on examples from around the world. We are tentatively spreading our international wings and plan to include more foreign news and articles in the future, albeit without losing our UK focus.

As most of you will already know from the mailing we sent out recently, the much-heralded online map of radical bookshops through the ages is now live. We've included the announcement and links here as well, as we are sure that the *Newsletter* reaches places that our mailings don't.

In *Newsletter* 9 we wrote about the touring exhibition 'Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990'. A series of events was held alongside the exhibition, one of which was a talk by Amanda Sebestyen, who was at the heart of the movement she described and analysed. It's a vivid account, which naturally covers feminist literature, a staple of radical bookshops' sales, so we decided to publish the text in full.

We have our usual section of news items, old items, obits (two this time) and odd bits.

To round things off, we've produced a table of contents for our first 10 editions to help you find that elusive RBH article or news item that you knew you'd seen somewhere in a *Newsletter*.

As ever, we welcome any comments on this *Newsletter* or previous editions and we would also welcome any suggestions for future articles. Please help to widen our readership by sharing the *Newsletter* and telling your friends and colleagues about us.

Dave Cope, John Goodman, Maggie Walker

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Progressive Books 1975–85
Central Books 1986–2004
LOTS 1992 –2025
davecope2@phonecoop.coop

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This *Newsletter*, and previous issues, can be downloaded from:
www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk
(Research Pages tab)

Design and typesetting
Ben Goodman

Left on the Shelf change of ownership and new RBH website

As some of you may know, Dave Cope has sold his business (Left on the Shelf) to Mark Thwaite, a long-standing customer with a deep knowledge of radical books but also the book trade in general, in which he has worked in a variety of capacities. He has also sold second books as a sideline for many years.

Please continue to support Left on the Shelf if you can. One of Mark's initiatives, putting the business on Instagram, has already proved highly successful, so please follow the business there if you use it.

All the Radical Bookselling History Group research pages will stay up on the Left on the Shelf website but we will have our own dedicated website shortly, which will have some extra features, such as a collection of images…. Watch this space.

Left on the Shelf

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News items, old items, obits and odd bits

London Radical Bookfair – past, present and future

This Five Leaves blog from May 2014 is a vivid account of the first London Radical Bookfair and how it came to happen: https://fiveleavespublications.blogspot.com/2014/05/london-radical-bookfair-past-present.html

There are many other articles, often, unsurprisingly, connected with the radical book trade, on Ross Bradshaw's blog, which ran from 2009 to 2016: https://fiveleavespublications.blogspot.com/

Brighton

Unicorn and Bill Butler

Further thanks to Ross at Five Leaves for pointing us towards some articles about Unicorn bookshop and its proprietor Bill Butler.

queensparkbooks.org.uk/discover-brighton/6-the-unicorn-bookshop/,

https://www.holli.co.uk/unicorn/text.htm,

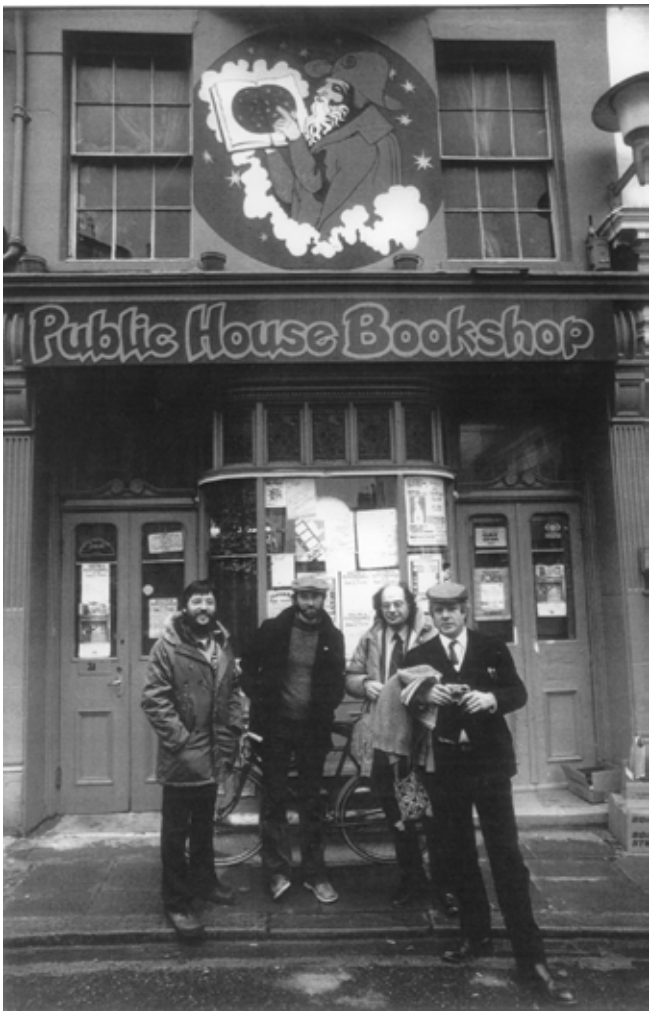
http://www.pennilesspress.co.uk/NRB/butler.htm.

The latter is a review of a book about Unicorn and Butler in which the reviewer, poet Jim Burns, remarks that 'It seemed to me, as I moved around doing poetry readings, that just about every city and town had a small bookshop that was trying to break away from the conventional in terms of the books and magazines they stocked.' True.

Public House Bookshop

While we're at it, here are a couple of articles about Brighton's other alternative bookshop, The Public House Bookshop:

https://afoniya.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/the-public-house-bookshop-brighton/



A photo of the shop, courtesy Facebook, with, left to right, Richard Cupidi (owner), Lee Harwood, Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky.

https://thelatest.co.uk/brighton/2013/07/09/vanessa-austin-locke-the-public-house-bookshop/

This website contains extensive reminiscences of Brighton bookshops, including Unicorn and Public House, some by members of the owners' families:

https://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/topics/topicbusi/bookshops/bookshops

Women in Publishing: an oral history

The project aims to create a permanent record, in their own voices, of women who worked in publishing in the 1970s, '80s and '90s. These decades were the heyday of the networking organisation Women in Publishing (WiP) and more generally of women's activism in the UK. But surviving records of WiP and women's experiences during these edgy, energetic and exciting times are scant or non-existent. Oral history is the most effective way of capturing and preserving social history and giving a voice to the women themselves.

https://www.womeninpublishinghistory.org.uk/

The Personal, the Political, and the Publishing: The International Feminist Bookfairs, 1984 to 1994

Gail Chester's latest article, with this title, has just been published in the latest edition of *DiGeSt - Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 12(2), 138-154.

Abstract: 'This article examines the conflicts that often occurred in the context of the six International Feminist Bookfairs, held between 1984 and 1994 in various cities on three continents. Their organisers had to balance the demands of commercial publishing interests with those of feminist politics. The article addresses some of the political dilemmas and personal difficulties faced by the Bookfairs' organisers, including language liberation, finances, racism, and ableism, but concludes that, whatever their difficulties, the International Feminist Bookfairs were valuable and often life-changing experiences. It includes the personal testimonies of participants in several of the Bookfairs.'

The full article is at https://doi.org/10.21825/digest.91692

Women's Books, Bristol

An article about Women's Books has recently been published on the HOWL (History of Women's Liberation) website: https://howl-uk.org/womens-books-bristol/. A project aimed at building an oral history of radical bookselling in Bristol is underway and we expect to have more on this in future Newsletters.

