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# GRACCHUS ANARCHIST

The enemies of the people are those who know what people need

STONEHENGE FESTIVALS & '86. HEROIN.  
DOPE. 'THE BIGGEST BASTARD' poster.  
PROUDHON.



# PROUDHON

## 'What is Property?' Property is theft.

'WHAT IS PROPERTY?' was the title of a pamphlet by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon which appeared in 1840. On the first page of the pamphlet he gave a precise answer to the question. He said, "Property is theft." This was to become one of the most effective slogans of the 19th century. It also made its author, thirty one years old at the time, famous throughout Europe.

Proudhon was born near Besançon in France, and his family was of peasant origin, his father being a local innkeeper, his mother a domestic servant. He began work in a printing office and had little formal education. Largely self-taught, he even learnt Greek and Hebrew while proof-reading religious books. In his attitude to life Proudhon always remained something of a peasant, though he was not opposed to industry as such. He had won a scholarship to Paris, awarded by the Academy of Besançon, and 'What is Property?' is dedicated to members of the Academy. Given its revolutionary content they weren't pleased!

The publication of the work and Proudhon's subsequent prosecution however brought him considerable fame in radical circles, and Proudhon was to spend the rest of his life earning a precarious living as a journalist. He was imprisoned for several years because of his outspoken radicalism, and died in 1865.

'What is property?' is essentially a moral critique of capitalism. Proudhon takes the ideas of the 'English' political economists like Adam Smith and Ricardo, and follows up their social implications. If, as these economists argued, the value of a commodity was largely determined by the amount of labour used in its production, then the real producers were the working people. Thus what is taken by the capitalists - those who own the capital or property such as machines and factories - as profits is surplus value over and above that paid to the workers as wages. The 'exchange' between wages and a person's labour is not therefore equal and just - it involves hidden exploitation. The capitalist appropriates what rightfully belongs to the worker. The profits - and the rent of the landowners - represents therefore a theft from the worker.

Proudhon wasn't the first to see the socialist implications of the labour theory of value - Karl Marx was to 'rediscover' it years later - but he was the first to outline a critique of capitalism that had passion and substance. Marx himself - only twenty two at the time - thought 'What is Property?' a "penetrating work". But Marx had no time for moral assessments of what for him were "economic facts", and he had the idea that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable anyway. It would be re-

placed by some form of communism. He felt this was happening. It is also clear that what was meant by communism was some form of state capitalism, at least in the initial stages.

Now Proudhon was a very unsystematic thinker. His writings, though indicating wide learning, are rambling and discursive and full of contradictions. This is partly due to being self-taught: but he deliberately eschewed the desire to build theoretical 'systems'. I am just a truth-seeker, he was concerned only to understand "why there is so much sorrow and misery in society". George Woodcock rightly described him as a "man of paradox". Proudhon did not have Marx's sense of history. But he had a much more profound sense of justice, and his instincts were entirely anarchist.

This meant that Proudhon was not only a critic of capitalism (property) but also of communism. His idea that the community or state would be a proprietor or capitalist filled him with a horror which would only lead, he felt, to slavery and oppression. It would involve the violation of the sanctity of the individual. Communism could have only one meaning: a restriction of human freedom of thought and action.

Proudhon therefore advocated a third alternative which he called mutualism. It involved the creation of a peoples' bank where independent producers could obtain credit at administrative cost, and the advocacy of a decentralised system of administration based on federal principles. Though he suggested a kind of barter system, Proudhon did not advocate a return to a primitive economy. But rather he argued for a social economy which would consist of a federation of producer cooperatives, industrial and agricultural, in which the workers themselves would have control over the means of production.

Proudhon wrote many other important works. Unfortunately these are not available in English, although Marx's critique of one of them was published, as 'The Poverty of Philosophy'. Proudhon's critique has some substance, but it is full of errors and misrepresentations, and completely fails to appreciate the originality of Proudhon's thought. Marx often abused those from whom he learned the most.

Proudhon was the first writer to describe himself as an anarchist. He shares with Marx the credit for having outlined the basic tenets of anarchist thought, a rejection of capitalism, the state and authoritarian socialism.

Brian Morris.

