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The social history of Republica Internationale FC; A 30 year struggle for Socialist Football.

By Mick Totten (with help from Republica).

Foreword;

This article tells the tale of Republica Internationale FC, its' thirty year history from formation as an alternative football club to its participation on an international stage of like-minded clubs. It covers the many social and political issues the club has had to confront, its successes and setbacks. The author is indebted to contributions made by many others and has tried to faithfully convey an accurate recollection of events. And, where controversy has arisen, the author has sincerely attempted to offer a fair and balanced view. Republica is very proud of its history and hope that others are inspired by it too.

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Introduction;

Republica Internationale prides itself on being a socialist Sunday League football club and has recently marked its thirtieth anniversary. But what does it mean to be a socialist club? And how does Sunday league football foster left wing politics and culture? The Leeds Sunday Leagues are hardly a breeding ground for libertarian thought. And chasing a ball around a muddy pitch in winter, dodging dog shit and raking tackles from thugs, it is hard to reconcile with a path to leftist enlightenment.

There have been many struggles to live up to the club's ideals, to balance the competitive game with the politics (for some more than others), and many issues have dogged the club perennially. Many have doubted the credibility of the club at some time. What does socialism mean and what is a socialist football club? What is it the club does differently, how do you pick a socialist team that represents it? There is a statement in the club's socialist constitution which states "our uniqueness is precious and will be defended fiercely" (see Republica Internationale 2013a). One might wonder whether the club has done that well enough and whether the legacy of key activists has lived up to expectations. In short; can football sustainably foster left wing culture?

Bill Shankly (see Empire of the Kop 2013) saw football and socialism as essentially symbiotic. The game is about the team, to subvert purely individual gain in pursuit of collective goals, the struggle to work together cooperatively to overcome adversity, the reward of mutual endeavour and enterprise to achieve shared success; a sense of camaraderie and community. But socialist football is not just about the game. It is about integrity and praxis; the reciprocity of how socialist ideas inform behaviour and how experiences shape ideas.

Socialist football should promote socialist ideas and actions. It should challenge capitalism and offer alternatives. It should challenge commercialism, materialism, and promote ethical consumption. It should challenge authoritarianism and create consensual, democratic leadership, self-determination and organisation. It should be empathetic, inclusive, educate, empower, and promote respect. It should fight oppressions like sexism, racism, homophobia, even capitalism, raise political awareness and inspire campaigns. It should build networks, promote international solidarity, and create alliances of anti-capitalists, socialists, anarchists, feminists, greens, anti-nationalist, and the broad left. Socialist football should act as a site of struggle and resistance; ideological, economic, political, social, and cultural.

How well have Republica done these things? There are inherent tensions between living up to these ideals and the pressure of dilution by everyday realities, tensions between Republica and other teams, and tensions within Republica between its uniqueness and shortcomings. This article explores the notion of left wing, socialist and alternative football through a critical evaluation of Republica Internationale FC and the international networks it subsequently became a part of from their origins until the present day. It covers distinct eras in the club's development, significant events, and a plethora of social and political issues encountered along the club's journey.

1983-86; The Originals.

The club was not always called Republica Internationale. Like that great punk band Spizz (Oil, Energy, Athletico 80 and Spizzles), the club name changed regularly over the years, but it started in 1983 as Woodhouse Wanderers; a combination of the park where they would train and a reflection of the transient nature of the membership. Club lore recalls that "a bunch of footballing lefty radicals (Anarchists, Marxists, Neo-Marxists, Communists and Socialists) met in a smoke filled pub (not unlike Marx and Engels prior to the publication of Das Kapital) called The Pack Horse in Leeds and decided to form a football team (rather than emancipate the proletariat and seize control of the means of production!)"(see Republica Internationale 2013b).

Collectively, and many long in the tooth, the original founder members had each played under and become disillusioned by the ethos and values of typical men's Sunday league clubs. A win at all costs philosophy and hyper masculine violence were the norm, and right wing prejudices, sexism and racism, were endemic. The originals were socialists who played football and wanted a club of likeminded people which would counter these traditional values and prejudices and foster an egalitarian approach; a lefty alternative. In order to try and attract the right sort of people an advert was placed in the then lefty independent Leeds Other Paper insisting recruits needed to be a card carrying member of the Labour Party (!) whose socialist disposition was more credible in 1983, unlike now. But even then many members were far more left wing than the Labour Party and no one bothered to check party affiliation although some recruits did volunteer their affiliation. So they began training, located themselves from The Chemic pub, and re-joined the Sunday League as an "alternative football club" in 1984.

At that time four precedents were set in the club that continue to the present day. The first was that although they may be based from a pub, they were not the pub team. The pub may be a host but the team is separate and constituted essentially by its body-politic. The second was that it accommodated a wide range of abilities from ex-pro and semi pro to those without any real ability at all. The third was that the club would be a democratic organisation and Team Captains and other club posts were elected annually by the membership. And the fourth was that the club shirts would not have traditional commercial sponsorship. They commenced with ideological sponsorship and were adopted by the Leeds Other Paper. This arrangement allowed the club to promote the paper, for match reports to circulate to a large targeted audience to promote the club, and the club was leant lefty credibility with the stamp of Leeds Other Paper emblazoned across its chest for the inaugural league game. But this arrangement only lasted a year or two as a significant section of the Leeds left was against most competitive sport, especially male football, and a persuasive radical feminist lobby ensured the arrangement was eventually curtailed.

The original club members had impeccable lefty credentials, their confluence an organic matter of fate. Leftist politics were very animated in the early 1980s as Thatcher's far-right authoritarian government rejected the post war social democratic consensus, divisively hacked away at left wing institutions, and confrontationally tore the fabric of more consensual civil society and communities. Left-wing resistance

was loud and proud and it was relatively easy for a group to emerge naturally from existing friendship networks who shared an interest in politics and football. They set out on a journey in defence of socialism and in favour of left wing football whose travails home and away in the Sunday league would mirror the struggle elsewhere. Their distinctiveness was obvious, they wore their politics overtly in everyday life, and as a football team too. They were very different to other clubs; alternative.

1986-92; Re-Generation.

Club on the Move

In a relatively short space of time many of the originals retired owning to old age and injury and from 1986 a new younger wave of recruits in their mid-twenties joined the club. At this time the Leeds Sunday League was extremely violent, most referees did not dare confront intimidating teams, and often there were no official referees at all. On one such occasion one of Republica's players refereed the first half and stupidly allowed an obviously offside goal. Vengeance was wreaked in the second half when the opposition referee allowed increasingly violent tackles. On remonstrating with him and showing stud rake marks on his upper thigh and hip, a player was told "play on; it's a man's game"! In another game a ponderous teammate was viciously chopped down by an opponent who appeased the referee by claiming "it was like waiting for a bus to turn". The violence inherent in most games conflicted with the alternative Corinthian spirit of the club, and friendlier skilful games were savoured, but at this time the club were not reticent to go toe to toe in muscular confrontations and fighting was not uncommon. Had it not done so, and shown weakness, opposition teams would have forgotten football and kicked the "commies" off the park. With Lenin and October Revolution patches now adorning the kit, they literally had to fight for socialism.

Rejuvenation kept the club afloat and newer players learnt more about football, life and socialism at the knee of their elders. By 1986 Woodhouse Wanderers moved to the Vesper Gate pub to be closer to their pitch in Kirkstall, which had a 45 degree sideways slope, and shortly afterwards in 1987 to a flatter pitch at Roundhay Park and further along the road to the Rising Sun pub where the social side really took off. The name changed to AFC Rising Sun as it sounded suitably Maoist and the landlord was a most accommodating character. He was a Turkish immigrant who earned a reputation for cleaning up rough pubs with his fists and welcomed his new regulars warmly. But the local fishing club were not quite so accommodating and were regularly irritated when these newcomers usurped their traditional seats.

In addition to match days and training nights, Monday night became Subbuteo night and tables were laid out in the lounge as club members relived their childhood and curious passing punters joined in echoing "I used to play this". The landlord made it difficult to go home as after closing time he would announce lock-ins and thrust banknotes into the hands of reluctant drunken members who had run out of money saying "it's a loan". Unable to refuse they would often regret it later when he came to collect the debt when they were sober and sorrowful of pocket.