Sam Rayner's sabbatical blog

Samantha Rayner, Professor of Publishing and Book Cultures at University College London and Co-director of Bookselling Research Network (and friend of this project) is taking a year's sabbatical 'visiting and researching the amazing ways independent bookshops create connections and help our wellbeing'. Definitely the best way to spend a sabbatical that we've ever heard of. Follow her at:
https://profbookshops.substack.com/

Bookhaus

Darran McLaughlin and Phil Wrigglesworth took over Bookhaus, Bristol in September 2025. This bookshop opened in August 2021 and it has been a member of the Alliance of Radical Booksellers since 2022. Bookhaus is a general interest bookshop with a strong focus on radical bookselling, which hosts many events on radical books and hosts radical reading groups in store. Darran McLaughlin has managed the shop since before it opened, and he knew the previous owners Kevin and Jayne Ramage through being involved in the Labour Party and Momentum from 2019. Phil Wrigglesworth is a Senior Lecturer in Illustration at UWE and publisher of *Left Cultures* magazine, which launched its first edition at Bookhaus. Kevin and Jayne decided to retire in 2025, so Darran and Phil took over as owners, after a successful Crowdfunder campaign, in order to continue to maintain Bookhaus in the same tradition and culture it has built over the past four years.

Archives Update

Frontline Books, Manchester 1990 - 2003

We've been notified of an extensive archive of Frontline Books Manchester held at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford. It is in their catalogue as org/FRONTBOOKS 9 -33. The 11 boxes have been extensively catalogued.

Boxes 1 and 2 contain documents relating to property, organisation, employees, the formation of Frontline Books, Community Co-operative membership, meeting minutes. This includes a folder on police raids 1994-1997.

Boxes 3–8 are the financial documents 1990-2003, which among stocklists, cash books, invoices and grant applications includes papers relating to dealings with the general distributor China International Book Trading Corporation.

Boxes 9–11 are miscellaneous papers and photos regarding local events.

Boxes 10 and 11 include the contacts book and diary/rota books for 1999–2000.

Obituaries

Judy Robinson

Judy, who died in May this year, was a well-known community activist, latterly in Sheffield. In earlier years she had been a founder member of Lamp Bookshop in Leigh, Lancashire. Her Guardian obituary is here: https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2025/jul/31/judy-robinson-obituary. We hope to have more on Lamp and Judy in a future Newsletter.

Diana Burfield

Diana had several links to the world of radical bookselling. She set up a radical second-hand bookshop in Oxford, Artemis Books (1980-1998), she commissioned the first English translation of Foucault, and she wrote about one of her relatives, Francis Henderson, who was the founder of Henderson's, the 'Bomb Shop' that became Collet's. Diana died back in 2011 – here is her Guardian obituary https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/jan/29/diana-burfield-obituary - but it has only just come to our notice that her friend and executor Tony Walter has set up a website in Diana's memory: https://sites.google.com/site/dianaburfield

Radical Bookshops map launched

The much-heralded online map of radical bookshops through the ages is now live. It's the outcome of several years' work by On the Record, supported by the research of others, primarily our very own Dave Cope with his listing of radical bookshops, which you can download from https://www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk/pdf/Radical-bookshops-Listing.pdf, and also supported by generous funding from the Barry Amiel and Normal Melburn Trust.

The map is now entrusted to the Alliance of Radical Booksellers for care and maintenance. There's a link to the map on the right hand side of the ARB home page: https://www.radicalbooksellers.co.uk/ or you can access it directly at https://map.radicalbooksellers.co.uk/.

If you spot something wrong or have information to add please let us know – by emailing ARB at alliance@radicalbooksellers.co.uk - so that the map can be continually improved.

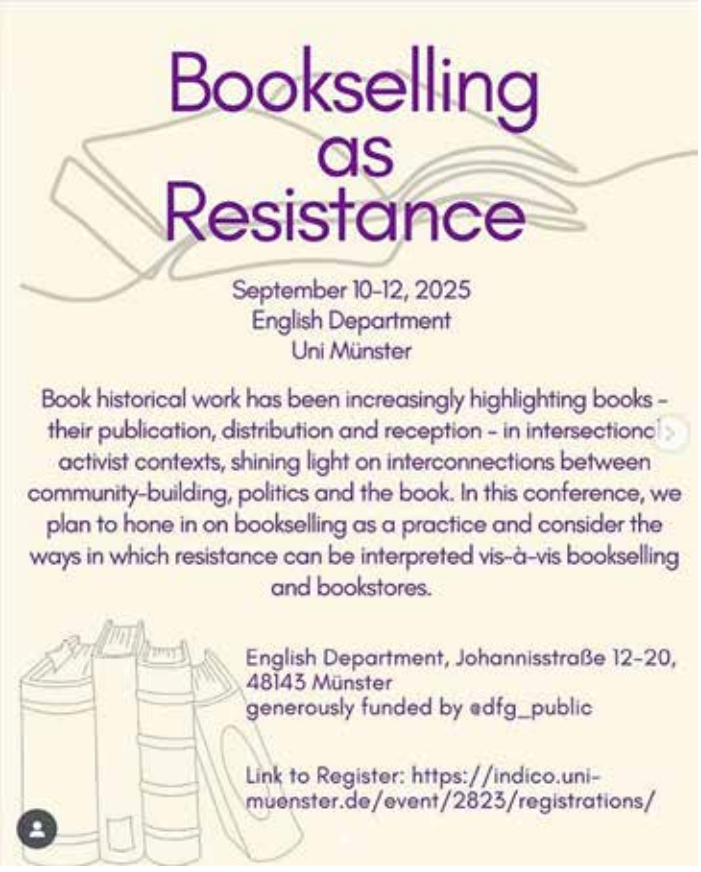
Bookselling as Resistance?

A Conference Report

by Carla Schäfer (University of Münster)

Publications authored by Queers and People of Colour, as well as the institutions that disseminate them, have in recent years increasingly become the target of right-wing culture wars strategies. Within Anglophone book studies, these developments, and especially the manifold strategies of resistance enacted through print cultures and literary institutions, have prompted sustained scholarly engagement. Works such as Kimberley Kinder's *The Radical Bookstore* (2021), Kristen Hogan's *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* (2016), and the interventions of activist bookseller Danny Caine are only a few contributions to this lively discussion.

This year's conference of the Bookselling Research Network, held from September 12th-14th at the English Department of the University of Münster under the title Bookselling as Resistance, situated itself within these debates by focusing on bookstores as sites of community building, alternative knowledge(s), and political mobilisation.



The conference opened with a lecture by the local antiquarian Michael Solder. The prominent placement of his talk underscored the close interweaving of theory and practice, which proved central to the debates of the following days, and which is rarely encountered in the humanities with such consistency. In his talk, Solder drew a line from the medieval *libri catenati*—books fastened with chains and locks—to the small-edition diaries of Anne Frank printed in the occupied Netherlands, and on to the role of antiquarian bookselling today. Antiquarian bookshops, he argued, are not merely repositories for forgotten books but can actively raise awareness for present-day forms of erasure and censorship.

Kristen Highland's lecture likewise addressed forgotten resistant booksellers and the strategies and pitfalls involved in rendering them visible. Deploying digital

humanities methods, Highland presented a new map of New York's nineteenth-century book trade, which included the first Black-owned bookstore in the United States. Operated by David Ruggles, the shop functioned as a meeting point for the abolitionist movement and has thus been repeatedly subjected to hostility, including arson attacks.

Repeatedly the discussion returned to a perceived lack of archival material, which continues to impede systematic research into bookselling practices, and to the importance of persuading booksellers to document their labour. In their lecture on the history of Edinburgh's Radical Bookfair Christina Neuwirth provided an example of painstakingly documented resistant bookselling practices: The publication *A Meeting of the Continents. The International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books 1982–95* edited by Sarah White, Roxy Harris and Sharmilla Beezmohun (2005). Both in the publication and in Neuwirth's remarks, concrete practices of resistance took centre stage, making clear that these often have less to do with the dissemination of grandiose ideas but rather with tireless, usually unpaid organisational and care work. Illustrative examples included reminders to purchase red tablecloths, the provision of shelter during race riots, and the everyday necessity of offering bathroom access to trans people in response to recent anti-trans legislation in the UK.

