





## 121: A Personal Trip Down Memory Lane.

(Oh no I've got to walk down Railton Rd again.)

121 Railton Road: South London's world famous radical squatted house/anarchist bookshop/autonomous social centre/free community space survived for a record breaking 18 years before being evicted. Some people claim the place was haunted, by the ghost of euro punk perhaps.

121 was certainly haunted by Jack Frost as you nearly always felt cold inside the building (even when it was warm outside). The number of meetings and events there one sat through with shivering limbs and chattering teeth, we all deserve medals just for passing the test of physical endurance involved in going to the place. It is the comradeship and community, the social movement and historic struggles that the place was connected to that actually matter. On the long run the building itself was always expendable. And let's face it folks the building itself was a bit knackered from day one. Maybe, if they could have got away with it, it would have been better had the people who first squatted it demolished it there and then started building some folk art Watts Towers or Gaudi Cathedral like fantasy house to live in. So many hours of maintenance work and decorating on the building and its world famous anarcho squat centre toilet from hell but to little avail.

It felt only slightly more cosy in the early years when the ground floor dividing wall was still up and the bookshop was in the front with the latest "Black Flag" and "Crowbar" hot off the presses wafting printing ink thinners out the door. But maybe it only felt that way because we were younger then. There would be real agitated ANARCHIST meetings in the back room with young punks, ageing Spanish veterans, anarcho-nerd bookworms, romantic insurrectionaries, hardcore squatters, urban saboteurs... (today's "anarchist" meetings just don't have that same authentic feel). It was the last days of the cold war, Thatcher was in power, there was open mass unemployment, there were inner city riots, big industrial battles like the miners and the printworkers yet to be fought. Life was so much politically simpler in those days, the revolutionary vision appeared much clearer, insurrection seemed just round the corner. In those days you could get easy student grants and loaf around for several years, you could sign on for years with a minimum of hassle, the giros felt bigger and silkier. The queues in the dole office were more chatty and friendly. Tell that to the young whippersnappers in R.T.S. today and they won't believe you.

I remember my first conversation in the bookshop when I first visited 121 in 1981; I sat down with a cup of tea and chatted about summer riots, squatting, secret police and whether the room was stuffed with bugging devices or not. This was still in the days when the arguments between Black Flag and Freedom actually mattered to anyone so it was fun to pop into Angel Alley, Whitechapel, and then travel down to Brixton to catch up on the latest exchange of the political raspberry blowing. Not satisfied with smalltown anarchism in the early eighties I used to catch the train up to London at weekends in search of the hard stuff. A typical Friday routine for me circa early eighties: travel to Brixton, meal at 121 in the cafe upstairs, then downstairs for an anarko meeting, wander off for a little "direct action" or flyposting, crash at somebody's squat, then Saturday morning maybe a paper sale and meeting in a pub in Ladbroke Grove (Class War had just started coming out as a paper) or a demo in central London.

The quality of 121 cafe food was not universally awful but it often got pretty close. Yellow broccoli in squat food is a political issue. I miraculously escaped food poisoning in all 18 years eating there although I believe several victims are still convalescing in a London infirmary to this day. Was the good meal in summer '92 or '93? I can't remember. The 121 Toilet: The architects and designers model of the ultimate in grungy, dingy and dire squat toilets. There is a full size mock up of it in police training college.

And what of more recent years; the nineties for instance? I didn't get there so much. The postmodernists tried to redesign the place into the "121 Centre" but it just wasn't going to happen without a cappuccino machine. There were several changeovers in personnel in the collective, sometimes it looked like it was dying, but then it would come back to life a bit for a few months as a bit of new enthusiasm was put into the place. And then video and discussion evenings and anarcho theme cafes, the sex cafe, dead by dawn raves, music events in the opened up basement, exhibitions... I popped down to some of these events and even, shock horror, enjoyed myself once in a while. But still the temperature, the building, the stairs, the toilet!!! Otherwise I would only be down there for the occasional London ABC (prisoner support) meeting in one of the upstairs rooms, so cold the biro would freeze up.



And all those bundles of unsold undistributed unsellable copies of every anarko paper and leaflet piled up in a strategic reserve/political text mountain. In politico speak piles of unwanted tatty old newspaper are referred to as an "archive". The old log books/daybooks from 121 make a good read, I believe they were rescued with other stuff before the eviction and still exist. During the Brixton riot in spring in 1981 while pitched battles were going on in the street outside, book sales listed for that Saturday afternoon in the logbook included "Towards a Citizens Militia" by Cienfuegos Press and "Mutual Aid" by Kropotkin. As for since the eviction and the future? Well let's be honest; half the comrades today are earning so much in white collar professional jobs they're almost rich enough to buy the place if they wanted.

## Whingers at the petrol pumps.

Did something nearly start kicking off there all of a sudden in the U.K. or not? When faced with a surprise wave of social disgruntlement in the form of lorry drivers and farmers blockading oil depots demanding lower fuel taxes it is a truism to say simply that all outbreaks of social unrest are politically impure and the class composition of revolt is always a bit confused. There is a big important difference between a situation of unrest that is lead by workers taking action or a working class community revolt which might then draw in (positively or negatively) some middle class elements, and a situation that is lead and orchestrated predominantly by middle class and business interest groups right from the start. The fact that many of these "blockades" were just small pickets that succeeded in delaying oil supplies with the virtual connivance of the oil depots and oil companies, and were assisted much of the time by softy nod and wink policing and the support of the press, gives the game away.

There would be no such connivance or softy policing or press support if this was workers taking industrial action against an employer and engaging even in primary picketing never mind secondary picketing, or the community occupying the street to demand less traffic pollution. This situation was started mainly as a business strike by various business sectors attempting to stir up populist grumbling over petrol prices, and attempting to squeeze government revenues in order to force changes in government policy favouring their own business interests.

As proletarians we might well take advantage in such a situation to find windows of opportunity to create good trouble for ourselves. Maybe we can use fuel shortages as an excuse to fail to turn up to work and mount an unofficial stayaway. We could take advantage of less traffic to take over streets for our own demos and carnivals of the dispossessed perhaps. But we need to be very careful to avoid our efforts being sucked into and exploited by a conservative populist campaign serving various business interests or even worse a generalised people power movement revitalising and rejuvenating capitalist democracy.

In the street it was amusing from the full time pedestrians' point of view to have seen long lines of sad motorists queuing outside garages shepherded by police waiting for petrol. It is sometimes amusing to see "normal" lower middle class and upper working class people getting all agitated about some big screw up in the system which just happened to affect them directly for a change (lower down the social hierarchy the system's screw ups are a part of daily life). A little bit of an atmosphere developed around the whole thing, people grumbling about the government in the supermarket queue rather than talk about the weather. And now there is a little more of an atmosphere of general unease, an atmosphere with a clearly global dimension and the possibility of defiance and a sort of feeling maybe something's going to happen and something's not right at all with the good old capitalist system. This makes a difference after a period of mostly silence and apparent disappearance of class struggle in particular. This in itself can contribute to wider diffuse resistance. The system is *perceived* by everyone to be momentarily weaker, maybe this is a convenient moment to slow down at work, demand longer breaks, demand price cuts of other goods, delay the rent, get out and dig the atmosphere in the street. But how much of this is based on proletarian strength and how much of it is just outbreaks of media directed middle class worry and bourgeois manipulative campaigns (conservative opposition to the euro etc.)? We need to force a clear material break between the two. For now "middle class people power" seems to have fizzled out, it's time for proletarian power to show what it can do.