When the brewery moved the landlord on in 1989, the club left too for the Central pub and were renamed Moscow Central as it sounded like a Soviet underground

station. The benefits of this move to the city centre were eventually outweighed by the hassle of getting there and in 1991 the club moved to the Highland pub where it stayed for almost a decade. The newest name of Republica Highland was chosen as when uttered quickly it sounded like the Irish state and many members had republican sentiments, Irish roots, or both. The landlord really was larger than life. He was six foot ten, had the build and appearance of a grizzly bear, could reach across almost the length of the bar-room to pick up fistfuls of empty glasses, and despite his normal geniality would announce closing time loudly with a booming “sup up, and fuck off”. Pre-shift nearby casino staff would mingle with members and one would perform card tricks regularly mystifying onlookers when he would bury their chosen card in the pack, then launch the whole pack at the ceiling creating a shower of cards all over the pub, and leave necks craning at the bewilderment of their card stuck to the ceiling itself.

Constituted

At this time, most of the originals had now left and further recruitment was crucial for the club’s survival. Too many Sunday mornings were spent dragging relative strangers out of their beds to make up numbers. Too many players had dodgy credentials for lefties, and with the absence of guidance from their former mentors the second generation engaged in existential angst about what the club was originally about and how could it move forwards? “Alternative” seemed a bit vague and passé, and in response to this inquisition the label of socialism was applied overtly for the first time to characterise the essential spirit of what had gone before; we were now explicitly a socialist club developing a socialist membership.

Having slain some angst more now appeared that would be embraced by the club for the rest of its existence; what is socialism, and what should a socialist club be? An answer to the first question was never dogmatically defined and remains elusive. But great debate followed about whether members had to be socialist to join or whether they would be a “broader church” and seek to cultivate socialism in others? Were they a “right on” club or were they about educating others? Should they be exclusive or inclusive? Everyone recognised that something had turned them on to socialism and when some queried why they would deny this opportunity to others, the broader church argument won the day. Over time this balance has remained in limbo and at regular intervals the breadth would expand and contract depending on the strength of its core. In sub-hegemonic terms, the core has attempted to expand to incorporate others, but too much resistance amongst the periphery has led to conflict, purges and exodus.

Further important precedents were set in this era. Firstly the iconic adoption of a red playing kit, secondly the subsidy of membership and match subs for low waged players, thirdly from 1989/90 the club started producing its own fanzine (later titled Republication from 2000). The original style was very much akin to the DIY punk “Gluesniffer” format and became an important vehicle to convey club identity to a wider audience. It contained political cartoons, humour, trivia, and more organisational information. But more significantly, in 1991, the club attempted to enshrine what the originals had been able to take for granted in a constitution (see Republica Internationale 2013a) which, with only minor alterations, remains intact;

> "*This Club recognises and supports the values of Socialism. Its' membership are committed to the promotion of Socialist ideas and actions. The following principles govern the Club's journey.
> *The club will not tolerate racist, homophobic, sexist, prejudicial or abusive behaviour by any of its members.
> *The game should be played in good sporting spirit.
> *Whilst committed to the rigour of hard physical, competitive sport, players will not behave in an unacceptably aggressive or violent way.
> *Players should play in a camaraderie spirit of a team, co-operatively advise each other in a positive manner and never offer purely negative criticism.
> *Players should recognise that the game is played, first and foremost for fun!
> *There are about 100 teams that play in the Leeds Sunday Leagues. As far as we are aware ours is the only team playing under such a Constitution. Our uniqueness is precious and will be defended fiercely!"

The constitution defined what the club aspired to be. It outlined what it was for and what it was against. It also tried to accommodate the sensitivities of some of its membership (not least a newer more pacifist middle class influence) by distancing itself from some of its violent past, though this issue has been tested periodically in the combative Sunday League context. In response to concerns about mission drift amongst the membership, and who should be a member at all, the constitution also contains selection criteria (see Republica Internationale 2013a);

> "*A player's individual ability.
> *A player's ability to contribute as a member of a team.
> *A player's contribution to the club socially and as an organisation.
> *A player's acceptance of the club's philosophy and values."

Most striking about the four criteria is that only one is about ability. The rest are about ensuring the sustainability of the club as an alternative socialist entity. The criteria have been absolutely crucial in club regeneration, recruiting lefties, dissuading football mercenaries and giving those without great ability a chance to feel valued. So in terms of ability, effectively Republica always fields weakened teams and competes with one hand tied behind its back, but the ideological prize has always been the one most valued. The constitution is the yardstick by which Republica measures itself and always tries to live up to. It is referred to constantly in club conversation and debate, put under perpetual scrutiny, and creates a culture of socialist inquiry.

1992-98 Local heroes.

Growing Success

Adherence to the constitution effectively consolidated the development of the club and its next era was one of gradual expansion and stability. Numbers grew sufficiently to establish a second men's team in 1992 and club structure grew to create roles beyond captaining football teams and arranging fixtures. Most notably from 1996 a "Club Captain" was created to enable oversight between the different club teams, ensure the constitution and selection criteria were adhered to, and propagate the socialist culture of the club. Its title changed in 2002 to "Club Coordinator" and it remains the most significant role in the club.

In the period immediately prior to the establishment of the second team, the growth in numbers and demand for play meant interpretation of the selection criteria was at its most heightened. Every week meetings took place debating who would best represent the club that weekend and who would and would not play. This created a competitive situation where individuals enhancing their socialist credentials counted as much towards selection as football ability, and club culture prospered.

The formation of the second team extended this process to twice the number of selections, but created friction about who should then represent which team, and why? Second team organisers lobbied for two teams of equal ability and first team organisers for their players to be the best footballers from those initially selected to represent the club. Selection debates became much more complicated and longer, but the first team organisers, who held more sway at that time, generally won the argument. A consequence of this meant that the first team became much more seriously competitive, working on fitness and skills rather than just playing football. They trained outdoors in winter semi-darkness on a mucky rugby pitch lit from one side only with the ball frequently disappearing amongst the shadows, though some felt that was an improvement from previously playing more than 10-a-side in a sports hall.

Racism was still very common in the Sunday League, but Republica's reputation may have been beginning to have some impact on other teams. Once when an African Republica player was abused in a friendly, and teammates stepped forward to take issue, the situation was diffused when the opposition captain subbed the player, and sent him home. On a later occasion Republica considered abandoning a match at half time because of the racist abuse by opposition supporters. Instead the matter was reported in a series of letters to the League and the West Riding F.A., but both were dismissive and took no action.

In 1993, the first team's captain was a ferociously uncompromising character who became feared and admired not just in the club but across the whole Sunday League. Black, extremely skilful, standing six foot five and as hard as nails, but with a curiously posh accent, he stood out markedly. A centre forward averaging two and a half goals each game for two and a half seasons(!), he terrorised opposing defenders and even the hardest racist thugs from the hardest estates across Leeds backed down in confrontations with him. Once an opposition player called him

"Nigger", but their Captain apologised saying "Sorry, I would have called you a twat, a cunt but never a nigger". Our captain was unusually lost for words.

He led his team to win leagues and in 1993, the club's greatest ever footballing success, in a replay after a drawn final, to win the prestigious Leeds Sunday Jubilee cup. The opponents and their supporters were somewhat bemused at both games by a large crowd dominated by Republica supporters, adorned in red and black socialist paraphernalia, manically and humorously backing their team. Enthusiastic celebrations back at the pub were punctuated by of all people; the goalkeeper, dropping and breaking the cup itself, whilst everyone else reflected on their achievement, swollen with pride.

In the final itself, the Captain badly broke his own leg (yes!) crunching an opponent, and as he was being stretchered to the ambulance he removed the oxygen mask from his face to aggressively exhort his team mates to glory. But a couple of weeks later, as he still lay in his hospital bed, some club members hatched a plot which ousted him in the forthcoming election and appointed a more conciliatory leader. These incidents highlight ongoing tensions in the club between unbridled competitiveness and a more playful Corinthian spirit which would lead to further arguments, purges, expulsions and walk-outs over the years.

Branching Out

Shortly afterwards the club marked its tenth anniversary with the "Decadean game", at which original club founders were invited back to play a match against the current team and witness how the club had developed. Bolstered by a few of the older current members, the originals won the fixture, perhaps and not least, because the current captain remained in hospital. The club's reputation had begun to spread and a Yorkshire network of allies began to emerge outside of conventional FA league structures. FA cup final days were marked by an annual fixture and social with local pals Dynamo Tetlizi. And the beginning of greater things were fermented by an alliance with the football team of the overtly anarchist 1in12 Club, from Bradford, which hosted a bar, nightclub, vegan café, library and community centre in its vast (originally squatted) former mill building.

To mark the May Day international workers day, the 1in12 organised an annual football competition; the first of many ventures outside the gaze of the F.A. They invited ideological fellow travellers including Republica, Bocca Ark from York, Hebden Bridge Trades Club, and a team who would go on to play a pivotal role in Republica's future; The Easton Cowboys from Bristol. Relations with the Cowboys were further cultivated when a member or Republica moved to Bristol and joined the Cowboys and others visited Easton to socialise, and even one time to play in a Subbuteo competition organised by the Cowboys in their home pub; The Plough.