Anke Vogel, in her lecture on the history of leftist bookselling in West Germany, examined the conditions under which it might still exist today as part of a counterpublic. Vogel further recalled police raids directed against leftist booksellers, situating these within broader patterns of repression. In this context one can also situate Sarah Pyke's research on Operation Tiger, during which in 1984 more than 140 titles of queer literature were confiscated en route to the London bookstore Gay's the Word—a striking example of how resistant bookselling was deliberately criminalised and suppressed. Despite the centrality of such experiences, more recent examples of state violence against booksellers—such as the case of Palestinian booksellers Ahmed and Mahmoud Muna, which made headlines earlier this year—unfortunately went unmentioned at the conference.

At the close of the first day, Tora Åsling presented the latest Industry Insights Report of the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) and thereby bringing contemporary experiences of booksellers into focus. The report on the topic of censorship and freedom of expression took as its point of departure the increase of hostile attacks on booksellers in the form of vandalism and intimidation.

Some of the experiences mentioned in the report were echoed by the owners of bilingual bookstores in Berlin interviewed by Inge Orlowski. Further structural challenges they encounter are the absence of state cultural funding, rising rents, and deficient import infrastructures. Remarkably, some interviewees also reflected on the literary industry's own complicity in processes of gentrification.

An invitation to think more deeply about urban displacement and to decentre middle-class notions of bookselling was extended by Kanupriya Dhingra, whose lecture examined the criminalisation and eviction of the booksellers of Old Delhi's Sunday Book Bazaar. Her analysis illuminated how, under the guise of regulating informal cultural economies, authorities enact processes of urban cleansing, spatial restriction, and censorship, and how booksellers responded through localised practices of resistance.

In summation, the organisers of the conference Chandni Ananth, Ellen Barth, and Corinna Norrick-Rühl created not only a warm and invigorating space for discussion but also a remarkable programme which provided manifold points of departure for renewed reflection on the ways in which literary texts and institutions can resist authoritarian developments, while simultaneously raising critical questions regarding the conditions of possibility for literary resistance and autonomy under capitalism.

Reproduced, with thanks, from the Bookselling Research Network website https://booksellingresearchnet.uk/blog/bookselling-as-resistance/. We have Anglicised the spelling.

‘The Way We Wrote’ 1969–1989

Amanda Sebestyen

The cusp of the 1970s was a time of absolute ferment of words, ideas, conversations and print. Radical bookshops like Housmans, Compendium, Grass Roots and Frontline hosted a forest of pamphlets from all over the world in in their back rooms and basements. The step from reading to speaking to action often seemed short – almost instant. One could move from group to group or sink deep roots in one place.

Shrew was the first publication of the Women’s Liberation Movement in this country; produced each month from 1969-74 by a different group, costing ‘sixpence for women, a shilling for men until we get equal pay’. It would now be called a zine, often printed by the writers themselves. Within a short time the back page of each *Shrew* showed an explosion of new local groups. ‘Consciousness raising’ was what we called the process by which we brought personal feelings and collective actions together -- some of us still do.

It took courage to be a feminist. We were considered mad, ugly and threatening. Several women I knew lost custody of their children when the family courts ‘exposed’ their membership of the women’s movement. Respectable papers like the *Sunday Times* and *The Listener* enjoyed defaming us, echoing the medical profession and functional sociologists wedded to the postwar settlement. JK Galbraith truly remarked as late as 1973 that women had become a servant class ‘available, democratically, to almost the entire male population’.

Early efforts to write about the suffering involved had been dangerous too. Hannah Gavron’s *The Captive Wife* was published posthumously in 1966 after her suicide. Jane Arden, author of the shocking play *Vagina Rex & the Gas Oven* performed in 1969, founder of theatre company Holocaust in 1970 leading to her experimental film *The Other Side of the Underneath* in 1972, again took her own life as did RSC theatre director Buzz Goodbody.

The New Left upheaval gave a more possible space for new writers. Juliet Mitchell’s essay ‘Women, the longest revolution’ in 1966 was followed by Sheila Rowbotham’s pamphlet *Women’s Liberation and the New Politics* in 1969 and then her books *Women, Resistance and Revolution* in 1972 and *Hidden From History* in 1973. All these would now be called intersectional feminism.

1970 was a year of big books brought out by major publishing houses: *Patriarchal Attitudes* by Eva Figes was followed one month later by Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*.

Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* followed her painfully perceptive essays

in the New York Radical Feminists pamphlets. Her writing met stiff resistance from UK feminist theorists at the time but is now being recognised as visionary.

Then came Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch,* the most influential of all on women outside the movement. And of course her next book, *The Obstacle Race* in 1979, focused on women painters.

Separating out the threads of our grass-roots resistance movement is difficult because we would often interlace. Our posters and cartoons reached out widely: that dishcloth, for instance: 'You start by sinking Into his arms, and end up with your arms in his sink'!

Carole de Jong made the first posters, publicising the 1971 International Women's Day march. Chandan Sally Fraser's photos documented our first protests and conferences of 1970, and Val Charlton made the placards for that first march in 1971. Jo Nesbitt and Keir Wickenham came through with their cartoons for Women's Report from 1972, where Pat Kahn was also a member of the collective. Cath Jackson and Jacky Fleming did cartoons for Spare Rib from 1974.

Yet I think of the 70s as a time of words above all, books, and songs, and street theatre. Poetry pamphlets were also appearing throughout the 70s, coming out of collectives of half a dozen (sometimes previously published) women sharing new experiences and encouraging each other.

Visual art was developing more gradually. I remember a well-respected art textbook devoting a chapter to explaining that women students *chose* to drop out of the artworld and have children, so it was pointless to try and promote their work. There were outposts at opposite poles of expression: the matriarchal, Mexican-inspired art of Monica Sjoo in Bristol counterposed to the consciously abstract works selected by the first all-women committee of the Hayward Annual 1978.

First in my memory comes the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union, showing their work in July 1974 under the inimitable title 'Hang Up, Put Down, Stand Up!'. They included Mary Kelly, Tina Keane, Mary (now Hannah) O'Shea, and Roberta Henderson (later to host the early 90s Muse Brixton Arts Café where Joan Binta Breeze performed her poetry and women showed their craftwork).

Then in the mid 70s came the Women's Art History group: Roszika Parker, Griselda Pollock, myself, and again Tina and Mary/Hannah. Our discussions fed into those two iconic books many years in the making: *Old Mistresses* emerging in 1981 and *The Subversive Stitch* 1984.

As with the earlier Underground press, all the leftwing groups started women's sections and many had their own magazines: *Red Rag* mainly Communist, *Socialist Woman* mainly Trotskyist, *Woman's Voice* wholly SWP. Socialist feminism was broader than this and was definitely the leading strand, while we radical feminists were more anarchist-inclined, busier squatting together, starting rock bands, going in mystical directions than writing. (Sue Bruley's upcoming 'History of Women's Liberation at the Grassroots' will cover some of the ways that women built new bases to support independent lives.)

But we read, oh did we read! Our first favourites were the classic *Notes from the Second Year* by New York Radical Feminists: 'The Politics of Housework', 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm', and Redstockings Manifesto:

'We identify with all women. We define our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited woman… We repudiate all privileges that divide us from other women. We are committed to achieving internal democracy'…

Followed by the fiery Furies writing of Rita-Mae Brown and then her lesbian comedy romances, and the poetry of Adrienne Rich, Karen Lindsey and Robin Morgan.