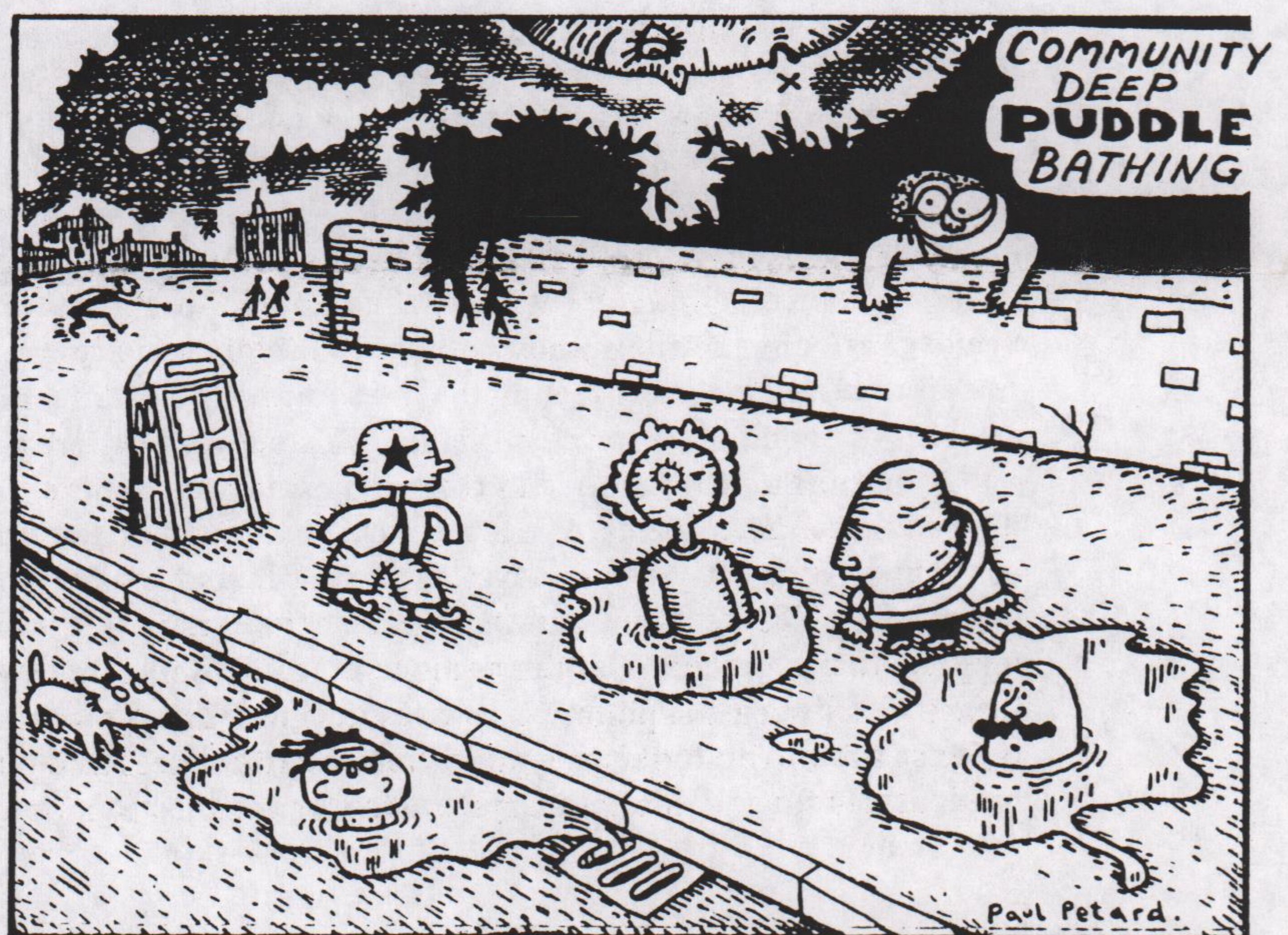
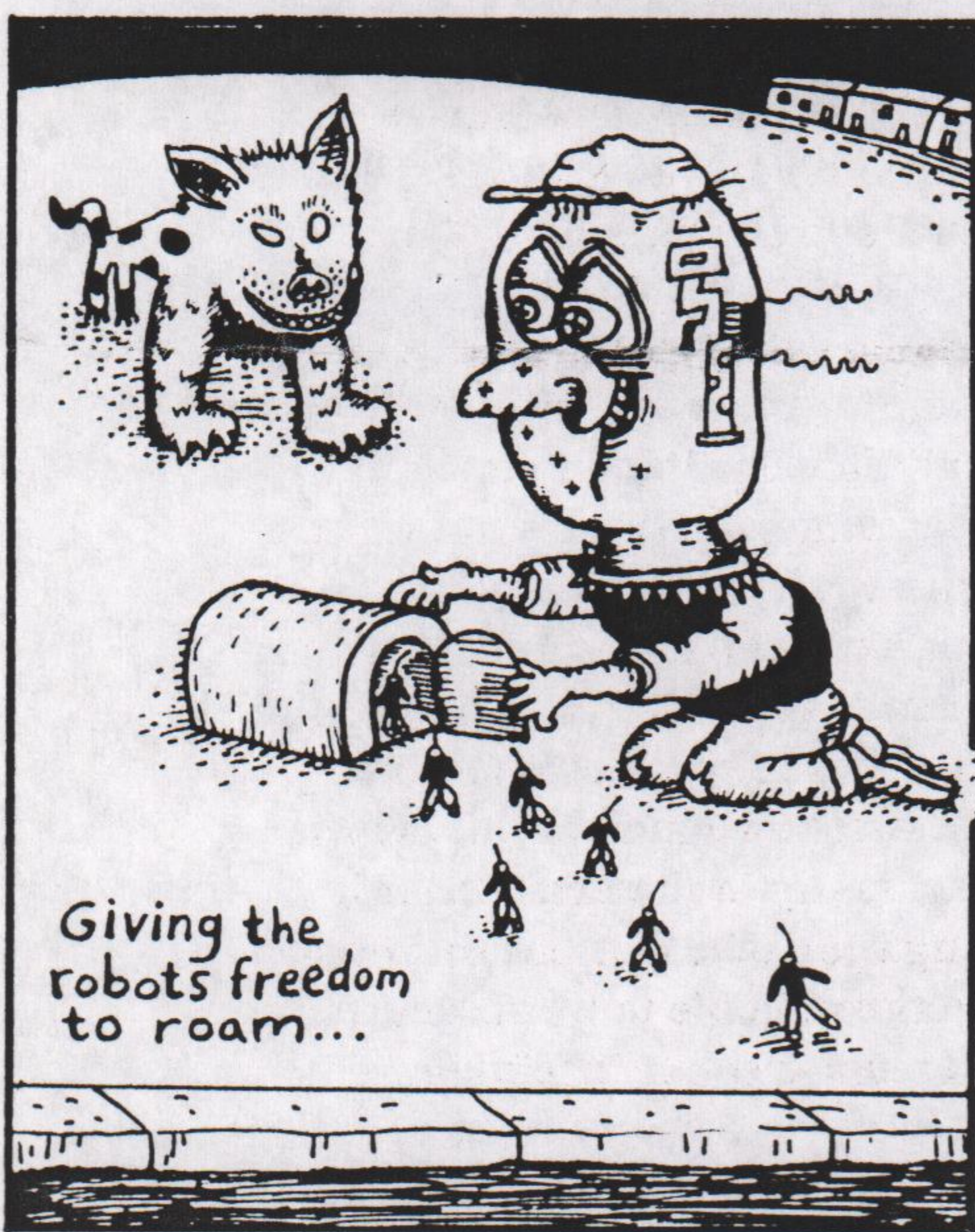
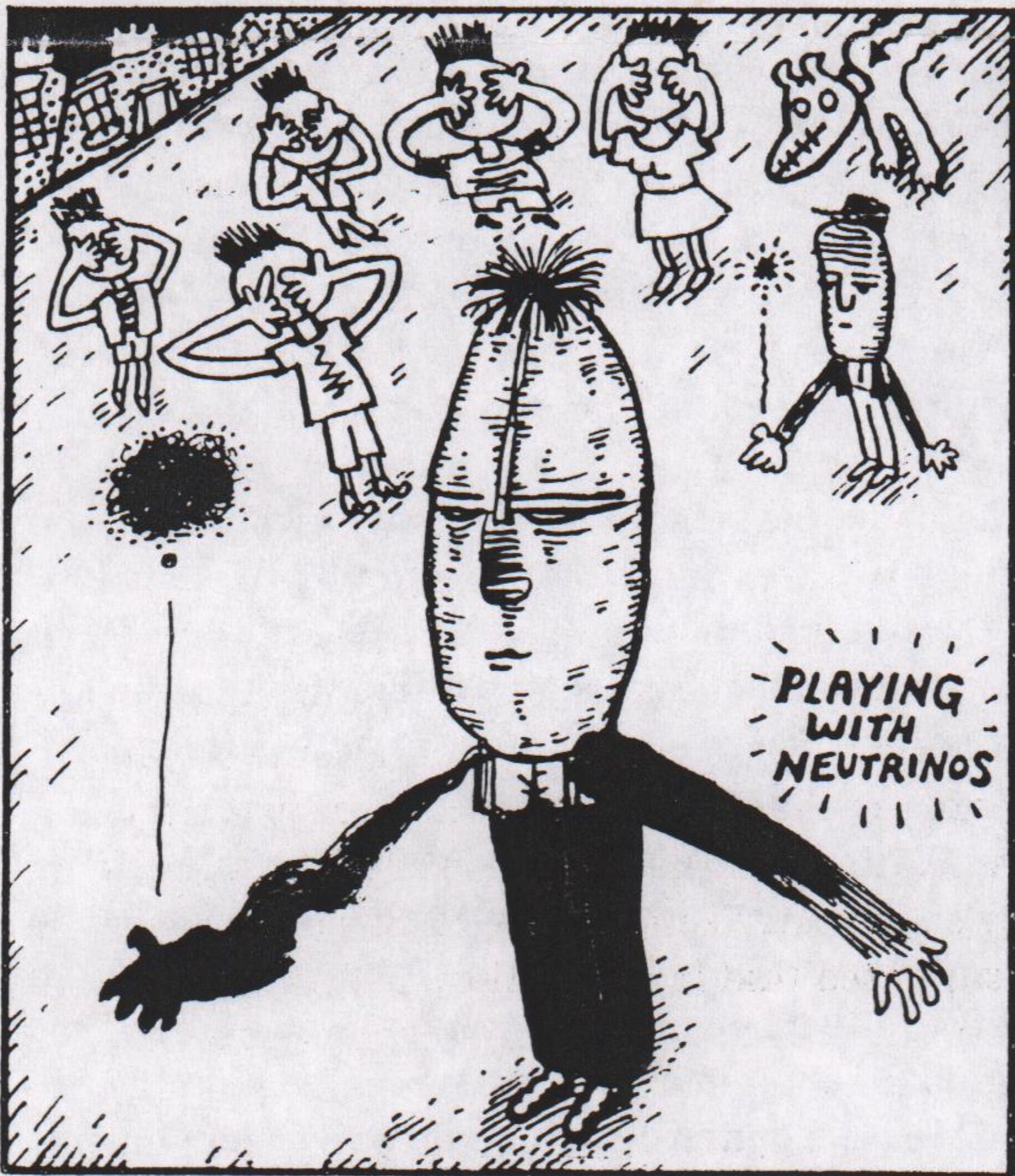
The new "anticapitalism" and all that, alongside its communistic and internationalist