Subbuteo was also a regular at club fundraisers, sometimes tournaments staged simultaneous group games in different houses, and a scout hut was used to stage "Big Fun" and expand entertainments, selling beer, and food. A phenomenal boost to the social side of the club on match days occurred in 1995 with the extension of Sunday drinking licenses across the afternoon and into the evening, even if livers

suffered. And the club also conducted its first tour; to Windermere in the Lake District, staying in a friend's bed and breakfast, and playing the local Labour club on a pitch, mown by cows, with a slope such that one corner flag was higher than the crossbar.

Three more important precedents were set in this era. Firstly, in 1994, the club welcomed its' first fully paid up female member who would go on to play an important role, not least in the future development of women's football. Secondly, from 1996, selection criteria embraced a guarantee that all substitutes would play for a minimum of twenty minutes. This avoided people turning up and not even getting to play, but also knowingly further weakened the team when a more able footballer was taken off in a tight game. And also in 1996, as consciousness of egalitarian struggles expanded, an overt stance against homophobia was added to the club constitution.

1998-02 International players.

Women enter the field

This era witnessed the most rapid and profound development of Republica which saw its activity catapulted from the Sunday League onto an international stage whilst back home there were significant revisions of club operations and, momentously, the first embryonic emergence of the women's section. Things began at the 1in12 May Day tournament when to the amazement of many men a women's team participated. Bradford University Women were to have a profound impact on both the men and women of Republica. When drawn to play each other men, who otherwise professed a solidarity with the feminist cause, where heard to query; "What shall we do, should we tackle them, what if they we hurt them"? The Captain on the day instructed the team that they must play to their full ability as anything else was patronising. He added that, given the ability of the women witnessed, they should aim to win ten to nil. Unbeknown to him, this pep talk was overheard by three female Republica members supporting who promptly defected with their support to the women and revealed the target score. The Bradford women then fought feverishly to undermine that aim and were successful in doing so.

Game won, but mission unsuccessful, Republica progressed to the final, but the three Republica women had not ended their epiphany. With some curiosity they socialised with the Bradford women. One described nervously meeting lesbians for the first time, her relief that they were perfectly normal, and her embarrassment later that she might ever have thought otherwise. Two also borrowed boots from the Bradford women, practised a bit, and then quietly asked the Republica Captain if they could play in the final? He pondered whether they should play or whether their appearance itself would be a patronising gesture in a competitive final after hard fought qualification? Without mentioning the women he asked the team whether they wanted to play to win or not take things too seriously. The team said they wanted to play to win, so he decided to continue with the established team, and promptly told the women they could not play. They were livid.

Soon after the women successfully argued that they had just as much right to represent Republica as anyone else did. A very small group began training with the men and as beginners demonstrated their resilience for a year; making sure they

were playing in the next May Day tournament. One was elected as club league secretary arguing that, other than on ability, she beat most of the men on every other selection criteria. Those few women were pioneers whose determination kept the possibility of women's football in sight. A feminist revolution was quietly underway in Republica.

Alternative World Cup

Meanwhile the Easton Cowboys were plotting something big for later in the summer. From 1993, through contacts in the Punk scene, they had played in tournaments in Europe with likeminded teams (see Simpson and McMahon 2012). And learning from that, they planned to host an "Alternative World Cup" in the sleepy Dorset village of Thorncombe. They invited twenty teams, including Republica, the 1in12, and the Bradford women, as well as others from across Europe who would go on to host similar events amongst the network in the future; including The Lunatics from Antwerp in Belgium, ICE Neckerstrasse from Stuttgart and Internationale Harte from Hannover in Germany, and Boys Lecknica from Lecknica in Poland. The spirit of internationalism was tested for Republica by the Wessex All Stars team who persisted with loud partisan singing and waving a Union Jack with Wessex scrawled on it. Mysteriously the flag disappeared one day and it later transpired that one of the Cowboys had dumped it in the cesspit.

Tournaments cost tens of thousands of pounds to host, although outlay is usually recouped by bar profits and any surplus recycled back into network activity, but subsequently clubs would help each other share some of the financial burden. Republica's broad church and selection principles were tested when it was decided to guarantee all players a game in the group fixtures, so rotating two completely separate teams, and to pick only the best players for the knockout stages.

One poor soul was left behind, a young lad deemed not sufficiently in keeping with the clubs' ethos. He had earlier made sexist and homophobic comments about the Bradford women at the May Day tournament. He later rushed back from a family holiday for a club meeting where some argued he should be allowed to go educationally to raise his awareness, but the majority decided that it was not in keeping with the constitution. He was late and arrived after the decision, to be told with his dad in the pub car park, that he would not represent the club. He left the club shortly afterwards.

The Cowboys were impeccable hosts and Thorncombe was an amazingly successful inspiration which proved to be the catalyst for a flurry of subsequent international activity. It was a three day festival for more than five hundred people, camping in a field next to the sports ground, with dozens of football games, running kitchens and bars to cater for all, providing bands and entertainment for adults and kids, hosting political discussion and much more. It inculcated a form of ethical hedonism; "whereby politics are manifest, the organic intellectual is cherished and large numbers of people consume vast amounts of alcohol and other substances in an environment where nobody is really in control and nobody gets hurt!" (See Totten 2011).

Thorncombe was saturated with memories for participants and includes teams turning up for the first time on the eve of the tournament and the late night fraternal meeting in The Plough between like-minded leaders of clubs, the Lunatics performing a “Dance of Joy” even when they lost, gangs of kids and dogs of mixed nationality playing and seemingly communicating without difficulty, and the pride of the local community about the crazy event which had descended on their village. But most people’s abiding memory would be the South African team from Deipkloof in Soweto. The Cowboys had arranged for their travel and expenses to be covered and the players remarked how strange it was to be treated nicely by white people and how white women had served them food on the plane! They shocked hung-over rivals by not drinking and training at 6.30am in rhythm to evocative African singing and chants. They were easily the best team and deservedly won the tournament.

Challenging violence

Back home in 1999 Republica addressed an issue which had been simmering for some time. A schism had occurred between some rough working class lads and a more middle class section of the membership. The lads had debt owing to the club, had regularly been involved in fighting in league games “backing each other up”, and the club strained to enlighten their thinking. One success however was a player who in 1997, after a friendly in Bradford when locals had taken to the streets to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Pakistani state, was challenged for shouting; “Why don’t you fuck off back there then”? Two years later he was proudly requesting photos of him and his toddler to be taken with the victorious Sowetans in Thorncombe.

But the other lads were still playing up and even training sessions threatened to turn into violence without the intervention of senior players. Things had to be resolved and a curious plan was hatched to bring things to a head. It was agreed that at the next training session no attempt would be made by the senior players to offer restraint and a match would be refereed in such a way as to make sure things escalated. After the inevitable fight which ensued, all the players were sat down and lectured to by a senior player who pointed out the ridiculousness of the situation. The lads expressed guilt and shame and vowed to change their ways, but the effect was only temporary, and they were eventually expelled at the end of the season. The aftermath left a residual guilt that a socialist club had failed to accommodate players who owed their character to an upbringing from a truly tough working class background.

A second expulsion occurred a year or two later of a Jekyll and Hyde like character. Off the pitch he was a mild mannered sensitive activist who worked supporting elderly citizens and also chaired the Leeds South America support group. But on the pitch, although he was a great player, he was also an aggressive psychotic demon who would deviously and incessantly wind up his own players and the opposition in equally malevolent measure. His own team even cheered once when an opposition player punched him in response to a withering remark. But he could not help himself and eventually exhausted the patience of his club-mates and was asked to leave.

Opposition instigated violence continued to be a prominent feature of the men's leagues over the next few years and two prominent incidents included an appalling match entitled "the battle of Cranmer Bank", and another dispute which escalated when the opposition took to the field with weapons. A sent-off player retrieved a wheel brace from the back of his car and proceeded to chase the Republica goalkeeper around the pitch brandishing it. Briefly restrained by his own captain, and with the game suspended he, and some supporters carrying knives, then raced across the pitch threatening to attack Republica. A tense standoff endured until his Captain, a formidable hulk, again restrained him and carried him back to his car.