For the sake of this younger audience I should explain that the borderlines between radical feminism, nonviolent anarchism and the Gay Liberation Front were very porous at that time, and transgender people were part of our movement. New lines and definitions have been drawn up after my time, and without my agreement.

Our fledgling radical feminist group did write a 'position paper' for the 1972 Women's Liberation conference in Acton. Called *Thoughts on Feminism*, each piece was anonymous but distinct. We wanted to avoid committee-writing and be multivocal, as the Italians would say.

In 1973 we produced a Radical Feminist *Shrew*, with a lead article about Artemisia Gentileschi and a big cover photo of her sensational painting of Judith with her companion beheading Holofernes. That same year some of us collectively published Morgan's poem about Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath after it was banned in the UK.

Virago Press started in 1973 as well, followed in 1974 by Feminist Books Leeds (founder Lee Sanders Comer) and Onlywomen Press (founded by Lilian Mohin). In 1976 *Catcall*, 'a paper for non-sectarian feminist discussion', was

started by Judy Greenway, Margot Farnham and Deborah Hart. *Trivia,* with its distinctively tiny format, celebrated lesbian literature and was first to publish Jeanette Winterson.

Then in 1978 The Women's Press brought feminist genre fiction into the mainstream. Paperback anthologies brought writing once internal to our movement further out to wider readership of women. Penguin published some of these, and Routledge's Pandora Press joined in the 80s too.

Sheba Feminist Publishers was started in 1980 by a mixed collective (made up of white women and women of colour) and *Outwrite* started in 1982 as an international feminist newspaper with Black women in the majority: 'Dedicated to providing news for women, by women', in stark contrast to the male-dominated mainstream media, *Outwrite* developed from a workshop run by Dena Attar and Shaila Shah in 1979 at a Women's Publications conference in Manchester. The paper's global perspective developed as OWAAD (Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent) was gaining momentum and feminism emerging in many Third World countries.

The routes from pamphlet reading to conference papers to periodicals to book publishing could be indirect but were also interconnected. We would know people from different sections. It was, as Lynne Segal has remarked, 'a shared space', with local women's centres and the collectives springing up all over the place: collectives of radical lawyers, doctors, social workers, therapists, self-help groups and women's refuges as well as publishers and presses.

It was lesbian squatters who started the movement's bookshop Sisterwrite with its accompanying café Sisterbite. Black feminists mixed in women's discos and housing, while working on their own critical analysis of race and empire as they revealed themselves in our movement.

My favourite writing came from La Rivolta Femminile, Italian radical feminists who emerged from the art world. The critic Carla Lonzi was their main theorist: '*Existing as a woman does not imply participation in male power, but calls into question the very concept of power.'* Like many of our pioneers and prophetesses she died young.

In 1974 I went to visit La Rivolta in Milan and Rome, where I made friends with Suzanne Santoro whose own book *Towards a New Expression* was soon to be banned in England. The ICA bookshop was forbidden to stock her pictures highlighting the erasure of female genitals in the fine art tradition. Roszika Parker

wrote about this scandal in *Spare Rib* – the biggest publication of our movement with the widest outreach.

In 1976 La Rivolta opened their artists' co-op studio gallery the Co-operativo Beato Angelico in Rome, showing a previously undiscovered painting by Artemisia Gentileschi together with their own work. I reported to *Spare Rib* on this breakthrough and on other feminist factions in Italy. Roszika Parker liked what I had written and I was invited to join the *Spare Rib* collective -- something I doubt could ever happen as easily today.

Spare Rib started in 1974 as a national magazine founded by two professional journalists and with mainstream distribution. Its early cover look was women's-magazine-with-a twist: celebrity photos with subversive captions. By the time I joined the collective in 1977 a Punk aesthetic was taking over. The era of sampling and tearing was beginning, and it fitted well with our leaderless movement's ethos.

Spare Rib became a place where women around the country could network. Women artists were part of this interchange. There's an example from July 1977 when Rosie Parker's article 'Portrait of the Artist as Housewife' reported on the Feministo postal art exchanges where women artists made and sent works between their own homes. Those pages from the magazine, and some of the original post-able artworks, were shown again this year at Two Temple Place as part of 'Lives Less Ordinary: Working-Class Britain Re-seen'.

The month before Feministo, *Spare Rib's* cover led with 'Disturbing Images of Women' and a picture of experimental performance artist Jane Wibberley, naked and painted with zebra stripes. Lucl Lippard, veteran author of *From the Center: feminist essays on women's art* and still going now at 88, was quoted inside on the Contents page: "It is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult".

In 1981 I left *Spare Rib* over a very current issue of 'no debate'. The historical articles I wrote had also touched on issues that remain unresolved: sex work, social purity movements, menstrual taboos. I went to New Zealand, drawn once more by a publication, or rather two: *Broadsheet* and *BWD* (*Bitches Witches and Dykes* in the long version). Broadsheet was more like *Spare Rib, BWD* more like *Outwrit*e.

When I returned to the UK and two years later many things had happened in women's publishing. The first International Feminist Bookfair began with

excitement in 1984 at Covent Garden's Jubilee Hall. There was a range of theoretical journals now: *m/f* (post-structuralist) had started in 1978, *Feminist Review* (socialist feminist) in 1979; to be joined in 1983 by *Trouble & Strife* (radical feminist, for which I wrote the strapline about 'men's power and women's resistance' with the late Diana Leonard), and in 1985 *Women's Review* (literary).

I wrote chapters for some of these, and for feminist anthologies, and edited one myself: *68, 78, 88: from Women's Liberation to Feminism* (Ultra Violet Books 1989) invited women from around the UK to write about their lives and politics in those three epochal years. Gail Chester, my editor, and I were proud of the range of backgrounds and ages represented. Many of us had started to realise that our movement was being written *about* us *without* us. We had to do something!

Tentatively we'd begun a project called HOWL – History of Women's Liberation. – back in the late 70s. It has taken more than 40 years but there is now a growing website https://howl-uk.org/.

There you can enter and in the words of Sue O'Sullivan - founder member of women's liberation since the 60s, Spare Ribber, Sheba publisher, health worker with HIV Positively Women and more: 'Let the rich, united, divided, contradictory, joyful, difficult, amazing, ordinary *and* banal years of the WLM be recorded in our own words. This is our story. Our history'.

HOWL's oral history accounts begin in the 1960s and end in 1988, a similar timeline to this exhibition, 'Women In Revolt!'.

Through the 1980s I moved into writing about art, first for *City Limits*, a leftwing co-operative breakaway from *Time Out* magazine, and later for the *New Statesma*n, and sometimes for the *Women Artists' Slide Library Journal/Women's Art Magazine* and others.

There was that feeling in the air again, of a passionately committed radical movement, and this time visual artists were in the lead. If the 70s were about words, the 80s were about images. Angry and loving, feminist and queer, experimental, humble, utopian, ambitious, above all not all-white: this was our new school of history painting.

I responded to the Black British Art movement and was lucky to meet and write about many of them. One very important factor was how few of these artists came from, or had been educated in, London. This outlaw quality gave their work so much vitality.

The room of 1980s Black women artists in this exhibition is for me the highlight, though there are moving and important things to see elsewhere in this huge show.

As I stood awestruck again in front of Sutapa Biswas' many-armed Kali-like painting titled 'Housewives With Steak-knives', I suddenly noticed a little bloodstained flag clenched in one of the woman's fists. Looking more closely I saw the flag was made from a cut-out clipping of Artemisia Gentileschi's 'Judith Beheading Holofernes'. And I hoped that piece of paper might have been cut from our long-ago Radical Feminist *Shrew*.