tendencies, also as part of the general muddle, unfortunately includes fairly big chunks of conservative populist and petty capitalist twaddle. Capital is not globally uniform or homogenous and there are plenty of partisan capitalist interests such as small business, local business, nationalists, protected professional and bureaucratic sectors, who are quite happy to throw their lot in with populist protest against "neoliberalism" and the "international corporations" and "globalism". So the situation of general unease bursts out into a situation of general protest and political unrest pulling in all sorts of directions at once. A clearer proletarian based action and communistic program has to fight to keep its head above the confusion. Otherwise the confusion could drag us down into isolationism, scapegoating, petty capitalist misery, barbarism, nationalism, even war.

A most interesting parallel exists between all the "new economy" rubbish we have been subjected to over the past year before this particular oil crisis and the feeling, in the early 1970s before the oil crisis then, that the prospect was one of indefinite, healthy, synchronised economic growth throughout the world. Has everybody been getting richer under this capitalist "boom"?

EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW RESISTANCE STRATEGIES ....





Are most of my friends faking it or have they all got more dosh in their pockets? I even made a little money myself recently by selling some paintings. Are we all upwardly mobile and getting better off now after all? Most folks have got something resembling a job now, being on the dole went out of fashion years ago. Still signing on today, I'm part of a dwindling band of job refusers, we feel like some Japanese soldier lost in the jungle who still thinks the war is going on, and even I am likely to be starting temp work soon.

But what has been passed off as a record period of capitalist prosperity has only been a temporary equilibrium, a temporary slowdown in the underlying cancerous growth of economic crisis. Real unemployment, complete disempowerment as opposed to the minimal empowerment of one's productive power being in demand with individual employers, is being disguised. With something like the government's "new deal" hundreds of thousands are frog-marched through the routine of a pretend job, without having a real one, to maintain the ideology of wage labour and keep the unemployed competitive. The real unemployment policy: in America the federal reserve adjust monetary policy to maintain effective unemployment at 8-10% of the potential workforce to keep the capitalist economy from "overheating" - i.e. to stop the wealth trickling down a little bit and undermine the need for workers to continue selling themselves into wage labour.

Contrary to the hype, the record of the '90s, does not match the economic performance of the 1960s, the end of the post-war boom period. Today the re-assertion of the mortal crisis of the capitalist system is devastating whole continents. Imperialism has relentlessly deepened its super exploitation, slavery, child labour, disease and wars born out of the bitter struggle to survive are sweeping the world and penetrating even the more "advanced" sectors. Up to recently the U.S. and London economy has been stable, but at the expense of much of the rest of the world. The U.S. has shifted the burden of the global crisis onto the back of some of its imperialist rivals and the so called third world nations. Part of this "boom" has to do with investment in new technology, but the "boom" has also been subsidised by low oil prices. But now, with oil prices having gone up, the illusion they have tried to create of permanent capitalist good times for all is stripped away.

Should we organise meetings specifically of the unemployed? or should we organise public meetings or meetings for political activists?.... the question is not new. Writing in 1887 Joseph Lane comments: "The most likely thing to occur by calling meetings specially of the unemployed is that, having their passions aroused by our denunciations of the thieving class, they will destroy a few windows. The paltry bill will be paid by an insurance company, and we lose some of our best advocates as a result. We socialists do not want to see the aimless destruction of property, but the destruction of the property holders. In the meantime, let the starving people steal, sack shops, or what not, in preference to starving, if they so choose, We may regard this as a sure forerunner of revolution, but we must not let it be supposed that it is socialism. Meetings specially of the unemployed, therefore, should not be called but meetings of the workers as a whole should be held on every possible occasion."

And so to PRAGUE for mass demos against the bosses world conference and romantic autumn riots in narrow old cobbled streets. This article is being written before the actual demos have happened so we don't know what the outcome is going to be. Will our comrades who are travelling get there safely? Will they ever come back? And let's suppose they did just manage to fight their way past all the barriers and police and troops and journalists and SWP paper sellers and get into the conference chamber and roasted the politicians on a spit and ate them, what would they do next? Demos against bosses banquets can only go so far, and you're very much on enemy territory. But they can be useful as agitational and oppositional social gatherings nonetheless. Our Czech Republic correspondent, a friend of Bugs Bunny, reports from Prague two weeks in advance of the demos: "there are soldiers everywhere and they don't look very impressive... everyone in Prague 1 has been advised to tape up their windows and an ordinance has been passed making it illegal to walk on people's lawns. That'll show 'em." I'm not going myself, too lazy and too old and infirm for this running around and smashing things lark (ultra lefty bad back syndrome). We leave most of it to the younger comrades these days.

It is probably a bit late in the day to be still ranting on about Seattle but back to the tiresome timewasting debate about the token property destruction. Much of what I've read about Seattle suggests to me that most of the demo was heavily self contained and stuffy to the extent that it didn't really need the police to oppress it, it was doing a good enough job of this itself. But then as I just said, I think demos against bosses conferences and banquets are liable to be on territory particularly favourable to the system rather than us. Symbolic gatherings can be useful in



themselves but most of such a demo on that kind of territory is likely to be on the level of just symbolism and civil protest. The bosses conference is usually symbolic anyway, much of the real negotiation has already taken place in advance. And it is not as if we're fighting directly over some land we want to grow food on or some buildings or space we're trying to seize to live in or fighting to seize some productive resource to communally produce things of use to us. So most of something like a seattle is bound to be a big circus and a show. The politicians and police and journalists are all part of a show, the moralistic pacifists, opposition leaders, reformist protesters, professional activists, union stewards, they're all just part of a show too. In this context I wonder whether the "black bloc" anarchist crew who wanted to attack a few retail outlets need have bothered that much. It is all quite a romantic adrenaline rush, put your mask on, throw straight, break a window or two and run away. But the point about a "black bloc" is that you shouldn't have to need a "black bloc" if you see what I mean. At June 18th in the city of london last year I got the impression there ended up being less of a separate, narrow black bloc as such, the situation ended up being much wider and more fluid. I have problems with a "bloc" (squaddism?). It can end up imposing a stuffy self containment on itself like the moralistic liberals and pacifists. It can end up being too much of an exclusivist club imposing segregation and separatism and adopting a romantic kamikaze "our elite bunch of political streetfighters against the rest of the world" kind of mentality. It runs the risk of generating a particular kind of cadre-vanguardism. Mind you a seattle with broken business windows is better than a seattle without broken business windows, so I should shut up my whinging...