Horizons Abroad

May 1999 was also the beginning of a truly extraordinary relationship with the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, Mexico. This was initiated, as many adventures are, by the Easton Cowboys whose activity had come to the notice of the Zapatista in the Mexican jungle. The Cowboys were invited to form a touring party to play in the Zapatista communities which they duly did including two Republica players and some of the Lunatics. The tour involved travelling to communities by foot through the mountains overnight to avoid military checkpoints and matches were subjected to helicopter surveillance. One rationale for the trip was that the Zapatista were safer when the Gringos were there and less likely to be arrested, imprisoned, tortured or killed; effectively human rights observers. Others were to express solidarity with the Zapatista struggle, boost morale, and learn from them in a form of political tourism. After the first trip the Easton Cowboys started fundraising to support the communities financially and to which Republica made contributions. The Cowboys then formed KIPTIK in 2000 which has now raised more than £100,000 for Zapatista projects (See KIPTIK 2013) which is quite impressive for a working class Saturday and Sunday League football team.

A summer tournament to follow Thorncombe was organised in 1999 by the Lunatics in Belgium at the Ponderosa, Republica travelled overnight by coach shared with the 1in12 Club and continued drinking long after those hardened anarchists had gone to sleep. Republica flew a hammer and sickle flag during the tournament but were persuaded to take it down as it might be offending the Polish team who had not long escaped the shackles of Soviet style communism. Other stars of the tournament included Lokkas Sorte Svin from Norway who woke up to blaring thrash metal music, drank deathly spirits all day long, had a player calling himself Bastard whose accompanying girlfriend had done time for murder, and played terrible drunken football in punk gear and combat boots.

Republica won a dramatic semi-final decided by a sudden death penalty which some experienced players were too scared to take, but up stepped the newly emancipated female player. She had recently been at a corporate training event during which she had actually walked on red hot coals. And, as she nervously stepped forward, she shouted; "I can walk on fire", and rolled the ball into the net (inspired by Republica, she also soon quit her highly paid private sector job to work for the local council). After a tournament of mostly languid continental football, peculiarly the two gritty Yorkshire teams met in the final in a dour physical replica of Sunday League football which the 1in12 won and were given a painted toilet seat trophy.

An important legacy for Republica after Belgium was the decision to set up an "ethical fund" enabling poorer members of the club to attend future tours and facilitate political and educational activity as well. The fund is judiciously used, well maintained, and has enabled many to benefit from the international network and tours that would not have otherwise. And the club has benefited from the development of those members too.

Creating a home

In 2000 as more men and some women joined the club Republica realised it had outgrown the size of the small Highland pub as its whole membership would not fit in. With regret a decision was made to leave in favour of the Cardigan Arms which was a well-respected and popular local venue. It had the capacity for the club to expand further, and boasted changing rooms, showers, and a function room ideal for club meetings and socials, and where the club would remain for more than ten years.

A name change was required and after flirting with "Red Cardigans", the club settled on its current name Republica Internationale to reflect its increasingly international outlook. And Internationale Harte from Hannover in Germany ably kept the summer network rolling by hosting the tournament. The club fanzine was retitled "Republication" and in 2001 a red and black logo designed to signify the club. Republication was mostly the effort of one talented member. As an organ for information, politics and humour, it became an immensely important medium to cultivate club culture and propagate club ideology.

2001 was another year of rapid expansion in Republica especially for women as the small but growing group of female members were now recruiting in earnest. Interest in playing women's football was growing generally and the lack of established women's teams around Leeds meant Republica was an attractive and supportive magnet for both older women who had not played competitively before and for younger women who had played in girl's teams and now had nowhere to play as adults. The women soon began playing five-a-side games and over the year graduated to eleven-a-side friendlies, and playing in the summer tournaments. And men's football expanded to add one, then two, five a side teams in local leagues.

There was a desire generally in the club to empower the women and for the club to reform to accommodate more growth. The club coordinator for the next few years adopted a more strategic approach to club development, rigourised its organisational approach, won support for more leadership and development roles, and devised a new structure which created a cellular model with a core central coordinating group and different sub-sections for women and men, which could ambitiously add further cells at a later date. The Easton Cowboys were an influence as they had expanded into other sports and although this did not happen at Republica there were later separate sub-cells for eleven and five-a-side. And the men's section agreed to seed the women's early development by gifting kit, equipment, and financial subsidy.

Anti-Racist World Cup

International links and trips proliferated in 2001 as Republica extended into new networks. Kick it Out had earlier commissioned research into racism in grassroots football and Republica had supported a local study in West Yorkshire. When the findings were launched in 2000 at Huddersfield's football stadium Republica were represented and were approached by Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD) from Sheffield. FURD were interested in a t-shirt listing the clubs attending the Hannover tournament and wondered if this was the same tournament they had attended; the massive annual Mondiali Antirazzisti (see Mondiali Antirazzisti 2013a) in Italy. Enthusiasms were shared, notes exchanged, and plans hatched to attend the Mondiali that summer.

Also at the launch a female Republican bravely approached the then Secretary of the F.A. to talk about the development of mixed football. She was humiliatingly dismissed and his attitude reinforced the view that the F.A. was a divisive and conservative force, not to be trusted, and whose interests were at odds with Republica. Like many other teams in the existing network, on a point of principle Republica had never sought money or favours from the F.A. or other authorities knowing that would come with strings attached and lead to a loss of autonomy. A "Do-it-Yourself" (DIY) philosophy was always adopted, so Republica became one of the most successful early developers of grassroots women's football in Leeds entirely on its own.

The first trip to the Mondiali was a big success and attendance became an annual event opening up a whole new network of contacts in addition to existing ones. The 2001 tournament featured 100 teams and 1000 participants (see MondialiAntirazzisti 2013b), was similar in culture to previous tournaments only much bigger, and featured more structured political workshops. But Mondiali was not without its issues as Republica and other women had been sexually harassed. However, the women assertively and successfully lobbied organisers for action, and initiated further empowerment for women at future tournaments as well as an overt central commitment to anti-sexism. Two notable highlights of the tournament for Republica were an impromptu game of naked football with members of the anarchist band Chumbawumba who had come to headline the musical entertainment (and whose version of the Partizan song Bella Ciao is still a tournament staple), and first meetings with fans of FC Sankt Pauli. Sankt Pauli were a legendary German professional team with an influential cult left wing following, more than 11 million fans worldwide (see Montague 2013, and Totten 2013), and plans were agreed to visit them in the autumn which subsequently opened another network front.

Flying the flag

Many Republicans travelled directly from Mondiali across Europe to the next 2001 tournament hosted by Boys Leknica in Poland. Language and communication were always an issue with the Poles and despite attempts at using the internet and translation no one was absolutely certain the tournament was actually taking place and everyone was relieved when they received a warm expectant welcome. One aspect of the welcome was not as well received though. The host erected the flags

of all the competing nations at the campsite and the assorted socialists and anarchists were aghast to be greeted by the Union Jack flag. Debate ensued about whether to burn it or if this would cause too much offense to the hosts.

Leknica was a border town with a slightly wild frontier atmosphere and responded to the collapse of communist rule by trading fervently through its market with its German neighbours across the bridge. The Leknica team were very nationalistic and seemed to assume others were too. The flag fluttered for a day or two while people brooded over what to do? In the end a suitable compromise was reached when the flag was customised within an artistically ripped black bin back, an anarchy symbol added, so it convincingly resembled a Sex Pistols single cover. It was now proudly carried to the stadium by a six year old Republican who astounded everyone when he replied to a passing German admirer of the flag by saying “It’s the King’s flag, but we don’t like the King because he keeps all the money away from the poor people”.

Women’s roles at the tournament were as ambiguous as at Mondiali. Self-empowerment occurred when an assortment from Internationale Harte and Die Letze Helde from Hannover, Republica and some newly tagged Easton Cowgirls spontaneously formed a team and gate-crashed the tournament. And there was discomfort and guilty pleasure amongst the men when some uninhibited German women, tired of queuing, shocked them by deciding to create mixed showers. But the Polish women seemed very repressed and there was even a very public, and worryingly tolerated, incident of domestic violence. There was also a strange nightly ritual whereby key men were furtively beckoned into the woods, regaled by Leknica’s leaders in a mixture of Polish and sign language, serially bestowed with gifts of delicate glassware, and toasted with vodka.

Perhaps uncertain of whether the Polish tournament would materialise, the Cowboys had staged a repeat of the Thorncombe event again later in the summer. Relations with Wessex were tested again when their loud singing at night on the campsite kept children awake. An angry mass delegation from Republica decided to confront them once and for all, but a full bust up was avoided by an eloquent and searing speech from an Irish member who damned the meaningless content of their singing and segued into a caustic denunciation of Englishness and their vacuous lack of culture. All were stunned and silence ensued. The tournament highlight was a “Gong” talent show with a bizarre range of contributions from teams. Some of Republica stole the show with a surreal display of naked mixed formation dancing which culminated with them lighting firework sparklers, gripped in their arse-cheeks and mooning at the audience through a crackle of sparks.

