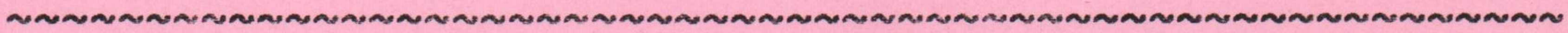
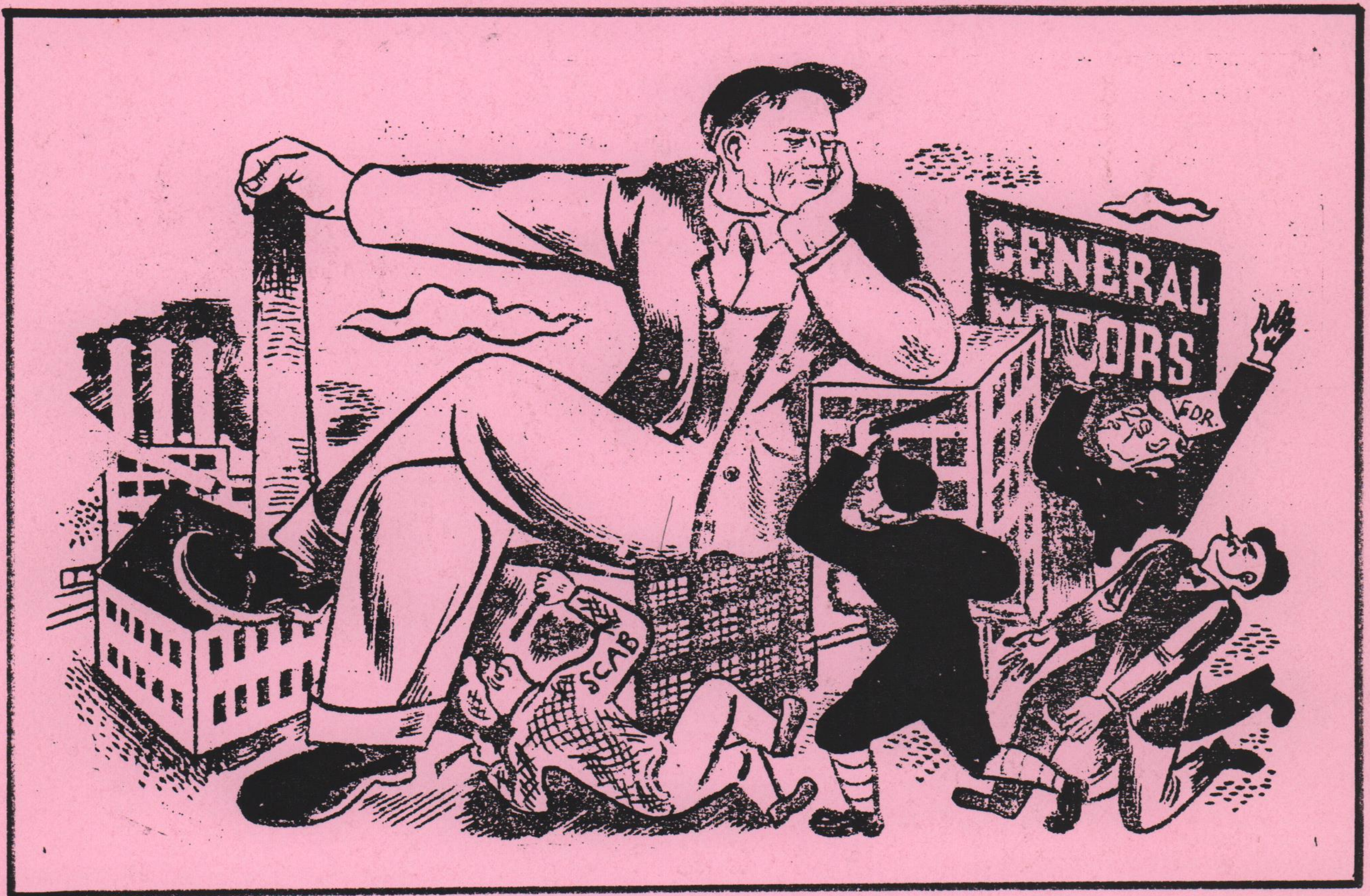