## Housing Whinges

After spending nearly a year living in squatted accomodation I decided to go soft and try and get some more security by joining a housing co-op and paying a little bit of rent in shortlife licensed housing. However being stuck in a small room in an overcrowded house, having no longterm security while stuck in shortlife status and sitting here watching the low rent about to start slowly but surely creep up, I'm wondering if I've done the right thing.

The idea behind a housing co-op is that technically you are supposed to be collectively your own landlord so you're all in control of your own housing. But is this the case? On the face of it "being your own landlord" sounds like a nice rosy idea. But, if you stop and think about it, the realisation begins to dawn that it is actually a bad idea. If you stop and ask yourself just what is landlordism anyway? then you realise that landlordism is an inherently oppressive/exploitative/parasitical thing by its very nature. It is based on the conflict between property ownership by some and dipossession amongst many others. After all if everybody was *genuinely* a landlord then who would need to pay rent? And if nobody needs to pay rent then landlordism collapses. Being "your own landlord" means you take responsibility for imposing the conflict between ownership and dispossession upon your own head. The contradictions of self managed landlordism lead to schizophrenia and tearing yourself apart as your interests as a landlord come into conflict with your interests as a rentpayer/tenant, you end up imposing the oppression and exploitation upon each other. This is why half the people in housing co-ops tend to end up resenting each other and squabbling in faction fights sooner or later.

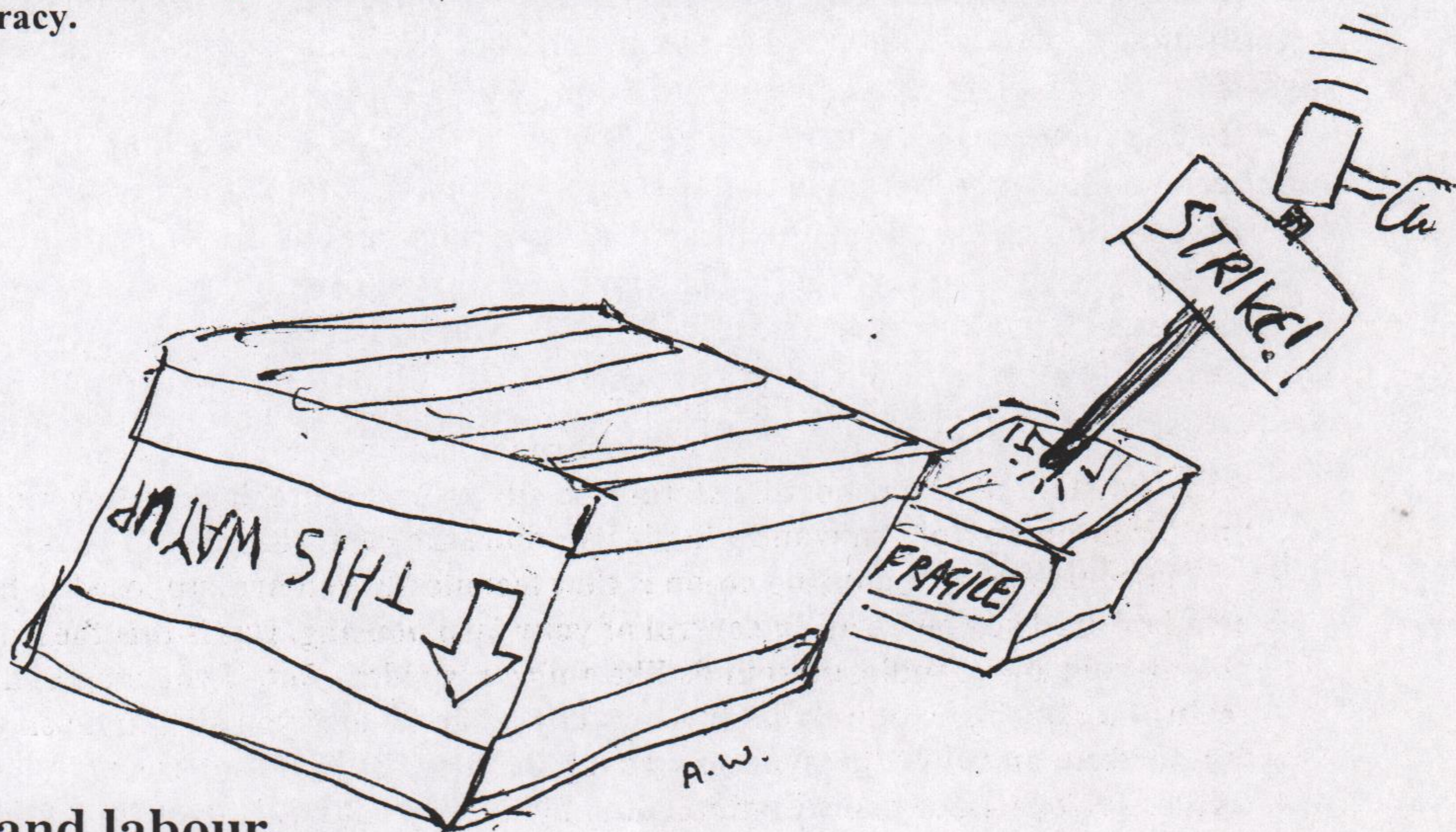
Despite the utopian idealism and self managed collectivist rhetoric a housing co-op is still a commercial enterprise that has to compete in the market and operate within the money system. A co-op is not a collective in the full on sense of the word. "We are the co-op" already implies an exclusivism, the co-op might seek to look after the interests of all its members in relation to housing but it starts off doing so from a position of exclusion of the rest of the population. In practice within a co-op there is often a small scale hierarchy of regular hardcore committee members and they will tend toward a play safe, don't do anything confrontational attitude in the running of co-op business. They will tend to keep a "don't rock the boat" electoral majority loyally voting for them against any significantly dissenting minority. Policy in the co-op is laid down in general by the economy. And more specifically it is laid down by councils or big housing associations if they are providing the properties for short life accomodation and policy is laid down by government bureaucracy in the form of the HOUSING CORPORATION. And everyone is so scared of the Housing Corporation. The accountant and the management committee will



formulate particular policy proposals and these policies will be bounced onto the members at some poorly attended general meeting where opposition is isolated or non-existent. It is like elections used to be in stalinist albania where virtually everyone routinely voted for enva hoxa, only a few brave souls dare vote against anything. The latest new policy in the co-op is a new rent setting policy putting everyone's rent up and imposing automatic further increases *above inflation* every year. Eventually this will push rents up to market level.

Resistance to the prevailing wind of capitalist austerity and privatisation in housing will be weak in a housing co-op much of the time because of fragmentation. This is not just the fragmentation between individual co-op members but also the immediate fragmentation between the members of that particular co-op and other co-ops and housing enterprises. Questions within the decision making bodies in the co-op will be framed first in terms of "what is in the best interests of the co-op (as an enterprise) rather than "what is best for all those in need of social housing in general?"

Shortlife housing is being squeezed but it still exists. As the supply of temporary properties from councils is being shrunk, co-ops have had to go begging to housing associations like peabody trust for empty flats and houses. This enables peabody trust to rip off the co-ops, the co-ops in turn are manoeuvred into a situation where they have to impose that rip off onto their own members. Meanwhile they have to compete and fight against other co-ops to get their hands on a dwindling number of properties. When big handbacks of shortlife properties occur the co-op doesn't have enough alternative places to rehouse everyone so a shrinkage of members is imposed. This involves some members being democratically, co-operatively and collectively being dumped by the others. Housing co-ops are a wonderful experiment in real democracy; real capitalist democracy.