Introducing Sankt Pauli

Autumn 2001 brought about the much savoured first trip to Sankt Pauli which became a regular annual fixture as friendships developed. Some had known of it for years and the heady mix of bohemian culture, left wing politics, and party atmosphere more than lived up to expectation. The stadium atmosphere was stunning. It included the pre-match music of the entire Sex Pistols “Never Mind the Bollocks” album played over the tannoy, a protest in support of the dignity of local prostitutes, the hypnotic chanting and choreography of the Ultras, and a tannoy

announcement “Welcome to our friends Republica from Leeds” which was met by an “Oh no. Not you lot” from a expatriate member of 1in12 who happened to be stood directly behind.

At home in 2002 the 1in2 were now struggling with the capacity to organise the annual May Day tournament, and organisational confidence grew within Republica such that it volunteered to take over the majority of the burden. A suitable venue was secured at Hipperholme rugby club for Republica to host its first tournament and fundraising began in earnest. One of the women was so successful in blagging for sport memorabilia to auction that the ethical fund was boosted by thousands pounds afterwards. The event was expanded into a more international affair though not as big as the summer ones. Most significant was that it was the first event to boast an additional distinct women’s tournament as the growing women’s section extended their interests and exploited their own new contacts. One of them described how the weekend felt more real than the rest of her life and how when drinking tea with the infamous hard core of the Cowboys in the middle of the night she never felt safer, and also now accepted as one of them.

Summer fun was sustained by the Lunatics hosting again at the Ponderosa with the addition of the Sankt Pauli women’s team. Lasting bonds were forged with the Republica women, some of whom were proud to play in a Sankt Pauli shirt for the first time. This summer network had now become firmly established and although it had no formal name a slogan was broadly adopted to convey its purpose. In the early 1990s one of the cowboys had captioned a picture on their first T-shirt with a phrase which went on to gain greater currency and signify many later activities as “Freedom through Football”!

2002-06 Top of the World

Women in league

After a period of rapid expansion on all fronts the next era became mostly one of consolidation as Republica surfed the crest of earlier investments. The men had two sustainable teams (despite the threat of expulsion by the FA for the 2nds playing in a “pirate league”), and a women’s section was up and running and punching above its weight. Three different international networks had opened up through the annual Alternative tournaments, the Mondiali Antirazzisti, and the links with Sankt Pauli. And club politics were boosted by association with the other like-minded teams and links to the Zapatista. Activity was frenetic and rewarding as the club launched a regular Republication online as well as a website (www.republica-i.co.uk). A real sense of community was growing at home and abroad; friendships were kindled, romantic relationships (hetero and homosexual) were forming, sometimes ending, and children were being born. All that is not to suggest that there were not serious issues in this period as there were some growing pains in the women’s section, there was tension in the club between those most politicised and those not, tension amongst those politicised between socialist and anarchist factions, and there was a challenge to the direction of club leadership.

The women were now ready to enter a competitive Sunday League and in 2002 they joined and became one of the early members of the West Riding League. The

paucity of other teams meant the women had to travel further than the men and developed a tenacious defensive style often pitting their wits against much more skilful and athletic teams on a regional stage. The flatness of the then hierarchy of the women's game was brought starkly to bear in a cup game when they were drawn against Leeds United. The Leeds team boasted multiple full cap English, Irish and Scottish international players including the England goalkeeper and centre forward. Republica drew a large crowd of support waving red and black flags which attracted the interest of a passing TV crew and press coverage. The women's tactics were simple. Leeds record score would be a 26-0 and they must not let this happen which they fought to the end to ensure, just. At the end of the game the Republica keeper, covered in mud, was player of the match, and the Leeds keeper swapped her spotless shirt with her. Respect had been earned and the Leeds squad came back to the pub for a friendly sisterly social, although some Leeds players had to leave early for an international training camp ahead of Euro qualifying games.

Much of 2002 and 2003 were spent raising money for a truly mixed Republica team to go to Chiapas and a film was made to document the trip (see Republica Internationale 2013c). This was the first mixed football the Zapatista had ever seen or played. Whatever direct influence this had is difficult to assess but five years later Zapatista women were playing football as a demonstration of their own liberation (see Icaza 2009). More trips to Sankt Pauli games occurred in 2002 and 2003 and Republicans were becoming comfortably familiar with the scene there. During protests they witnessed fascinating tactics between fans and cops, riot cops shifting formations which the stadium tannoy mischievously choreographed to military marching music, attempts to kettle and contain fans, clever breakaways and splinters by protesters, and the deployment of water canon in the streets. One Republica player caused consternation among a rank of riot cops when he "innocently" enquired, as a tourist, what they were doing. Such an intimate encounter appeared to unsettle them and they promptly marched away. And club member participation in political protest at home also became more prominent with the campaign against the planned war in Iraq, and members organising regular leafleting at local elections against the BNP.

Plotting and playing

In early 2003 the growth of the club at home was causing some concern as the proportion of core political activists was getting slightly smaller and a covert plan was conceived, codenamed R.I.5., to attempt to recruit directly from political organisations. But this was scuppered when amongst others the Socialist Workers Party was suggested and the anarchist contingent vociferously objected bringing the initiative quickly to a close. Tensions between the political core and periphery of the club were not new, but heightened tensions between socialist and anarchist approaches were to become more common.

Both camps aimed to fiercely defend the political integrity and uniqueness of the club. But whereas the club coordinators favoured a strategic approach and strong organisation and leadership, some members lobbied for a more organic elastic approach. Matters culminated in the run up to the annual elections in May when campaigning which was normally conducted fairly openly amongst core members

was done far more divisively. A secretive plot to oust and replace the current leadership en masse was revealed and friendships were jeopardised in an underhand and vengeful atmosphere. When the elections came there was overwhelming overall support for the approach of the current leadership to continue but the experience had been painful and sown mistrust.

Republica women made their mark at Mondiali again in 2003 when Women-only football was initiated by a coalition from Sankt Pauli and Republica who persuaded other teams to hold an impromptu competition of their own. It was promptly adopted by the organisers, received its own trophy and became a regular future feature. A week later some of the original alternative network then assembled in a secluded forest clearing near Freiburg in Germany where Republica and Sankt Pauli fielded a joint team.

Kamfende Hertzen were very friendly mellow hosts whose annual event features excellent food, drink, punk music, and bonfires. The football winners were the Lunatics whose supporters were absent from the final as they had earlier departed on a drinking trip into town. The Lunatics mischievously moved their supporters' campsite into a nearby cornfield and delayed celebrations interminably whilst they agonisingly duped their errant fans into thinking they had in fact lost.
And the summer was rounded off when Republica first organised the football at the local "Unity Day" festival. The event was a local community response to concerns about recent riots which Republica continued to support for years to come. Particular inspiration was taken when, after watching women playing football, little local girls were seen playing amongst themselves wearing hijab and sandals.

On face value the regular 2003/04 season was the most successful ever overall. A second women's 11-a-side team started, membership peaked at over 100 (now with four 11-a-side and umpteen 5-a-side teams), all teams regularly playing at a higher level than previously (including the men's first team's first season in the top league), social and political activity was vibrant, and the club was spoilt for exotic tournament choice. But expansion was causing issues for the women with a first team more focused on football and a second team more focused on politics and inclusion. The divide was illustrated at a pre-season training camp when a veteran player offered an impassioned account of the women's peace camps at the Greenham Common American air force base and many players walked away disinterested.

Some players perceived that the male coaches were too competitive, that there was a lack of meritocracy, and that some players were "favourites". Other talented players, expecting a more political club, refused to play for the first team whom they felt had become cliquey and sometimes bullying. A drift into two teams with different ideologies began which would later clash bitterly. But there was also encouraging signs too when a talented young player was offered a chance to sign on for Leeds United but refused because they would not let her play for Republica in the summer tournaments, and when an older member took great pride helping a younger one from a challenging background with her homework. The club also agreed to form a fair trade committee and policy which led initially to boycotts of products from the Nike, Coca-Cola, MacDonalds and Nestle, and would expand further over the years.