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# The Political Economy of Workers' Socialism - a first approximation

by Alan Woodward



A Workers Socialism booklet

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**The Political Economy of  
Workers' Socialism - a first  
approximation**

**by Alan Woodward**

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- : front - US car workers occupy GM factory**
- : back - *As We See It* , statement of WS.**

**Cartoons : from Solidarity journal 1961 - 93**

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## Some key events and dates

- 1840 Proudhon uses Lyons workers demands as basis for control.
- 1848 Marx proposes theory of the political evolution, anarchists prefer social revolution
- 1864 -77 First International Working Men's Association
- 1871 Paris Commune,
- 1902 Lenin amends marxist theory further centralisation.
- 1905 First Russian revolution, council appear for first time.
- 1906 to 1920 Rise of anarchism as world wide movement.
- 1917 Second Russian revolution and mass workers councils,
- 1918 Bolsheviks integrate workers councils into state machine
- " Mass workers councils in Germany, repressed by Labour Party, SDP in alliance with capitalists.
- 1920 Germans set up council communists and debate with Lenin.
- = Italian workers councils dispersed by Labourist CGL/ PSI, despite influence of Gramsci's *New Order*.
- = Irish workers prove industrial action effective
- = Split with Lenin , German council sets up own movement and revolutionary party.
- 1925 Stalin announces 'Socialism in One Country' for Russia.
- 1926/7 Chinese workers massacred by nationalist troops/ Stalin betrays remainder.
- 1936 French occupation of factories.
- = Spanish revolution, with numerous collectives on land, in workplaces and social institutions.
- 1956 Polish revolt initiates Hungarian revolution, revival of council communism/workers socialism.
- 1958 CLR James writes first English text on councils,
- 1962 Algerian council movement, generally on foreign owned works.
- 1968 Mass strike and insurrection, entirely unexpected, in France,
- 1969 Czech insurrection and councils.
- 1973 Chilean council movement, crushed ultimately by USA imperialism
- 1974 Portuguese councils after military insurrection,
- 1979 Iranian councils subverted by Islamic fundamentalism,
- 1980 Polish workers set up Solidarity & councils, later repressed.
- 1989 Collapse of Russian and east European state capitalism.
- 2001 Argentinean councils in workplace, in estates and city centres.

?

Revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships :

- it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies,
- it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, the moral level and material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscious action for their own future.

Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who work in them, in their own interests as well as the public's.

Revolution is the destruction of all coercive ties : it is the autonomy of groups of communes, of regions .

Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence.

Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes, and the tastes of all kinds that exist among people.

Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative, district, communal, regional national bodies which, without having any legislative power, serve to make known and to co-ordinate the desires and interests of people near and far which act through information, advice and example.

Revolution is the crucible proved in the facts - and lasts so long as freedom lasts, that is until others, taking advantage

- of the weariness that overtakes the masses,
- of the inevitable disappointments that follow exaggerated hopes,
- of the probable errors and human faults,

succeed in constituting a power, which is supported by an army of conscripts and mercenaries, lays down the law, arrests the movement at the point it has reached, and then begins the reaction.