## Flatulence and labour.

Why does the marxist labour time theory of value have this obsession with *time* as a measure? "The *value* of a product, independently of its use, is the quantity of abstract labour it contains, i.e., the quantity of social energy necessary to reproduce it. Since this quantity can only be measured in terms of time, the value of a product is the time socially necessary to produce it,..." (Dauve, Eclipse). Yes but can this quantity *only* be measured in time? Is there no other way of measuring it? Surely if you had a particular human society, in particular environmental conditions at a particular time, the *value* of a product, independently of its use could be measured in terms of the socially necessary quantity of oxygen that humans have to breathe in order to produce it??? This measure of oxygen could become important if humans take to space ships and start engaging in time travel which could screw up labour time calculations (see Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy). And if time is the measure of social energy, quantum mechanics tells us that time can be resolved into actions of subatomic particles which bear relation to quantities of physical energy. Cannot social energy be somehow measured in social *joules*?

Back on the subject of oxygen; if the value of a product, independently of its use could be measured in terms of a socially necessary quantity of gas to be taken in, could it not also perhaps be measured in terms of a socially necessary quantity of gas to be expelled? i.e., for a human society with a particular diet, a socially necessary quantity of burping and farting??? And in the building industry is not the value of a brick wall the socially necessary quantity of bottom that the bricklayer has to expose in order to get the job done????

(by the way, it's a joke)



## Socialist Substandard

As a part time cartoonist I get a buzz out of seeing my drawings popping up in various political papers and mags from time to time. I was pleased to see one of my cartoons recently appearing in the Socialist Standard, paper of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB), for example. But just because I'm pleased to see my cartoon appear in their paper it doesn't mean I won't moan and whinge about their politics.

The SPGB are quite a weird bunch, they are "impossibilists" who have been stuck in an historic timewarp since 1904. They are not a bunch like the SWP who obviously stand for state capitalism and act in practise as aggressive guard dogs for the labour left and the official trade unions. They predate bolshevism, lenin and trotsky and all that, they are more of a mix of Marx and William Morris. Stephen Coleman in "Non-market socialism in the 19th ad 20th Centuries." (Edited by M. Rubel and J. Crump) writes about them:

"The most typically possibilist and historically enduring product of the split in the Social Democratic Federation emerged in 1904 when the majority of the London "impossibilists" (as opposed to "possibilists" reformists)... formed a new party: The Socialist Party of Great Britain." They "adopted an Object and Declaration of Principles which has not since changed." and, "If one turns to the Socialist Standard of 1904 one can read basically the same analysis of capitalism and statements about socialism as would be found in 1934 or 1984."

Now I suppose you have to be as sad and boring as the SPGB n order to bother sitting down and writing a critique of their politics. Well if this is true it's a fair cop... But on a serious note a critique of "impossibilism" helps go part way to developing a critique of wider aspects of revolutionary/ultra left/libertarian communist politics some of which I have been involved in myself for the last twenty years and no doubt will continue to have some kind of involvement with for the foreseeable future. Before we start it should be noted that there is a significant number of SPGB members who will privately admit that they don't actually believe half of what the SPGB claims to stand for, just like there are members of the Industrial Workers of the World who aren't actually syndicalists and there are individual members of the Anarchist Communist Federation who candidly admit they aren't actually anarchists, like there are people who go to church who admit they are atheists. This kind of phenomenon requires a whole separate article to deal with. But for now we will take what the SPGB claim to stand for on paper and start from there...

The SPGB's line on things begins with three claims regarding "socialism" (free communism, non-state communism):

1. Socialism has long been an idea but nowhere a practise.
2. When it is established it must be globally.
3. World Socialism can only be achieved democratically.

They then go on to outline a simple vision of future utopian world socialism, with socialised production for need not profit, without money or wage labour. And they outline the main purpose of their party; to educate the majority of society about this utopian vision and "make socialists" through propaganda. When the majority are finally conscious of the need for socialism then they will elect a majority of socialist MPs into parliament who will declare "Socialism" in one act. Hm, perhaps the reader does not need me to continue with a critique of the SPGB as they can see the problems here already, but yawn not poor reader and stay with us as we chisel away at the all too possible fossil of impossibilism.

Claim no.1 about socialism, "Socialism has long been an idea but nowhere a practise." is a denial of socialism as an actual material historical tendency and an historic movement. It is a cover up of socialism as a recurring expression of class struggles. It is a reduction of socialism to a mere religious and mythical ideal projected into the future. "Heaven/jam tomorrow, if only those stupid clots would open their minds to the "idea". The second claim regarding socialism, "When it is established it must be globally", implies a sort of managerial exercise of "establishing" socialism, a *formal* suspension of history...by who? and how? Again a cover up of the actual course of class struggle. Socialism as a general tendency becomes global but specific socialistic outbreaks will begin at certain times in certain situations.

The SPGB's third claim about socialism, "World socialism can only be achieved democratically" contains more of a hint as to the party's practise and proposed method of intervention, but it is not one we have any time for. (Mind you at least they actually *have* some kind of practise and intervention, some withdrawalist groups are rumoured to exist that have given up on any kind of intervention at all, to the extent that they don't even put out propaganda



or talk to anyone. Nobody, including themselves, are sure if they even exist anymore.) Today "Democracy" is an expression of market and commodity relations. Democracy has become the political wing of capital. There is a significance to the choice of the word "Democracy", and as to why the political wing of capital has deliberately chosen this word as its leading word rather than any other. A word contains a program and the word "Democracy" lends itself to the market capitalist program particularly well. The "rule of the People" becomes the rule of the atomised competitive voter-consumers, a dictatorship of capital and commodity built upon wage labour. The impossibilists' insistence on the democratic method is an attack on spontaneity, necessary minority action and communal solidarity in struggle. It is a reduction of politics to just individualised ideas and atomised liberal opinions which are all equally valid, merely to be debated in an artificial debating chamber (the SPGB are particularly fond of formal debating, even with local Tories) divorced from the material clashes and conflicts of real social life.

Socialism is NOT just an idea, it is a *material need* for proletarians. And that need periodically expresses itself in outbreaks of socialistic struggle and revolt. The SPGB's own critique of liberal democracy is simply on the level of a cynicism about the parliament and professional politicians. It is shallow and simplistic to the level of dishonesty and hypocrisy, leaving the door open of course for their own participation in the diversions of bourgeois electoral circuses. Bourgeois elections are not just a joke, they are a very important ideological mobilisation exercise for the system, participating in them from whatever supposed political platform ends up contributing to capitalism's political marketplace and its spurious debate. Any parliamentary strategy involves elitism whether impossibilists admit it or not. It also involves an acceptance to some degree of the nation state's constitution; recognition of the national parliament and its borders....

The educationalist approach of the SPGB turns the fight for socialism into an oppressive patronising Sunday school preaching exercise. "making socialists" becomes like selling double glazing. This misery of preaching implies a didacto-vanguardism and an elitist-teacherism, ultimately a patronising dictatorship of the "socialist" clergy who alone begin with consciousness of the mystical socialist truth, rather than in practise a *mass dictatorship of the proletariat* for communistic social relations. Didacto-vanguardism, by hiding behind "socialism" as an ideal to be preached maintains an *elitist* agenda in lecturing the working class about what they already know. In fact millions of working class people both in the west and around the world are already quite aware that capitalism is crap and social production for need not profit would be better. The impossibilists' preaching the gospel truth Sunday school approach is aloof/detached/patronising/treating workers as all generally simple.

"Consciousness" does not just come from individual persuasion and propaganda. The spread of non-market socialist ideas does not depend exclusively on the efforts of one or other particular socialist sect but is generated by capitalism itself. The SPGB will tend to sneer at and remain aloof from most actual specific struggles and strikes. The impossibilist approach is a symptom of withdrawal from real struggles disguised by token activism (and of course paper selling). The SPGB may appear relatively nice and quaint and inoffensive, particularly in comparison to the trotskyist and leninoid rackets, but they speak with a forked tongue. Despite numbering about only five hundred members they still have minor potential to act as a trojan horse for the democratic agenda in the midst of critical workers discussion during moments of social revolt. We also need to look at the SPGB's class analysis. This basically takes the line that virtually everyone, apart from the uppermost richest capitalist, who is technically a wage earner or salary earner or dependent is working class, and that the working class all have more or less the same common interest. So the middle class don't exist. Now the term "middle class" is a bit of a clumsy, vague and unsatisfactory term so for the rest of this rant we are going to keep it in inverted commas. We might agree that the "Middle Class" as a full on coherent class for itself separate from the capitalist class doesn't exist. Perhaps the nearest it comes to doing so is in the form of the SWP. But the "middle classes" with a small c, do have an existence and their existence is a material problem for proletarians. There are clearly hierarchical gradations within the wider "working class" that, at least on the short term, are a specific obstacle to practical class wide solidarity. The "middle classes" have an existence in the form of a broad coalition of petty capitalists and specifically protected professional, managerial and bureaucratic elite workers who form a sort of new, non-hereditary, caste system reproduced under capital. The problem with an exercise like trying to define the "middle classes" is that if one picks on whatever arbitrary fixed category to define them one is always going to find some of one's friends accidentally just about fit into it. As a result, having stigmatised your friends as part of the "middle classes", they are liable not to speak to you again. The way to get round this is to point out that hierarchical gradations of many varieties are an ongoing *process* to which all the



working class are continually being subjected. Hierarchical gradations are continually being invented and reinvented. *Proletarianization* is also a process to which workers in general will be subjected.