Tournaments in 2004 were boosted by the inaugural Sankt Pauli "AntiRa" organised by the fans for a new fan network of other clubs across Europe as well as friends like Republica who won the men's competition. Memories included an encounter with a Sankt Pauli activist whose partner insisted that he was kept away from matches as his method of protest was arson. She was unsuccessful as a local business and the fire brigade could later testify. And many women had their first inspiring experiences on the road travelling from the Mondiali, then onto Freiburg to bond with Cowboys and Lunatics. At Mondiali they played as a mixed team and beat a men's team who patronisingly gave them a free goal in the main tournament. They then went on to win the women's competition too. And the summer was later wrapped up with another reunion hosted by the Lunatics at the Ponderosa,

Rifts appearing

The club mustered a respectable thirteen attendees at the "Make Poverty History" demonstration in Edinburgh July 2005 for the G8 summit. And some chose not to attend the next summer tournament in Poland hosted by Boys Leknica as there was increasing discomfort about Leknica's sexist and nationalistic politics. But, political tensions continued to build in the club over that and the next season both between the more and less politicised elements, and amongst the most politicised between those more socialist or anarchist. This all came to a head at a meeting in March 2006. A fringe 5-a-side player, cruelly nicknamed "the plank" because he was no less reliable in returning a pass than a lump of wood, naively asked if a friend of his could join who was a cop?

Previously, although it was only ever made known to a few members, a contact with some credibility had given a tip-off that the security services had a record relating to Republica. What threat a socialist football team poses to the state is unclear, and even if later events elsewhere revealed that any infiltrator would more likely appear from the more politically engaged, the obvious answer to a cop joining was a short "no", but club coordinators made a terrible error in deciding to respond differently. It had been a habit of many recent club meetings for the agenda to include an incendiary issue to galvanise political debate the outcome of which had no great bearing on day to day operations. The coordinators felt debating the potential membership of a cop was a good way to politicise the periphery assured with a safe predictable outcome. But the "cop vote" turned out to be a much more malign affair. Despite notes being recorded for meeting minutes there is still dispute as to what actually occurred, how the debate evolved, and what was understood.

The debate morphed uncomfortably into one about whether anyone should be excluded purely on occupation? The least politicised felt that any discrimination was wrong, and some queried why not a cop member? One politicised constituency argued that there was no need for a ban as the constitution was protection enough against those, like cops, swearing oaths of loyalty to the monarchy incompatible with socialism. Some others felt that the club might be over-egging its political credentials. But anarchists were outraged that the notion of cop membership was even being debated at all! Significant misunderstanding and confusion ensued eventually resulting in a majority voting against exclusion on the basis of occupation.

Nobody was happy, least of all some anarchists (a significant number of whom were valued club members) who promptly left the club. This also diminished the men's section such that the following season would be the final one running a second eleven-a-side team. A debate designed to expand the political core had dramatically reduced it, and the wounds inflicted were longstanding.

Another fissure in club outlook was revealed months later after the club elections. Previously there had been concern about the hopelessness of the younger generation of men to lead the club forward and the club duly elected its first female coordinator; a veteran and daughter of a founder member. From here-on women were to become the more dominant force in club activism. She was elected on a platform to address the balance of politics versus play and how that was manifested in the membership. One of her first actions was to effectively issue an ultimatum to the women's section. A tension had grown between feminism and socialism, the extent to which the club should empower any women to play football and a dilution of socialist identity. Many of the female players were feminist but not socialist and some not even feminist at all, especially amongst the first team (some of whom also appalled others by eating MacDonalds in the pub before games). A socialist feminist gauntlet was laid down; either adopt the club politics or play somewhere else, and much soul searching began.

Glorious summer

A sour end to the season at home contrasted with an incredible spring and summer abroad. Earlier, the club's prize at the Sankt Pauli Anti-Ra was a set of poker chips emblazoned with the motif of the Ubersteiger fanzine which had been used in a campaign against fan exploitation. Unknown to the organisers at the time, some Republica players were avid poker players who adopted the chips for their regular game at home, which was later featured in the Ubersteiger itself. And at the Mondiali, despite the ructions in the women's section just days earlier, conflict abated in a harmonious and united mixed team. They all took part in the political meetings and played well in the football beating two male teams along the way. With a growing support they progressed from 204 teams to their highest ever finish in the quarter finals.

A long standing tradition at the Mondiali was that the main trophy was not for winning football but for the greatest contribution to the cause. As the packed ceremony built to its crescendo and the main prize was announced Republica were amazed to hear their name read out to huge support. A humble Republica took to the stage with a mix of emotions; pure joy, but also guilt. With all its problems surely the club was undeserving of this recognition? Somewhat proud but also embarrassed some vowed then to work harder to "make the club the one Mondiali organisers thought it was".

Later that summer, near Hannover, Internationale Harte hosted what many felt was the best tournament ever. Another mixed Republica team did well managing to draw with the very capable Bad Muskau men's team much to their annoyance. And in addition to all the usual tournament trimmings Harte offered a gentle quirky humour, and in the campsite; a swimming pool! Seldom had hot bodies and hangovers been

so pleasantly soothed, but the highlight was the final night “Water Ballet” (synchronised swimming) whereby teams created their own entertainingly bizarre routines to music. How could things get any better?

2006-09 Pushed to the brink

Falling out

Following times with overwhelmingly positive directions of travel, the next era was dominated by trouble and strife that threatened to tear the club apart. From its previous apex the club looked over a precipice and descended into internecine struggles which some seasoned veterans feared it might never recover from. Although there were also new initiatives and positive developments, various simmering issues came to a head. Growing pains led to showdowns in relation to the growth of football focused members and the proportionate diminishment of core political activists, between the empowerment of the women and the ineptitude of the men, between more elitist female players and the political core, conflict over the partial exclusion of a terminally ill player, and intimidation and harassment of women at tournaments. These issues resulted in crisis in control, purges, and defections. Perhaps the club had become too big for its own boots but by the end of the era it had halved in size.

Following the socialist feminist reckoning before the summer hope was harboured that although a few women might leave many more would rigourise their commitment beyond football to club politics, but personal ties proved more powerful than politics and almost the entire first team defected to set up on their own. The club lost some valuable members whose commitment to their teammates was greater than that to the club. Whilst some departures were mourned the overall effect was to strengthen the bonds and identity of the remaining women. With some mixed feelings about the process, and recognition of the club’s pioneering role in developing women’s football in Leeds, it was decided to empower a “sister club” to form. They were still registered as Republica for the season ahead and the club paid their registration and donated equipment. A shock occurred during the season when a letter arrived from the league accusing it of a racist incident. It related to a player in the “sister club”, and dissatisfied with their response, the main club decided it could not continue the association which terminated at the end of the season (although the other team continued on its own).

Illness and apathy

The early 2006 season included a rare autumn tour to Dublin where, as holders of the Mondiali, the club had been invited by SARI (Sport against Racism in Ireland). Republica took a team of mixed ability and gender to an otherwise all-male tournament with teams of awesome ability. Republica watched stunned as rehab-teams of reject professionals who had turned to heroin played with an intensity of speed, aggression and skill that was captivating. And socialising afterwards with SARI revealed some truly impressive activists. At home an unprecedented issue caused friction amongst the newly reconstituted women’s team.

The gutsy goalkeeper had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and effectively was partly disabled but continued to play on admirably. She was prone to the occasional

collapse on field and this divided the team between those who respected her bravery and desire to play, and those picking the team who were more concerned she would die on the pitch and stopped selecting her. Players emboldened by the previous defection of the first team and seeking a more inclusive culture petitioned the club coordinating group who eventually overruled the selectors in favour of the player but by this time she herself chose not to play. She died later in the season and her parents set up a website about her which made glowing references to football, Republica, the network tournaments, her politics, and how important they all were to her.

In recognition of the player's spirit and commitment the annual award for the member who best embodies the club's spirit was renamed after her and first presented after a memorial match. The issue prompted women to explore how inclusive they could really be and later led them to challenge interpretations of the club constitution and selection policy which they felt did not go far enough. But progression on the field was illustrated later in the season when the team were drawn for the second occasion against Leeds United in a cup game and kept things to a 14-0 loss.

A great plan became a reality in 2007 when an earlier idea explored by Republica to tour Palestine actually took place. The idea, hatched in 2003, had been abandoned due to organisational difficulty but was resurrected with impetus and leadership from the Easton Cowboys and a joint party made the first trip. The tour encompassed the occupied territories of the West Bank and was based in the divided centre of Hebron, where one particular match was delayed by a passing sand-storm, as patrolling UN observers and Israeli sentries looked on from their gun towers. An iconic memento shows a photo of the team lined up against the giant dividing wall with a graffiti backdrop of goalposts and "Freedom through Football" written in Arabic.