This is the text of a talk Amanda Sebestyen gave at the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, on 2 May 2025 in conjunction with the exhibition *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–1990*, which ran from 7 March to 1 June 2025. The paragraph beginning 'Carole de Jong made the first posters…' has been updated.

There is a slightly different version of the text – with plenty of images - on the HOWL (History of Women's Liberation) website: https://howl-uk.org/the-way-we-wrote-1969-1989/.

HOWL is collecting the oral and written testimonies of women who were involved in the women's movement between the late 60s and the mid-90s. If you would like to contribute to the website, especially if you live outside London, they would love to hear from you at howl@howl-uk.org.

Attacks on Radical Bookshops

Dave Cope

The first part of this article is an attempt to explore the nature of attacks on radical bookshops in Britain and other countries in the twentieth century by looking at the most serious cases of attacks on individuals and premises, and to examine the responses. The shorter second part is a more detailed look at the case of one shop in France based on a book written by its owner.

Non-violent, 'legal' attacks

Before looking at these most serious existential attacks, it is worth pointing out some other oppressive attacks by the state on radical bookshops.

I am not including 'attacks' by customs officials in Britain which are well documented and however pernicious, and absurd, these became when repeated against certain importing shops, they are based partly on decisions by the shops themselves, though of course this does not justify the harassment and extended campaigns of destruction of books. The intention was not to close down any particular bookshop.

There is a study to be done on threats to bookshops by local authorities in England. For instance in 1988, Reading Matters in Wood Green, London, was threatened with the ending of its grant, and possible closure, by the Conservative group on Haringey council for its promotion of LGBTQ books at the same time as the group wanted to abolish the gay and lesbian unit and cease its funding of gay groups. The abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986 did lead to the closure of a number of radical businesses. This theme is also for another occasion.

I have yet to find information on IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) bookshops, but the first attempt to close Communist Party bookshops in the US was in 1919 in New York. Fifty policemen and right-wing volunteers raided the People's House bookshop at the Rand School of Social Science, then New York's most prominent radical educational centre. Another example of state persecution in America was in August 1940 when Oklahoma City police raided the CP's Progressive Book Store and arrested about twenty staff and customers, and confiscated thousands of books and pamphlets. Four shopworkers were successfully charged with violating State laws against 'criminal syndicalism', though the convictions were reversed two years later.

Some American radical shops of the second half of the twentieth century were kept under surveillance and/or harassed by the FBI for years, and this extends to the present. Government repression was not common in Western Europe.

In Australia, the CP was banned in 1940 and again in 1950 (though this ban was overturned by the High Court the following year). The 1940 ban led to the closure of all the CP bookshops and the stocks were confiscated. The International Bookshop in Melbourne escaped this fate as its ownership had been transferred to an individual, a common practice among left parties and groups, in Britain especially, to protect their publishers and papers from legal action – the idea being that a trustworthy and poor member would not face the same financial disaster as the party would, and a paper or even a company could be re-started under a different name and ownership.

Moe's Books and Cody's Books in Berkeley regularly provided protection for protesters during riots – both were situated at the heart of many protests. The People's Park riots in 1969 were so serious that the National Guard used the roof of Cody's Books for snipers and machine guns.

By mid-July in 1969 Cody's had to close for the twelfth time within two months, which had serious financial consequences for the shop.

Fred Cody personally had sympathy for the energy and idealism of youth, but had criticisms of some of their actions. Moe Moskovitz felt the same, especially when the Free Park movement was infiltrated by some who used the situation to sell hard drugs and showed little interest in politics. Cody's also found dealers leaving cocaine or heroin behind books.

In the mid-1970s the political scene in Germany was changed by the arrival of the Red Army Faction. The government encouraged the police to use German laws which, among other things, made it illegal to distribute anything that contained material on how to take violent action against the state. Over 40 radical shops were raided, with much press coverage, making it difficult for the shops to trade. Police photographed shops and customers, asked for identity of customers (which threatened the jobs of teachers), however there were no shops that openly supported the RAF.

Basis was a bookshop in Munich, set up around 1976. Ina Weiss worked there and had a flat above the shop. The shop was raided about ten times in five years, once with police armed with machine guns. Later searches were not aggressive, and there were never any charges brought against this shop.

In several countries - France, Germany and the USA in particular – radical bookshops complained not just about police harassment but about their inaction in bringing the perpetrators of terrorist attacks to justice.

A potentially new area of research, geographically, is opened up by a recent article on the independent Jifeng Bookshop in Shanghai, China: 'Spatial Dynamics of a Social Movement Centred on an Independent Bookstore in China' by Chen Zhou and Yuan Xie in *China: An International Journal* (2021). I have not been able to access this yet, but the abstract states that it survived for 20 years before being closed down by the authorities.

Violent attacks

Turning to the most serious attacks, the earliest example of the burning down of a radical bookshop that I am aware of in Britain concerns a suffragette bookshop. After suffragettes burnt down a university sports pavilion in Bristol, students retaliated by looting and burning down the WSPU premises and bookshop on Queens Road in October 1913.

"Bristol 'varsity students revenge'. The wrecked suffragette's headquarters"

The Brüder Suschitzky bookshop was the first socialist bookshop in Vienna, established by Philipp Suschitzky and his brother Wilhelm in 1901. They were both members of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria. Initially they sold new and second-hand books on socialism, pacifism, secularism and women's rights, sexual reform and abortion. In 1911 it branched out into publishing under the name of Anzengruber-Verlag (Wien-Leipzig).

The shop windows were often smashed, and from 1934/1935 they faced more serious problems: police harassment, searches, removal of books and court cases. After the March 1938 German annexation of Austria the shop was closed down.

Wilhelm was the father of Wolf Suschitzky and Edith Tudor-Hart, who escaped from Vienna in 1933 and 1934 respectively, and who both became celebrated photographers in Britain, with international reputations. Edith's photos grace mainstream and radical books alike, including a Left Book Club one.

The most egregious examples in the twentieth century were obviously the measures taken by fascist regimes in the 1930s, which wiped out all radical publishing and bookselling. Publishing by the resistance movements in the fascist countries was very limited. The story of German underground publishing, especially the communist 'Tarnschriften' (camouflage) booklets is fascinating as far as it goes. Under Nazi occupied countries the resistance movements were stronger, helped by the fact that socialist and communist parties had generally not been decimated since 1933. Members of the resistance went to extraordinarily brave means to produce leaflets and books (Harry Stone *Writing in the Shadow: Resistance Publications in Occupied Europe,* Frank Cass, 1996 gives a detailed and readable account of this, with a very wide range of rare illustrations).

Most evidence of violence involving bookshops comes in the 1960s, and extends to the present. Some European countries have a particular tradition of violent polarisation in their politics: in France, Germany and Italy this extended to physical attacks on bookshops. In 1962, during the war in Algeria, Maspero's La Joie de Lire was dynamited, as was the anarchist Le Monde Libertaire, and bookshops belonging to the French Communist Party in Toulon and Nice were also blown up.

Unsurprisingly, 1968 saw a huge increase in incidents.

Police chasing left-wing demonstrators in May 1968 into La Joie de Lire, threw tear gas grenades into the shop and one member of staff had to be taken to hospital. There was a period of attacks in 1968 by the far right – on La Joie de Lire, again, Clarté and then in October Gît-le-Coeur (Maoist) by rightists in retaliation for an attack on their meeting place which was itself a retaliation for their attack on the offices of an education trade union. Then another retaliation by a group of Maoists and anarchists failed to burn down the Librairie Francaise (librairie means bookshop in French). It appears that the Government's banning of the fascist group Occident who were heavily implicated in some of these cases did limit their activity.