It is not just a question of levels of income, although income differentials certainly matter, and whether or not you've got cash in your pocket is going to have an influence on how you might have to struggle from day to day. But it is also a question of such things as protected privileged status for certain professional workers, hierarchical protectionism amongst workers in general (racial and sexual discrimination, paternalism, nepotism etc...) hierarchies of control, and small business and mercantile interests. It is more than just "contradictions within the working class", the working class always contains contradictions in the sense that most workers have to compete against each other and proletarians work against their own interests while trapped in wage labour. It is also that there are privileged *hierarchies* within the wider "working class", that "workers" are not necessarily wage labourers, and wage labourers are not necessarily *proletarians*. Let's rummage through some rantings by old Mr Marx for a bit and see if he can enlighten us. (Marx, Grundrisse, Penguin...)

P.295: "Separation of property from labour appears as the necessary law of this exchange between capital and labour."

P.297: "The worker [as free wage labourer] is absolutely indifferent to the specificity of their labour; it has no interest for them as such, but only in as much as it is in fact labour and, as such, a use value for capital... This is not the character of the craftsperson and guild-member etc., whose economic character lies precisely in the specificity of their labour and in their relation to a specific master, etc."

P.604: "It is already contained in the concept of the free labourer, that they are a pauper: virtual pauper. According to their economic conditions they are merely a living labour capacity, hence equipped with the necessaries of life. Necessity on all sides, without the objectivities necessary to realise themselves as labour capacity."

Workers are not necessarily wage labourers; Artisans, tradespeople, self employed, contractors, all of these may be "workers" but they are not wage labourers. A person who is technically a wage labourer might also have other significant economic interests. There are quite a few people with day jobs who also run profitable part time businesses or who own properties they rent out or who have profitable self sustaining investments off which they could live comfortably and independently from social support if they lost their job. They are not "separated from property" or pauperised or economic conscripts. People of independent economic means might still get jobs for a variety of reasons such as habit/work ethic/status/boredom/extra cash/tax avoidance/or even a genuine interest in the particular job... Such people are therefore technically wage labourers in the context of their jobs but they are not proletarians. If they go on strike they can be objectively *anticapitalist* in their action, but they might do this either from the perspective of general solidarity or from the perspective of their own specific privileged self interest.

There is also a subtle difference between a wage and a salary. A salary might be a recognition that an employee is not fully proletarianised- not fully stripped of elite skill or professional status by the labour process. But de-skilling is an inherent part of the labour process/proletarianisation. What is sometimes referred to as the professional and managerial sector is not fully proletarian. Privileged, empowered, enriched and often with *special protected status* they are not absolutely impoverished free labour with nothing but general (unskilled or easily acquired skilled) abstract labour to sell. A professional police officer in the U.K. might own no property, have no savings, be working strictly on the books and not be taking any bribes. In which case they will be a mere salaried worker. But their rent is specially subsidised, their pay is fixed by the government and pegged to inflation, it is still difficult to sack a police officer, they have *socially protected elite professional status* which protects them from genuine open competition in the market in the present and will give them economic advantage in the future. They are not free labour. Their situation as "wage labourers" is *artificial* and specially protected (well over and above normal general employment "protection"; minimum wage, minimum legal employment standards etc.) and kept that way on a permanent basis. And a "salary" is sometimes often an expression of such protected artificiality, protected from equalisation of wages or an iron law of wages. Yes the police *are* "workers in uniform", but they are not *free labour* in uniform, they are not PROLETARIANS on the beat. (Nor of course are they unfree "protected" labour like prison labour, slave labour, *protoproletarians*.)

Such an analysis as applies to the police might also apply to a whole range of socially or bureaucratically protected professional elites such as top medics/school heads/middle and upper



civil servants/ lawyers and judges/ top academics and scientists etc. Who are usually tied to protective official professional bodies recognised by the state which are halfway to being a modern kind of guild. They don't have to compete with the majority of the unemployed in an open free labour market. They don't even have to compete freely with the majority of unemployed who happen to have similar material skills and abilities. There is a disproportionate number of professional workers in the west due to imperialism and an international division of labour. (The argument of somebody like the Revolutionary Communist Group that the majority of western workers are privileged because they profit from exploitation of the third world needs to be given proper critical consideration it can't just be dismissed out of hand. Part of the problem with somebody like the RCG is that they will tend to frame the question in terms of third world "nations" or "peoples" rather than in terms of the world *proletariat* most of whom are in the so called "third world".) Professional workers are also likely to have a keen interest in and ideological belief in the specialisation they do as a thing in itself, not just as a technical skill that earns them money. Such an analysis also partially ties in with such questions as "what was the soviet union?" state socialism may overthrow capitalism and class exploitation but it maintains managerial/bureaucratic hierarchical privilege and a form of state mercantilism based on an artificial heavily bureaucratised parody of wage labour. State mercantilism becomes state protocapitalism which develops into new capital.

Now some protected professional workers, and many elite skilled technical workers like computer experts who lack official/bureaucratic protection, may on the long run find themselves being subject to proletarianisation and de-skilling as capital knocks down protective walls and barriers and pushes people into the open competitive market. But, and it is an important "but", capitalist competition generates new winners with new wealth who will then try and construct or buy new protected privilege for themselves. Meritocratic parents will use their money to buy unmeritocratic advantage in the labour market for their kids by paying for their private education to give them more qualified advantage. Equal competitive opportunity in the labour market can trip itself up as it is precisely market competition that will generate the forces that will try and construct new barriers and new protected privilege.

Professional protected status particularly well equips one to engage in forms of crude accumulation. For instance if the police officer *does* take bribes or sells on confiscated drugs, managerial corruption, bureaucratic hustling, professional perks,... And this accumulation helps contribute to reproducing protected professional privilege. We suggest that a significant amount of mercantilism still continues today which is not fully subsumed under capital. Not all trading and hustling today is merely about the realisation of *capitalist* commodities and the equalisation process of the rate of profit between capitals. If high professional salaries are artificially protected from the equalisation of *wages* does that not give rise to a form of state mercantile hustle? And are not professional bodies and professional associations in part an expression of such a modern state mercantile hustle?

The simplistic class analysis of socialists like the impossibilists that virtually amounts to saying "everybody's working class apart from the fat controller", is a cover up of the real significance of professional/managerial/bureaucratic workers. That is they are not fully proletarianised/ subject to the labour process. There are other sectors of the wider "working class" who *are* subject to the full labour process of dispossession and reduction to mere general free abstract labour but are not subject to the industrial commodity production process. For instance service workers, houseworkers, ordinary employees of social capital, non-professional public sector workers... These workers *are* proletarian but their immediate relation and struggle with the bosses is not qualitatively the same as proletarians employed in commodity production (this does not imply an inferiority in struggle, but a difference in the immediate nature of their struggle in relation to capital). Outbreaks of struggle are immediately complex they are not immediately generalisable. The class struggle is not even or universal or even necessarily communistic, it can begin with limited attempts at winning temporary ameliorative reforms. The tendency under capital to proletarianize virtually everyone and force us all into competitive "meritocracy" is blocked by contradictory counter tendencies of capital to keep some sectors of workers outside the labour process and production process. Some of these workers are maintained as part of the continually reinvented "middle classes". Hence there is a need for a particular *industrial strategy* at a particular time which deals with the *different* specificities of the class, rather than just a timeless and general strategy. Different kinds and points of power need to be identified and utilised in a particular way in the working class (Hence chanting the mantra "generalise the struggle" is a bit vague at the best of times.). Impossibilism and utopianism contribute virtually nothing on the subjects of specific tactics and strategy at particular moments with particular workers. They



become a tiresome and useless repeating of simplistic socialist platitudes. "Should we smash the ice?" is a very important tactical question if you're a rebel sailor or worker on Kronstadt naval base 1921 and Trotsky is about to send in the red army to crush you. If there is a wave of industrial unrest should office workers picket their own individual workplaces or join mass flying pickets to blockade strategic industrial centres like oil depots? This too is an important and necessary question. Nobody has the perfect answer to such questions but you have to get your hands dirty and attempt to deal with them in practice, you can't remain aloof. "...it is getting harder to tell work from non-work." (Dauve, Eclipse..) Distinguishing work from non-work under capitalism is an important part of drawing up strategies for dealing with the present situation.