An echo of the past occurred at the annual May Day tournament. The Mondiali trophy was proudly displayed on the clubhouse balcony but it was knocked off, and like the Jubilee Cup in 1993, broken. Without anyone realising, a young player's mum quietly cycled home with it, glued it back together, and cycled back with it intact. But persistent divisions in the club, especially amongst the men, were revealed at the tournament. Politics were prominent in the opening ceremony which featured political theatre culminating in a Thatcherite dummy filled with stage blood being ripped apart with a chainsaw which splattered the assembled audience. But later veteran activists were shocked when many men showed no interest in watching a slideshow of the incredible Palestine trip. Unlike the women, the men had not directly addressed their political issues but a quiet change occurred as numbers dwindled and the second 11-a-side team was disbanded before the new season. But this was more to do with apathy and a failure to recruit rather than politics.

Kicking sexism out

Summer fun was hosted admirably once more by the Easton Cowboys at Cullompton and Republica won the gong show again with a new act which ended with an unbeatable resurrection of the "sparkler up yer arse" routine. And in the autumn a new initiative was born when Republica hosted the "Together for Peace" tournament featuring immigrant and community teams including a Gypsy United kids

team playing to the soundscape of African drummers. International tournament participation had become more sporadic whilst Republica wrestled with its home grown issues and the club were not represented at the 2007 Mondiali at which there were allegations of a serious sexual assault. Afterwards the organisers consulted teams on how to make positive changes regarding sexism and Republica submitted detailed proposals which were influential and largely adopted.

As the women's international network expanded driven principally by the Republica, Sankt Pauli and Easton Cowgirls teams, issues of sexism were increasingly confronted. At the Lunatics 2008 tournament there were attempts at sexual harassment which the women themselves faced down, supported by the organisers. The Republica men's team expressed solidarity by beginning work with the White Ribbon Campaign (men working to end violence against women) and would adopt its emblem on their shirts for the new league season ahead. But ructions continued in the women's team about selection criteria and inclusion. Players challenged selectors about the same women being on the bench each week and ill feeling set in. At a later meeting a vote was won to rotate substitutions such that all women had an equal chance of starting on the pitch. But this was too much for the then main three organisers, seasoned club members, who left the club in protest. Once again principles and interpreting the constitution and selection criteria had resulted in an acrimonious split. But interestingly the change led to weaker players improving faster and actually improved the team's performance in the league.

Extending challenges to sexism continued to dominate summer tournaments in 2009 as a successful mixed team won the "Kick Sexism Out" cup at Mondiali with a White Ribbon Campaign organiser invited to play for Republica and host a workshop too. And a photo of Republica staging an invisible handshake with a missing team from the Democratic Republic of Congo (who had not been allowed into Italy) still features in a Mondiali video. The network tournament near Stuttgart, hosted by I.C.E. Neckerstrasse, was set in an idyllic valley with beautiful scenery, but the atmosphere was soured by more harassment of the women. A mixed Republica team was the only team to beat the eventual winners, Bad Muskau, some of whom resorted to aggressive intimidation of the women at the final whistle. It must be stressed that sexism at tournaments is extremely unusual but the increasing profile of the women seemed to be animating a small residual minority of misogynists, but it was also making ensuring that it was confronted too.

This era had proved to be the most testing and stressful in the club's history and, whilst many really positive things had occurred, progress was dogged with conflict and controversy. Issues that had simmered over time were boiling over regularly. The long term sustainability of the club, and its unique political culture, was in jeopardy. With a depleting membership it remained to be seen whether it would regenerate itself again or fizzle out as such a distinctive entity.

2009-13 Shoots of Recovery

Gaining respect

For the club to stabilise it had to clear the deck of a lot of the issues which had been impeding it for the last few years. Two of the activists who vowed after winning Mondialli 2006 to make the club what others perceived it to be were elected as Club Coordinators, the first pairing in this role, female and male. They and others sought to embolden club politics, broaden political links and recruit more politicised members. In this era the club forayed further into sexual politics and anti-homophobia, addressed further issues of women's harassment, took stands against violence in the men's team and aggression in club meetings, and some felt it was time to take the gamble and host the club's first really big international tournament comparable to those of the Cowboys and Lunatics.

A new initiative entitled "The Left Wing" began with the aim of raising political awareness where members would meet to discuss a specific issue like Feminism, Trade Unionism, Mental health, the Chocolate trade, the Death Penalty, and others. The club also forged links with "The Justin Campaign" (against homophobia in football) and began to attend its tournaments. And the club ran a workshop and activities at the "Leeds Summat" where diverse lefty organisations from across the city would congregate for a community conference, information marketplace, and celebration. But two issues surfaced during the regular season which came to a head in 2010.

A new male coach came to the club, and unelected, began to work with the women's team. He had an interest in photography and began taking pictures of the players. But later he started asking some of the women if they would pose erotically for him and it was soon discovered that he also indulged in "glamour photography". He was swiftly banned from the club and from photographing the team. In addition, violence surfaced again in the men's team which was referred to in a published interview about the club. A radical author included a feature about Republica in his book on leftist football (see Kuhn 2011) and in which a club coordinator expressed dismay about violence in the men's game. A veteran player, with a previous warning for violence, had head-butted opposition players twice during the season and assaulted a teammate as well as at a club social. An investigation followed which became protracted as the player declined to attend and disappeared for a while. During the process friction arose between the coordinating group carrying out the investigation and some of the player's teammates.

The coordinators cited the part of the constitution which stated violence should not be tolerated and the players responded that it was unrealistic in the rough and tumble of the Sunday League. The player was suspended, but matters culminated in a meeting called to supposedly bring the matter to a close. The player was absent but a teammate harangued and insulted the coordinators so aggressively that the meeting descended into chaos. The emotional impact was strong enough that both club coordinators considered their positions. After consultation, they created a "Respect" policy which would protect all members in future meetings and club activities from being subjected to any similar intimidation or outright hostility. But one

still left the club, another valuable member lost on an issue, and the other, after some consideration, carried on in post.

Another Palestine trip took place in 2010 with two Republica members joining the Cowboys on a tour organised partly by the "Villages Project", an inspiring joint Israeli-Palestinian initiative. This second tour included interactions with Israeli Refuseniks and Hapoel Tel Aviv fans. Rather than the urban areas under Palestinian control where most of the football had been played on the first tour, the second tour visited isolated West Bank villages which were under close oppression from illegal but very powerful Israeli settlements and from the Israeli army. Both Palestinian tours had included warm hospitality and a football match almost every day for ten days, with the older legs of the touring party trying ever more desperately to keep up with another new set of eager young Palestinians each day. A film was made during the second tour which has been used to inform and educate at Republica events and at overseas events.

Hosting, renewal and removal

The biggest event of 2010 was Republica hosting its largest international tournament at Rufforth near York; "Republica Internationale's Flying Circus". For more than a decade, conscious that they would have to take their turn at some point, Republica had agonised whether it had the organisational capacity for such a venture. Eventually a few key individuals seized the initiative and the club quickly got behind them. It was a massive commitment involving months and hundreds of hours of preparation by dozens of people which involved effectively creating a temporary tented village, catering, sanitation, entertainment, artworks, workshops, a football tournament, all the necessary logistics, and sensitive liaison with the local community. It was a great success and many felt Republica had finally earned its place at the top table of the network.

But one controversy afflicted the tournament about who was invited. In addition to the usual suspects from the network, there were a Brazilian team, Autonomous, befriended by the Cowboys, some of the old teams from May Day, and the Justin Campaign, but there was also a notable absentee. Because of the history of women being harassed, tournament organisers chose not to invite one of the traditional teams; Bad Muskau from Germany. Although incidents had only involved individuals, Republica felt that the response to those incidents by the team had been inadequate so all were culpable to a degree. But the decision and reasoning were not communicated well to other teams and the tournament was divided between those that felt Republica had no right not to invite traditional participants and others who agreed with the stance taken. Related confusion also meant that in the following year no tournament took place in the traditional network for the first and only time.

Also that year Republica were invited to the Sankt Pauli women's team's twentieth anniversary celebrations and two had the honour of playing in a final game in the Millerntor Stadium itself. But given the issues with violence earlier in the year, an interesting incident occurred on another visit to Sankt Pauli that year as well. A veteran from Republica exiting the Millerntor after a game was approached by a female fan offering a badge reading "Stop the Violence" which he accepted and

wore. Much later that night in conversation with a member of the Sankt Pauli women's team, she regarded the badge, tore it off his chest, and hurled it across the floor exclaiming; "You think violence is never necessary?"!