America also had a violent tradition. CP bookshops had been attacked by the Ku Klux Klan from an early date, and so were black shops. Attacks on Black Panther premises were notorious. The Panthers did not open bookshops as such – they set up 'People's Free libraries' and 'reading rooms' in community centres and their

offices. Attacks were usually by the police, occasionally by far-right individuals. They did involve the destruction or confiscation of papers and books, and the use of armed force, and almost always the wrecking of offices. (For details see Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*).

There is a detailed account of serious attacks on one bookshop in Menlo Park in the San Francisco Bay area. Michael Doyle describes how, during the period of the attacks in 1968, Roy Kepler of Kepler's Books took several decisions in face of police inability to find the perpetrators. He employed a private detective; he spent $11,000 on organising security groups in the shops and surrounding area, and astonishingly he made contact with a group of far-right activists by attending a bible class they held, after which they held lengthy discussions on pacifism and Christianity. This led to these individuals developing some respect for Kepler, but they still hated the liberalism and radicalism of his shops – and they claimed none of their circle were involved in the attacks, which continued. But some were. These included a gun dealer who was developing a small munitions business on his premises and had an application to store dynamite turned down by the local authority. Kepler did go to the FBI, with evidence. They listened sympathetically but claimed not to have the resources to watch the bookstores. There were several more examples of police ignoring information. The breakthrough came when an ex-convict informed police about planned attacks. A more sympathetic police chief, concerned about the increasing number of attacks, which were reflecting badly on the town, used an officer to infiltrate the group. After the arrests, five of the accused were beaten up by fellow prison inmates for being Nazis. The charges were only brought against a planned attack on a church holding a talk about China, so nobody was ever charged for the bookshop attacks. Because of a rather bungled prosecution and criticisms of the police some, including the civil libertarian Kepler who hated any repressive law or misuse of the law, became critical of the proceedings.

There was another very serious incident in the USA. The Internationalist Books and Community Centre in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was set up by Bob Sheldon in 1981. It was a proper shop but had many characteristics of the infoshop. It was a centre for organising against a local nuclear power station, against the Gulf war and it organised books for prisoners, among other campaigns. Sheldon was assassinated in February 1991 when closing up one evening. The killer was never found.

In the late 1970s, France experienced a sudden upsurge in violent attacks on bookshops and booksellers, mostly from the far right. In January 1977 the owner of la Librairie Arabe in Paris, which had pro-Palestinian sympathies, was gunned

down. In April two provincial shops were attacked: La Tête en Bas in Angers and La Taupe in Le Mans – in both cases by soldiers who were soon arrested. In June 1978 La Librairie Française, a right-wing shop, was attacked by 'the Jewish Brigades'. In June 1980 the Black Ink printshop in Marseille was blown up, killing a neighbour. In August 1980 two Parisian shops - Les Reclus and Les Mille Feuilles - were completely burnt down by fascist groups. Two fascists were arrested after the attack on the latter – but only because they forgot to turn on their car lights and were stopped by police. Before the end of the year a Maoist shop in Paris, le Phénix, was burnt down and a worker was seriously injured. Both the shop and the worker lived up to the shop's name and recovered – it still exists in 2025. This phase extends into 1981 when Imagine (an anarchist information centre) and EDI (International Studies and Documentations – a radical publisher) were destroyed and La Librairie Jonas was firebombed (see below). One assessment put the number of attacks on bookshops, publishers and cinemas at close to 50 since 1976, with the weapon of choice being Molotov cocktails.

Karl-Marx-Buchandlung in Frankfurt was burnt down in 1981. But, like le Phénix, it was rebuilt and still exists in 2025.

Turning to Britain, a country without such a violent political tradition, the most distressing attack occurred in Birmingham. Socialist and Trade Union Books in Digbeth was opened in 1972 by the International Socialists. In late March 1981 a 21-year-old mentally disturbed far-right activist went on a killing spree in Birmingham. He attacked several people, though without killing any – one involved a crossbow attack on a black man, then he drove a car into two Asian girls. He then went to London, spent two nights in a luxury hotel, before hijacking a car belonging to Heather Bridges, who drove him to back to Birmingham. He put her in the boot, unconscious, and set out to destroy the bookshop. Blocking the entrance, he poured petrol into the shop and threw a home-made bomb inside. The shop was soon in flames. The six people inside escaped out of the back and over roofs. But Heather Bridges died in the car. The attacker stayed to watch and was arrested there. At the trial he expressed no remorse just 'anger that those in the shop survived'. He was given a life sentence.

Not a single book was saleable at full price. All records of the business were lost, apart from a few in the manager's house. There were immediate offers of support from the radical book trade. Richard Handyside (Stage One and Monthly Review Press) and Martin Eve (Merlin Press) wrote a joint letter to the Bookseller of 11 April 1981 suggesting publishers send books to restock the shop when it reopened. They could be sent to the Birmingham Peace Centre in

Moor Street, which would store them. The Federation of Radical Booksellers also raised money for the shop, but it never reopened.

An attack on Sheila Coxhead, while she was working on her own in the Other Bookshop, the International Marxist Group shop in London, left her unconscious, in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

Bogle L'Ouverture 1977

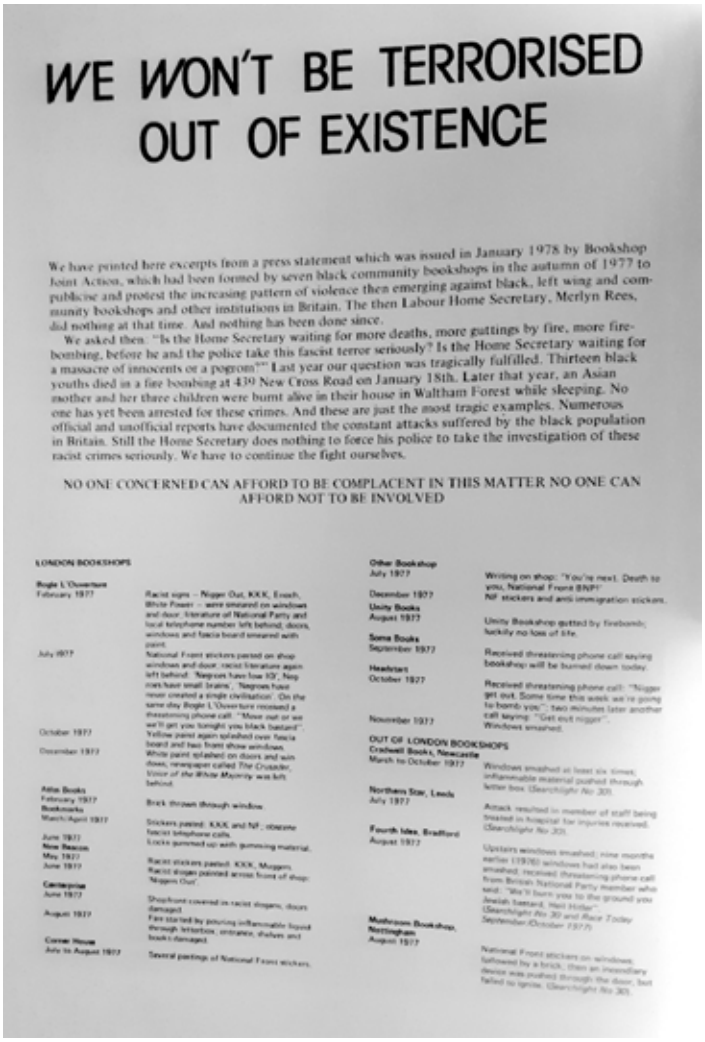
White, Harris and Beezmohun, A Meeting of the Continents

Black bookshops faced repeated racist attacks and abuse, and in Britain all the black bookshops at the time were radical. Much time was spent removing graffiti and even excrement that would be pushed through letterboxes.