# LETTERS PAGE

## 'CLASS STRUGGLE'

OK. Here's a point by point reply to the "Class Struggle - Theory and Tactics" article in issue no. 8.

The British people need not depend on the peasants of the Third World for their necessities. There is probably enough arable land in Britain for the country to become self-sufficient. At the moment the Third World is exploited by northern countries like Britain because it is more profitable for the capitalists to run things that way rather than develop our self-sufficiency and because commodity society produces so much consumer crap that we don't actually need. In an anarchist world resources would be shared on a basis of co-operation and mutual aid. Only when the working class of the industrialized north has control of its economies can this relationship be brought about. The working class of countries like Britain has to depend on the exploitation of the Third World because it is trapped into a capitalistic economic system (which it must help to destroy).

The British working class is not the exploiter of the Third World. The British ruling class is the exploiter of the Third World and the British working class gains materially from this relationship of exploitation. Just as workers within Britain live in differing degrees of comfort, so do they internationally. The system survives by creating different levels, and so dividing the exploited. Economic exploitation in Britain no longer rests upon the basis of land, but upon that of the control of the means of production. All those who are exploited by the international capitalist system, on whatever basis, must take part in its destruction. For the destruction of the system to take place, Third World revolution need not take place before a British revolution. Neither must a British revolution take place before a Third World revolution. One will speed the other and both must be supported.

To suggest that the working class in the industrialised countries will not take any revolutionary initiative is untrue. The material comfort provided to French workers from the exploitation of the Third World did not prevent them from taking just such an initiative in 1968. The exploitation of the Third World figured prominently in the politics of the revolutionary movement, and in any case, the alienation which commodity society produces convinced the workers that it must be overthrown.

Even if the British working class were to be satisfied with this material comfort, the present crisis in the capitalist system, which can less and less afford to give it to them, will eventually bring them into confrontation with the system which will have great revolutionary potential. The miners' strike is an indication of this process.

It is untrue to state that "any revolutionaries will be found amongst the unemployed, not at the workplace" The revolutionaries amongst the unemployed are just as much of a minority as they are amongst the employed. Ultimately it will be confrontation with the system that will create revolutionaries (inner-city unemployed, miners etc.). Our propaganda should aim to foment revolution amongst all sections of the exploited.

I do not give a shit about hairdos. I quite like brown rice. I think the way we live our lives in the here and now is important.

World pollution and resource depletion will not be stopped until a revolution involving the industrial working class takes place. Only when we have control of industry, can we stop producing crap that we don't need, and fit the technology which will cut down pollution. I stress that whatever we chose to do with our industry, even dismantle it, we cannot do it until we have control over it. It is true that the basic revolutionary potential lies at the point of production for that is the pivot of power in a developed capitalist state. Nevertheless, any genuine revolution

must involve ALL exploited sections of society. I think 'awkward basic issues' should be raised constantly, Without debate our movement is dead.

A revolutionary anarchist.

Dear GA,  
One valid criticism frequently levelled at green anarchism surrounds its lack of coherent revolutionary strategy. On the other hand, those usually making that criticism (ie, the class stugglists) have been correctly berated for their lack of attention vis-a-vis ecology, animal rights etc. Therefore it has been refreshing recently to read articles in GA on anarcho-syndicalism and articles in papers like Class War on ecology and animal rights: all of which have combined to help break down the silly factionalism that has characterised contemporary anarchism.

However, one piece in the last issue of GA stated that "any revolutionaries will be found among the unemployed, not at the workplace". By this assertion, a person, say, working in some boring repetitive job in an unhygienic environment with long hours, dictatorial bosses, shit pay etc, could not possibly be revolutionary. This is clearly not the case. The fact is not that the workers are not revolutionary, but that the means of protest presently available to them are totally bureaucratic, middle class-dominated, divisive, comprising, and totally geared towards parliamentary power for the Labour Party. It is interesting to see the same sort of watering down of militancy within the ANC in South Africa. As anarchists we must not adopt this holier-than-thou stance, but point out the ineffectuality of the unions CND etc, and offer alternative strategies for workers control of industry. Yes we all know there's a lot of reactionary shit spouted by working class people (both employed and unemployed) but we must accept that a revolution needs majority consent, and it is those involved in production of the things we need that will play a prominent part in this. So, to quote an old 'Class War'