In order to build genuine class wide solidarity, and it is only that that can seriously confront the whole of the capital process successfully, you have to face up to and deal with real material inequalities within the class. "Capital... creates the mass of individuals who are forced to rise against capital itself. This mass is not homogenous, but it will forge its unity in the communist revolution, although its components will not play the same role." (Dauve, Eclipse & Re-emergence, Antagonism Press, BM Makhno, WC1N 3XX.) As part of constructing solidarity it will be necessary to look at the different needs of different sectors of workers, and how these complex needs might be married up in the course of battle. That is why an ongoing project of complex class analysis which attempts to deal with various questions such as the question of the so called "middle classes" is valid and necessary. Simply sloganizing that virtually everyone who isn't a rich capitalist is a worker and all workers should instantly get together because they all have the same interests just doesn't work. To repeat; we would argue that the so called "middle classes" includes those who have petty capitalist interests or who are not necessarily capitalist but are empowered by protected privilege and/or mercantile profit. The "middle classes" do not suffer concrete alienation to the same degree as proletarians do. "Middle class" melancholy and cynicism is not the same as alienation.

Capitalism's left would get rid of the capitalists while maintaining the capital process. "If these people [capitalists] were eliminated, while the rest of the system remained the same, part of the surplus-value would be given to the workers and the rest would be invested in collective and social equipment, welfare etc.: this is in fact the programme of the left,..." (Dauve, Eclipse). An authentic state socialism might actually suspend the capitalist system but maintain hierarchical bureaucratic privilege and state mercantilism, at least for a decade or two. A communistic proletariat has a need to wage war not just against capital and wage labour but against all managerial, bureaucratic and mercantile forms as well.

The manifesto "Two Hundred Pharaohs, five Billion Slaves" (Reknaw c/o Box 100, 178 Whitechapel Rd, E1.) contains some interesting quotes regarding class composition: "The proletariat is the industrialisation of the third estate, a class now amounting to almost half of the entire population of the world" and, "Whilst senior managers are confirmed members of the world's middle class, junior managers and technicians are contentious members of the industrial proletariat forming a "pseudo-middle class at work." further on: "...But each successive wave engulfs this ephemeral class to a greater degree because each new wave of technology further absorbs into its physical structure and operation the functions of skilled labour and dictatorial powers of line-management."

However, we are not sure we can agree with their predictions for the future: "Gradually all production becomes office administration work... In short cybernetics is the software to convert the entire world into a single factory to be dialectically integrated with its illusory opposition, the endless leisure shopping environment." The old joke about Switzerland being just a filing cabinet for the rest of the world could easily be applied to a large proportion of work in the south east of England right now. But just because many people here are being pushed into work that is, or resembles because it involves a lot of time on a computer terminal, modern office administration, it doesn't mean everybody on the planet is being moved into office administration work. Although it is easy to be hoodwinked into thinking this while viewing the world from this particular corner. Just because some sectors of the workforce spend their hours staring at computer screens it doesn't mean everybody is or will do in the future. To the contrary the reason why one part of the workforce, particularly in the west and a few key corners in the east, might all be turned into office computer operators may be to help facilitate and speed up the process of organising much larger numbers of humans into the most miserable menial manual proletarianised labour in other parts of the world. Or even worse, help organise the process of physically crushing them altogether. Capitalism never achieves its perfect utopias/ anti-utopias. In order to enable that half the world can be made to look like a mega factory and a giant shopping mall, the other half of the world has to be turned into a permanent traffic jam/snarl up/waste dump/ social ghetto/gulag/bombing zone. One makes the other necessary.



## Big piles of money stashed under the bed.

Separated out alongside itself and born out of its own inherent contradictions, capital is continually giving rise to recurring moments of neofeudalism and neomercantilism which become entrenched and fall out of the capital circuit. They become an obstruction to further capitalist development. The continuing existence of a mercantilism not fully dominated by capitals realisation process and equalisation process is a contributory factor in a variety of conflicts currently going on in the world. The "War against the drug cartels and narco-terrorists" in Colombia, for instance is not simply just a conflict between developed capitals, a "bourgeois faction fight", and therefore overall just a war between capital and proletariat. It also involves specifically a war by "productive" capital against "unproductive" stores of mercantile wealth. The drug bosses who control the drug production are capitalists, they control a capitalist industrial production process based on wage labour which produces drugs as a commodity. However many of the smaller producers and *traffickers* are still operating essentially at the level of mercantilism, small scale cottage industry production and *trafficking*, which is not the same as capitalist transport. Big profits can be made by some of the traffickers even from this small scale production. Nor is this simply to do with temporary fluctuations in price in the free market. This is based on the big difference in price of the goods on the street and the cost of production which is kept artificially high by bureaucratic prohibition. This means the drug bosses are not subject to the same level of competitive economic pressure as other capitalists, their profits are not squeezed to the average rate of profit, they are not under the same pressure to reinvest into the production process to make it more efficient with restructuring and new machinery and the like. A lot of their money is just stashed in dodgy bank accounts or invested in other projects at their leisure. Even worse, some of the smaller traffickers will literally take their money out of circulation in the form of *cash* and stash it under the bed or in their socks. When added up this amounts to not an insignificant sum in relation to some Latin American economies. There is a big pile of dosh out there which is taken out of full capitalist circulation for long periods of time. A part of the population in the region tends to remain stuck in old fashioned inefficient forms of production (small peasantry, tied labour...) and tends to be protectionist. Productive competitive capital doesn't like any of this so it organises an attack to force the less developed drug bosses and the "narco terrorists" to become less mercantile and more capitalist. Productive capital will gang up on unproductive or underproductive stores of wealth to force them into motion and make them more productive. A similar process is likely to be a contributory factor in current military conflicts in places like Afghanistan/Northern Pakistan and parts of Africa for example. Contained within the war of capitalists versus capitalists and therefore more generally capitalists versus proletarians and peasants, there are also specific conflicts of capitalists versus mercantilists or even mercantilists versus mercantilists.

We also need to ask questions regarding the state. Why for a start should the supposedly capitalist state provide certain professional, managerial and bureaucratic sectors with protected elite privileged status that suspends the free operation of part of the market and the equalisation process? Well the question answers itself of course, and in several ways. For a start the administrative body of the state, civil servants and the like, tends to be made up of such people in the first place! But also we get a clue here that maybe the supposedly "capitalist" state isn't really that capitalist. The last time we wrote a load of rubbish..er... rants we got into a really sticky mess by trying to argue that the state was just one big capitalist corporation. Now instead we are prepared to explore the possibility that the state isn't really that capitalist at all!!! The traditional Marxist statement that "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for the managing of the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" has never fully added up in our non-Hegelian brain. Seeing as the whole bourgeoisie is global, and even the interests of individual capitalists is inherently tied up to some extent with global capital, then such a bourgeois state would have to be straightaway a GLOBAL state. But no properly constituted bourgeois global state yet exists, nor is it likely to be established in the near future. Certainly some of the capitalists will try and coopt the existing states into playing the role of being committees for the common affairs of some of the bourgeoisie in certain places part of the time, and the stronger the capitalists are the more they will succeed in this. But the state is other things as well. Part of this lies with the fact that the bourgeois "revolution" was never fully completed. Some of the emerging capitalists were in such a hurry to compete with other emerging capitalist that they didn't have time to chop off all the aristocrats' heads, they had to make an historic deal with some of them and customise bits of the old feudal state to capital's purpose rather than attempt to build a bourgeois state from scratch.