Unity Books in Harlesden was probably the first black bookshop in the country. It was run by the Black Workers' Movement, which replaced the Black Panther Party in Britain. It was fire-bombed in 1973 and all the stock was destroyed.

Grassroots in Golborne Road in West London was set on fire. It was the office of the Black Liberation Front and their paper *Grassroots*. It had a shop front and a small bookshop.

Centerprise in Hackney was firebombed twice. In August 1977 it suffered serious damage, which would have been worse but for quick action by people who were passing by. Staff and supporters slept in the building immediately after this to protect it.



WE WON'T BE TERRORISED OUT OF EXISTENCE

We have printed here excerpts from a press statement which was issued in January 1978 by Bookshop Joint Action, which had been formed by seven black community bookshops in the autumn of 1977 to publicise and protest the increasing pattern of violence then emerging against black, left wing and community bookshops and other institutions in Britain. The then Labour Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees, did nothing at that time. And nothing has been done since.

We asked then: "Is the Home Secretary waiting for more deaths, more guttings by fire, more firebombing, before he and the police take this fascist terror seriously? Is the Home Secretary waiting for a massacre of innocents or a pogrom?" Last year our question was tragically fulfilled. Thirteen black youths died in a fire bombing at 439 New Cross Road on January 18th. Later that year, an Asian mother and her three children were burnt alive in their house in Waltham Forest while sleeping. No one has yet been arrested for these crimes. And these are just the most tragic examples. Numerous official and unofficial reports have documented the constant attacks suffered by the black population in Britain. Still the Home Secretary does nothing to force his police to take the investigation of these racist crimes seriously. We have to continue the fight ourselves.

NO ONE CONCERNED CAN AFFORD TO BE COMPLACENT IN THIS MATTER NO ONE CAN AFFORD NOT TO BE INVOLVED

LONDON BOOKSHOPS

Bogle L'Ouverture
February 1977

July 1977

October 1977

December 1977

Atlas Books
February 1977

Bookmarks
March/April 1977

June 1977

New Beacon
May 1977
June 1977

Centerprise
June 1977

August 1977

Corner House
July to August 1977

Other Bookshop
July 1977

December 1977

Unity Books
August 1977

Soma Books
September 1977

Headstart
October 1977

November 1977

OUT OF LONDON BOOKSHOPS

Cradwell Books, Newcastle
March to October 1977

Northern Star, Leeds
July 1977

Fourth Idea, Bradford
August 1977

Mushroom Bookshop, Nottingham
August 1977

We Won't be Terrorised Out of Existence 1978 Statement

The larger black bookshops, New Beacon and Bogle L'Ouverture (renamed the Walter Rodney Bookshop in 1981), together with the smaller Headstart Books, set up Bookshop Joint Action in 1977. Their statement was headed 'Black Community Bookshops Say: We Won't Be Terrorised Out of Existence'. This campaign was extended to all radical shops. In 1982 there was a discussion forum at the 1st International Bookfair of Radical Black & Third World Books on 'Racist and Fascist Attacks on Black, Left Wing and Community Booksellers and Other Institutions in Britain'.

The Third World Centre in the East End of London was fire-bombed in May 1988. The first floor of the building was gutted and a bookshop, library and café were destroyed.

Two Collet's shops were firebombed for selling Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. It is worth making two remarks at this point. First, that it was not only radical shops that were attacked over the Rushdie affair. Dillons and other mainstream shops and independents which sold the book also suffered broken windows or arson attempts – including shops in York and High Wycombe - and there were failed attempts in Guildford, Nottingham and Peterborough. The second is that not all attacks came from the far right. The anti-Rushdie incidents came from Islamic fundamentalists – like those who organised the book burnings in Bradford.

Attacks could, occasionally, come from some young anarchists or individuals and groups who followed the anarchist 'black bloc' for the sake of attacking the police or looting. During the riots which followed the anti-poll tax demonstration on 31 March 1990, not only were shops and cafés looted and burnt but bins were thrown at the windows of Silver Moon and Collet's next door to each other on Charing Cross Road. The workers at the former just managed to get their shutters down, but Collets was less lucky. And it meant nothing to the rioters that Collet's had a window display of anti-poll tax books and pamphlets at the time.

An incident in the Wooden Shoe anarchist record and bookshop in Philadelphia in America is worth relating here. In the 1970s, one worker inspired by

situationism decided that the shop was commodifying dissent and revolution and he tried to destroy it by flooding all the shop's business records, and stock. The attempt failed and the shop did carry on. In February 1997 it did burn down – due to an electrical fault. The historian of the shop, James Robinson, writes that this was the best thing that could happen as the shop, described as 'a record shop with a few books on the side' was in a poor financial position and the insurance money enabled the shop to be turned into a much better one. The shop still exists, but it was nearly destroyed by internal dissent.

This 'ideological' opposition to bookshops as exploiters, which could be turned into an excuse for theft, features in several countries. Cody's and Kepler's faced the crippling effects of it. And in France, Maspero had to close his shop due to the repeated theft of large quantities of books by leftist students and academics. In Britain it was Centerprise that publicly recognised theft as a major problem. Generally, it was not discussed much.

The long-standing anarchist bookshop, Freedom, in Whitechapel, was firebombed twice. In March 1992 the premises were attacked by five men in balaclavas who smashed everything possible. The damage was estimated at £5,000 but nobody was hurt. On May 7 the same year there was a break-in and most of the equipment installed to replace what had been smashed was stolen, but on June 4 an arson attack caused more serious damage, especially to Aldgate Press, the associated print shop, estimated at £40,000. The immediate solidarity response to this disaster was impressive and unexpected by the shop. A year after the last attack, an editorial in *Freedom* suggested that financially the paper was in a better position than before, as three supporters had made significant donations/bequests.'

The second attack occurred overnight in January 2013 when the premises were firebombed: there were no casualties but the shop and its electrics were seriously damaged.

Fortunately, not all attempts were successful. Several fires were put out before they spread.

An off-duty policeman at a nearby night club reported the early stages of a break-in at the back of Progressive Books in Liverpool at 2.00am. In December 2023 the planned burning down of Five Leaves in Nottingham was thwarted in time, and a known far-right ex-soldier was jailed. There was a similar incident in Australia. In 2016, a far-right extremist was found guilty of planning attacks on the Resistance Bookshop, the Trades Hall, and the Melbourne Anarchist Club. He had visited these sites to gather information, though the attacks were not carried out. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison.

It has been claimed that three shops close to the centre of riots, in Berkeley, Brixton and Hackney, were spared from rioters **because** they were radical and appreciated by locals. Moe's Books escaped damage in the People's Park events mentioned above, possibly, writes Moe's daughter Doris, because it always sheltered protestors fleeing from the police. Albert Meltzer thought that the 121 Anarchist Centre in Railton Road went unscathed in April 1981 because in the few weeks it had been open before the riots the shop had earned the respect of a leading local black activist. The same was suggested in Rosa Schling's book on Centerprise, also during the 1981 riots. These claims cannot be proved, but they are possible.

Responses to attacks

We've already seen how some shops responded to attacks. There were other ways that shops fought back. These included mutual aid; crowd funding; asking supporters to meet in shops on days and at a time of potential flashpoints; setting up alarms to local police stations. After the attacks on its shops in the south of France, the PCF produced guidelines for the protection of its shops, and most radical bookshops probably did something similar, creating instructions in the event of an attack. The Federation of Radical Booksellers in Britain set up a security fund for emergencies following attacks, but surprisingly it was rarely taken up.