Buoyed by the success of "Flying Circus" there was a sense of renewal in the club and when the Leeds Summat was announced again for 2011 the club took quite a strategic approach to raising its presence by creating a stall, creating some street theatre football and doing a presentation. The results paid off and through a sinew of networks Republica attracted many politicised new recruits and a tangible shift began to be felt in the overall composition of the club. Also arising from the Leeds Summat, was "Leeds Citizens" (formally Leeds Community Organising) which was an organisation committed to grassroots activism city and nationwide. Republica were asked to join as founder member, but eventually declined due to historical precedent of non-affiliation and some reservation about the inclusion of faith groups. And, as the EDL (fascist English Defence League) assembled in Leeds a significant Republica presence unfurled a club banner at the demonstration against it. But relations had begun to deteriorate at the club's home base of the Cardigan Arms pub.

The brewery mystifyingly seemed to keep getting rid of successful management and a high turnover of tenants ensued. This discontinuity led over years to the creeping return of aggressive male customers, who became regulars, and positioned themselves around the bar creating an intimidating barrier to whoever wished to get served. The women in particular had to contend with regular sexism and homophobia and patience was wearing thin. The last straw occurred when a member was sought out and harassed when she was alone in the kitchen. Other women challenged the perpetrator bravely, getting in his face and refusing to back down until he apologised and eventually left. Thereafter the club mobilised really quickly, deciding the situation could no longer be tolerated, and left its home for more than a decade almost immediately. A new base was quickly negotiated with a move away from the club's roots in around Kirkstall and across Leeds to the Caribbean Cricket Club in Scott Hall.

Right now

Also in early 2012, initiated by Autonomous and others (who had partly been inspired by attending the previous Rufforth tournament), a new exciting network strand sprouted up in South America. A team comprised from a collective of the European network was formed, including Republica, and a tour took place in Brazil and Argentina hosted by anarchist and punk teams. And Anti-Homophobia Day was marked at home by both the men's and women's teams playing in customised black and pink kit. Despite all the many other issues, homophobia had never emerged as a divisive issue in Republica and, although the men's team were overwhelmingly heterosexual, the women had different sexualities happily coexisting since its inception without any discernible division. There was also a great Republica presence at the Sankt Pauli AntiRa in a squad featuring many of the recent recruits at their first tournament. They had an amazing induction into the scene and reciprocated with unbounded enthusiasm. And later in the summer, the Cowboys stepped up to the mark yet again to host a network tournament in Berrow.

In 2013 the political stability of the club has meant that members have expanded local campaigning. This has included a local community fight to take control of the former Leeds Girls High School away from developers and back into community use, as well as protest against the bedroom tax and another demonstration against the EDL marching in Leeds. And two Republica players had an interesting experience in Sankt Pauli in 2013 when there was an attempt to attack the Jolly Roger main fan pub by Hertha Berlin supporters. They marvelled at the organisation of the fans as a warning led to the swift and well-rehearsed transformation of the pub into a barricaded defensive fortress which even included a first aid post for casualties.

Later that year, whilst the Euro under 21s tournament took place in Israel, Republica were invited by the Leeds Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC) to represent Palestine at the annual “Refugee World Cup” in Leeds. Republica had previously attended the tournament for a few years but this time they raised money specifically for PSC campaigns and played in Palestinian colours. And Wessex All Starts joined the expanding number of hosts by providing the summer tournament.

Most recently, in late 2013, fledgling club basketball and cricket sessions have begun and Leeds People’s Assembly, which campaigns against austerity, was started by a new club member. However, a few months before a communique was received from a Brazilian member of the network who described how he was writing his own “prison diary”. He had joined the demonstrations against the Brazilian government during the Confederations Cup tournament only to be wrongfully detained and beaten up. Whilst intimating that he may need help with a refuge in England for a decade, he also added how he celebrated his eventual release the day after; “I scored a fucking goal for Autonomous!!! That makes me a lot happy!!!”!

A New Frontier

As the club enters its thirtieth year an old issue, selection, has reappeared in a brand new and complicated context. Recently a few transgender players have begun training with the club and more may be interested. This has raised issues about who they can play for and how they should be supported? Transgender issues are too intricate and complex to fully explore here, and fuller explanations can be found elsewhere (see LGBWhat? 2013). But some basic clarification is necessary. Transgender awareness challenges the binary assumption that people are either neatly male or female, masculine or feminine. And although some interpret this as a non-conformist third way, in reality it demonstrates that gender, and even sex, can be positioned on a spectrum of choice rather than as one of two predetermined categories. Also, locations on any such spectrum can change over time as individuals undergoing transition find their own comfortable position. So, gender identities are diverse and non-homogeneous.

Football, and much of social life elsewhere, is broadly based on binary categorisations and transgender considerations rock those assumptions to the core. The current players are all in female to male transition and have always played football. Currently they would like to continue playing with women, but also believe that selection should be based on ability, rather than sex or gender, as they

negotiate their personal situation within the club. But F.A. rules create exclusion for transgender players, who they can play for, at what stages of transition, and in terms of who should decide? Such players are consequently subjected to intrusive assessments of their biology and chosen gender identity. So Republica are faced with the dilemma of how to abide by the inclusive anti-discriminatory nature of their constitution whilst conforming to discriminatory F.A. policy.

If Republica attempt to register and play the players in league football they could face sanctions. But if they do not, then they partially exclude the players. And it is highly likely that if they did attempt to explore complex transgender issues with the F.A., the issue would be ducked and reduced to exclusion on the basis of doping policy. Not all transgender people take hormones classified as banned, but many do, and some feel the need to self-medicate which in itself can be illegal. Neither Republica nor the local F.A. has shown interest in drug testing previously, but by definition of transgender identity it is implicit that many such players are likely reliant on such drugs and therefore in breach of drugs policy. So, there is little hiding place once out in the open.

Transgender players may only wish to play football and live a quiet life, but they are pressurised to consider their own position and choose whether to accept exclusion or expose themselves as activists pioneering in football. Republica has to carefully consider how to include these players and who they can play for? And as that process unfolds, in the meantime a Trans-football tournament is in the pipeline for the next year. Outside the gaze of the F.A., all teams will be of mixed gender and each will include transgender players. And one of the players is in the process of setting up a “Leeds Trans Support Network” which aims to identify other social and leisure settings which are accessible and comfortable for transgender participation, as well as acting for advocacy and education.

Despite Republica’s commitment to inclusion, it is currently more likely that a player with a partial grasp of club politics is picked ahead of the transgender player to represent a team in official matches. This is hardly a comfortable situation but it is one of many that the club has to embrace because of its essential orientation. Republica has always struggled to define itself and sustain its distinctiveness. And who should be a member or be picked to play for the club has always been of central concern. But a larger challenge remains for Republica and others who enjoy mixed football whether they might rise to confront institutionalised gender segregation within the F.A.?

Conclusions;

At the end of the day Republica is a football club, not a political party or protest movement. And football is the conduit for everything else that goes on. It is a vehicle through which socialism is explored and expressed. Yet, as previously indicated, it plays football with one hand tied behind its back because of its commitment to so much more. The significance of football is ambiguous. On the one hand it is the gravitational centre of everything else, a passion, a game, a place to play. But on the other hand, football itself is really not that important at all, and over time as the club has projected itself onto a bigger canvas the importance of playing football has become less and less significant. But it is still football that people gather to play on a training night in winter or too early on a Sunday morning after a big night out. Football is the cultural milieu which the club inhabits, through which it has negotiated its existence, and ultimately football has gifted the club its legacy in everything else.

All that stands between Republica and conventional Sunday League teams is a thin piece of paper; the constitution, and an almighty struggle to interpret it and live up to it. If the club compares itself to its ideal it often falls short, but if it compares itself to other local teams it is distinctly different and left wing. For the club; there are “us” and “them”. And what overwhelmingly defines the club as socialist is not exactly about what it is like at any point in time, but the struggle itself; the principled fight for equality and the process of critical self-examination on that imperfect journey towards emancipation and enlightenment.

Republica has unceasingly promoted socialist ideas and actions. It has challenged capitalism and offered an alternative to orthodox commercialism, materialism, and consumption. It has challenged authoritarianism and attempted to create consensual, democratic leadership. It has pursued self-determination and organisation outside the gaze of the FA. It has attempted to offer an empathetic, inclusive community which educates, empowers, and promotes respect. It has fought oppressions like sexism, racism, homophobia, and capitalism. It has raised political awareness and inspired campaigns. It has helped to build networks, promote international solidarity, and create alliances of anti-capitalists, socialists, anarchists, feminists, greens, anti-nationalist, and the broad left.

Republica has acted as a site of struggle and resistance; ideological, economic, political, social, and cultural, and the struggle continues. It has been doing all of that for over thirty years, never without fault, and always with anxiety about its authenticity and credibility, but still as the constitution declares; “our uniqueness is precious and will be defended fiercely”.

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