This enabled bits of the old feudalism and aristocracy to hang over into the present. But the modern state is also a central expression of moments of neofeudalism, formal domination and neomercantilism which may have been born out of capitalist moments but subsequently, for one reason or another, became entrenched and fell out of the capital process. There is a real battle going on in the world at the moment between capital and its globalising tendencies and the bureaucratic neofeudal and neomercantile elements within existing nation states, in addition to the usual competition between rival capitalists in their war against the proletariat. If capitalism were eventually to go into decline the world could be taken over by a high tech neofeudal formal domination backed up by a gangster mercantile circuit. The proletariat will be squeezed between all of this. Wage labour would degenerate into slave labour, prison labour. This sort of makes capitalist development sound progressive again, and the trouble is, with parallel history, capitalism is both progressive and decadent at the same time. So we are stuck having to temporarily stand next to liberals on demos while in the process of battling against reaction, but whinging against liberalism at the same time. Oh for more proletarian strength at times like these.

### Communism *before* the revolution.

.....If we accept that for the time being struggle is just ongoing, that there is no current possibility of the successful complete overthrow of capitalism in a central political physical action then in a sense struggles and revolts become liberated. They become liberated from the tyranny of "revolution", revolution as a sort of political pantomime bolshevik style stunt. They can be judged and viewed on their own merits, as things socially useful in themselves. They no longer have to be judged in terms of being subordinate moments in some grand mystical apocalyptic religious plan of "world communist revolution". Communistic outbreaks exist now as a tendency and a form of practise which exist as moments in certain struggles and revolts. Struggles need and can create a communistic direction and program, but this involves practical strategy and useful winnable objectives. If it becomes an abstracted utopian vision a program runs the risk of being an alienated chore, an idealised projection to rule over us, a future event to which the present must be subordinated.

Apocalyptic Revolution= mythology; sometimes useful, but a myth nonetheless. Let us not knock utopian dreams and visions and myths too harshly, they can inspire us and motivate us. But today we have grown conscious of what they are, we don't need to religiously *believe* in them. And let us not have any of this neo-primitivist/pseudo-primitivist rubbish of withdrawal into tiny groups paranoidly rejecting all tools, technology and social complexity to return to a non-existent past idyll. Communistic solidarity involves millions engaging in complex sophisticated mutually-interdependent social arrangements, and seizing technology and productive resources to create something new.

An instant global revolution against capital today to create world communism tomorrow is not possible in the present, why?, because it is only communistic struggle/solidarity in the present that can eventually break open a situation where a revolution against capitalism becomes possible in the future. In this sense communism comes *before* the revolution. Otherwise putting the revolution first becomes part of the process of prevention of communist struggle in the present (bolshevism etc.). "The communist revolution is the continuation as well as the surpassing of present social movements. Discussions of communism usually start from an erroneous standpoint: they deal with the question of what people will do *after* the revolution. They never connect communism with what is going on at the moment when the discussion is going on." (Dauve, Eclipse) "When communist workers gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, etc. But at the same time they acquire a new need - the need for society- and what appears as a means has become an end. This practical development can be most strikingly



observed in the gatherings of French socialist workers.[sic] Smoking, eating and drinking, etc., are no longer means of creating links between people. Company, association, conversation, which in its turn has society as its goal, is enough for them." (Marx, Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts)

Despite grumbles about petrol prices and prague protests (subcultural glamour scene of demoluvvies), struggle might appear to have disappeared in this corner of the world at the moment. But this is never the case. At first informally, half invisibly, millions of proletarians continually struggle to try and create subtle alternative networks of mutual aid and social support in daily life. These alternative communal networks are vital (and so too are social funds of provisions) and it is important to create them well in advance of outbreaks of overt class struggle, they will become an important building block in the process of building wider solidarity when the situation gets big. They are outside the bureaucracy of the trade unions. Indeed the daily life microbattles to try and invent and maintain some kind of alternative social fabric in opposition to capitalist conditions will themselves slowly add up into a more general pressure helping force bigger revolt out into the open. Head teachers complain they have a problem with school pupils secretly communicating by text on mobile phones hidden under their desks. If a pupil in the class is secretly communicating with a pupil in a class in another school about what teachers she likes or dislikes, what clothes she wants to get for winter, and meeting up for coffee after school, she is not just talking about individual taste and consumerism. Such communication contains great potential for new ways of co-ordinating future solidarity.

Capitalism as a system is uneven and disjointed, it is never completely coherent or uniform. Likewise the proletariat it creates and builds up beneath it is uneven and disjointed, there is no one big centralist proletarian party or single historic event that can overthrow the capitalist system in one fell swoop. Revolution is a drawn out lengthy process involving as much spontaneity and chaos as design.

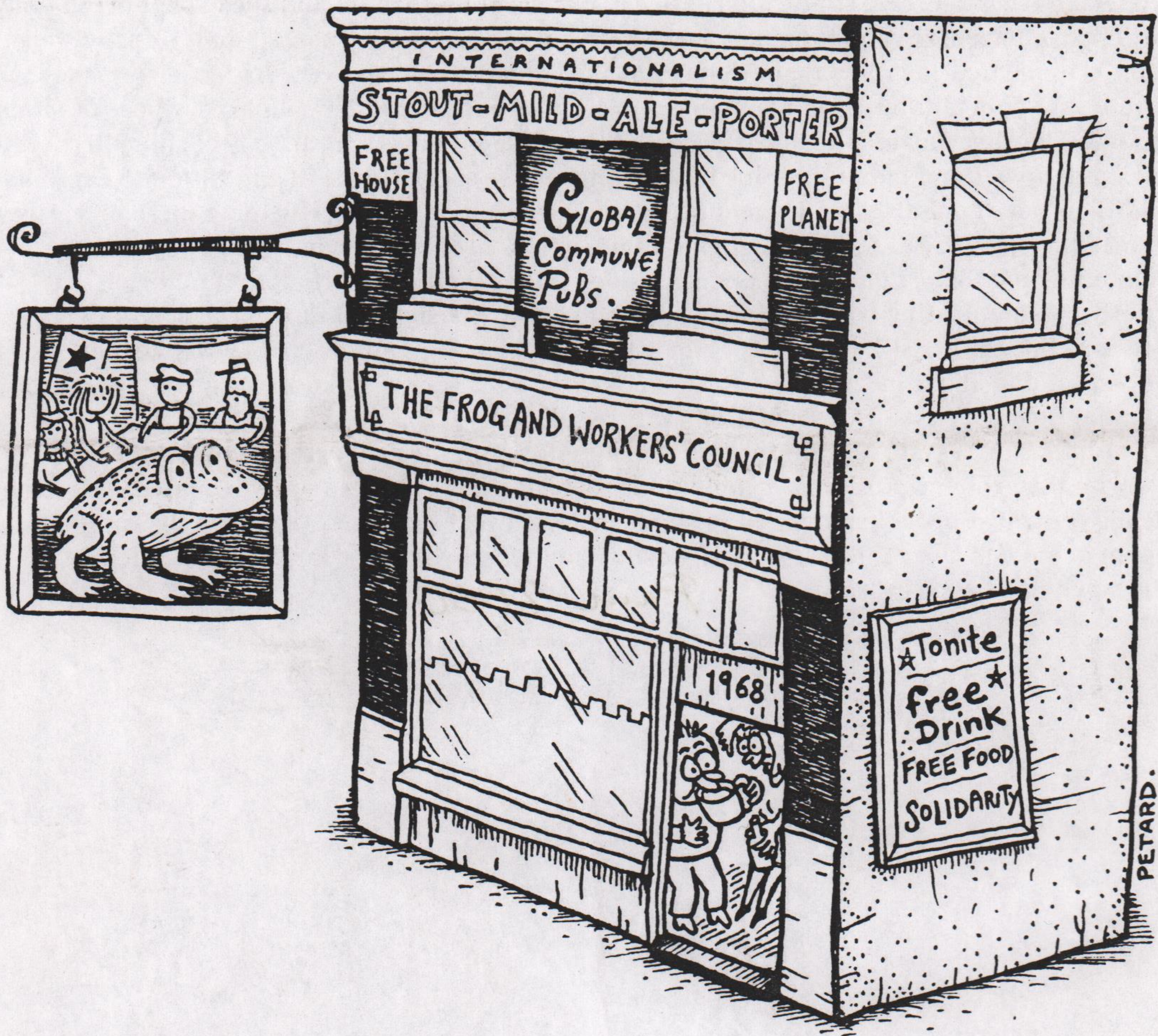
*Paul 2000*



Dictatorship of the proletariat for the abolition of wage labour.

Communism: World human community, internationalism, universal abundance and free access to all the necessities of life, space, resources, materials, food, social production for need and desire.





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