Just Books in Belfast faced a unique problem with customers in the shop openly armed, but with no criminal intent, not even to ask for a discount. They might be Irish republican volunteers or British army soldiers. The shop was even-handed in selecting stock and staff from both communities. To reduce any tensions there was a notice on the door asking for all arms to be left outside and apparently this was accepted, for instance when soldiers bought 'mementos' to take home. On one occasion a police officer came in with his weapon. Asked politely by Cahal McLaughlin, who was at the counter, if he would leave the shop he did – but returned with another officer and arrested him, but he was soon released. On two occasions nearby explosions did cause damage to the shop front. No bookshop could survive unscathed in Belfast during the 'troubles'.

Retaliation was dangerous, as it could lead to a spiral of violence as noted above in Paris. But it is an understandable response. Ann Torode describes a van load of women who waited overnight outside the shared premises of Cradlewell Books and the Tyneside Socialist Centre in Newcastle, when they expected an attack from the far right (in Angela Smith '*Re-Reading 'Spare Rib'*).

One brave worker at News from Nowhere in Liverpool, a woman, chased four fascists after one episode in the shop in 1984. This resulted in the arrest of two

of them (who were charged). Later that day one of other two came back and punched the woman in the face. The same shop, after an attack in October 1985, issued a thoughtful statement after the event, critical of those on the left advocating a physical approach: 'it shows once again that is not good enough to 'drive the fascists off Church Street', as they will simply turn their aggression onto sitting targets such as News from Nowhere or individual black, Asian or Jewish people, as they have done before'. Yet shops sometimes had to fill the premises with visible and hidden supporters just to provide themselves with a minimal defence, usually on Saturdays.

There was an unusual response from one shop, De Rooie Rat in Utrecht. In 1982, staff had a bitter and divisive debate on whether to purchase roller shutters to protect the windows, which had been broken so many times that they could no longer get insurance – though some workers thought drunks were responsible for some incidents. They had five staff meetings over this and it almost led to a split which might have ended the shop's existence. The argument was that if you put shutters up it showed you were afraid: 'Then you went on the defensive, and no longer stood for what you believed in' was how one worker put it. The windows were double-glazed and the shop carried on. They had had one arson attack on the shop in 1980, the day before it opened in new premises, but the fire was extinguished before serious damage was done.

It needs to be emphasised in discussing attacks on bookshops, that anyone at the receiving end of even so-called 'minor' attacks from the far right (broken windows, minor scuffles, verbal abuse and threats etc.) will know how damaging they can be to the mental, not just the physical, health of shopworkers and also to the daily running of a book shop, especially if repeated. Recovering from them could be difficult. And Fourth Idea of Bradford catalogued over 200 incidents in the three years 1978-1980.

La Librairie Jonas

The book by Sabine Landré, the owner of this bookshop in Paris, describing the twelve months which included two major attacks on her shop and how she and her staff, and the wider community, reacted, is important for an understanding of what these attacks mean at a micro level. The book's title translates as *The Year of the Cocktails: When Books Were Burnt*.

The shop was set up in November 1957 in rue de la Maison Blanche in the 13th arrondissement in Paris, by Sabine Landré and Henri Broskievic. At the time it was a working-class area so several publishers thought it would not last long.

Sandrine, as owner, did introduce an equal wage policy for staff. It was always a radical shop and a community one. Initially many of the people involved were in the PSU, a libertarian socialist party, strong supporters of workers' control, and with links to Christian socialism.

The shop organised literacy classes and events for children. It also supported local cultural events and developed links with theatre groups and musicians.

The first explosion took place on 9 March 1981. Police initially talked of young layabouts rather than members of the far-right – a common response in many countries.

Librairie Jonas after fire-bombing March 1981 from Hage, L'Age d'or des Librairies Partisanes et Militantes

There is a black humour in the book, such as the description of the visit on the morning after the attack, by a smartly dressed publisher's rep who had come to inform the shop that it had won a window display competition – a trip to New York for four people – but he hadn't heard the news.

The local radical community paper, which had started in the shop's basement, issued a special issue of four pages which sold for the special high price of five francs which would all be handed over to the support fund for the shop.

There is a support group set up and its first act is to produce a leaflet. The meeting goes on till after midnight and people have to walk home. The campaign involved weekly meetings between booksellers and publishers. Leaflets would be

distributed at the French national book fair – the Salon du Livre. There was much help from staff of the Librairie Mille Feuilles, burnt down the previous year.

The book describes in detail the days following the fire - the pain of clearing up the mess, and the wide and sometimes unexpected support that is given. Interspersed with this description there is much about the staff, customers, locals and some of their background but not a history of the shop. The author has no time for bitterness or self-pity. She describes the support of the pharmacy, and two jewellers one of whom cries in her arms; she is surprised by the gift of a large cake from the baker who is often heard humiliating her young shop-workers, and but also by the indifference of the tobacconist she often talked to. She does have some harsh words for the lack of sympathy shown by most fellow local small businesses, though she realises that the cause is petit-bourgeois conventionality, mixed with a fear that they may somehow become contaminated by contact with this strange shop.

The clean-up involved many volunteers, mostly women. The smells were awful and the temperature very cold. Vinyl records had melted and solidified onto the flooring.

For insurance purposes they had to list part of the fire and water damaged stock that they would try to sell at greatly reduced prices – most could not be salvaged.

In May, there was a big sale of the damaged books; this coincided with victory of Mitterand in the presidential election, and the joy is palpable.

A week later, the local Church opened up its rooms for a festival, into which the staff and many supporters threw themselves with great enthusiasm. Police provided a discreet protection, the League for the Rights of Man also provided a security detachment. The shop spends more time on the festival than cleaning up.

Rooms for kids; film; songs; theatre; poetry. And food and drink. The organisers had decided not to have stalls selling anything, but they made an exception for a local author who had just published a book about the Paris Commune in the 13th arrondissement, and for the local community paper *Canard du 13e*.

Trouble came from a humourless, profit-greedy green food supplier and especially from a small Maoist organisation which tried to turn the festival into a political anti-fascist rally under their leadership. Both these organisations renege on previous agreements taken collectively by all the participants as to how it would be run.

The day ends with a ball and concert. It is followed by two more weeks of clearing up, and exciting discussions with the architect on the redesign of the shop.

Then there is another attack at end of June: the window is smashed.

On 18 February 1982 the shop reopens. Two days later the staff are still there at 9 pm (French and American bookshops are famous for late closings) even forgetting to lock the door. They hear stones being thrown at the windows, but the new ones crack without breaking; the attackers couldn't throw the usual Molotov cocktails through a hole; ten or twelve surged into the shop, throwing the cocktails towards the staff – then run. Fortunately, the fires are put out. The author says very little more about this attack or injuries caused. After the detailed account of events following the first, there is probably very little new to say.

Librairie Jonas March 1981 (from Landré, l'Année des Cocktails)

There had been a support committee for victims of fascist attacks, which made links with organisations like the League for the Rights of Man, with the media, with publishers and authors; it had produced a legal guide, and it had collected

money. In October 1982 an association called Fahrenheit was established to make this more formal, researchers looked into organisations responsible for the attacks and tried to identify perpetrators, and they later published a journal *Article 31*.

Jonas came under new ownership in 1995 and still exists. It has even opened a second shop nearby that specialises in cartoon books, graphic novels and non-fiction and fantasy. Both are more good independents now rather than radical bookshops – a phenomenon seen in all the countries we've discussed. But the new one aimed to carry some stock in the militant tradition of the original.

There are obviously links between attacks on bookshops and attacks on other businesses, newspapers, organisations and individuals and these will vary from country to country, which would be interesting to explore. But sticking to bookshops, much remains to be discovered about this subject. The author would welcome any comments and information about other incidents.

Information on France is drawn largely from the first two books in the bibliography

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