Errico Malatesta, 1922,

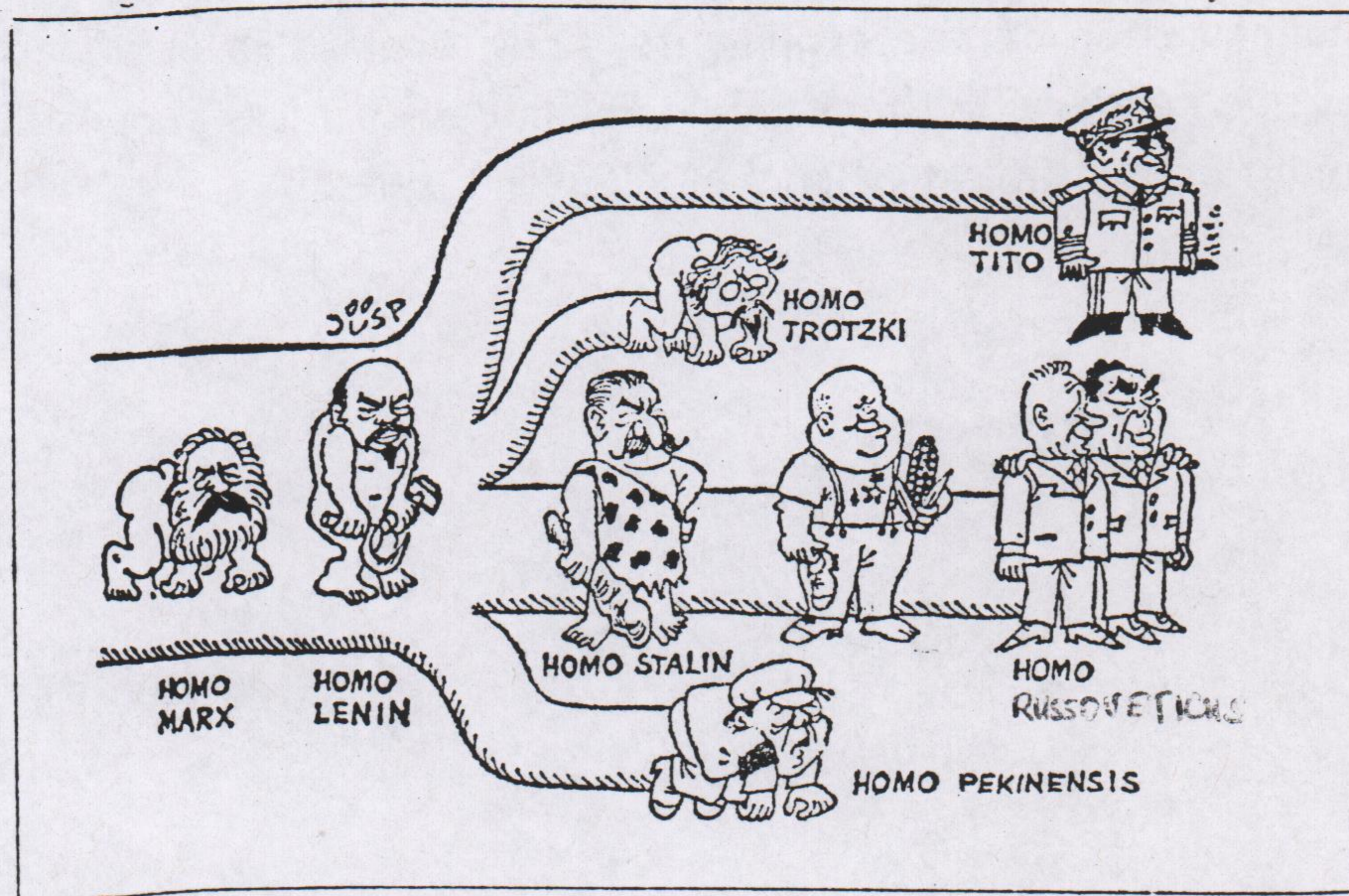
from Vernon Richards : *Malatesta - his life and ideas* [1977, 311pp]

## Introduction

About this booklet : I am primarily concerned with the existence of workers control exercised passively and partially in stable periods through union workplace organisation, and in unstable times through more political workers councils.

Both these phenomena can, and do, create a tentative foundation for workers socialism and the possibility of a new society to replace capitalism without the intervention of the leninist revolutionaries. Workers socialism poses the development of a non authoritarian revolutionary party parallel to and under the auspices of the industrial organisation. The united form can make up a revolutionary movement ready and able to challenge capitalist and state control.

The belief of liberation has been a core of anarchist/anarcho syndicalist belief since the days of the Karl Marx versus Michael Bakunin controversy, though it cannot be denied that anarchist theory is as flawed as its marxist counterpart as a comprehensive and coherent theory of analysis and action <sup>1</sup>. It is of course true that marxism shared this original liberatory perspective but proposed the mechanism of the political party as the chief means of achieving it.



<sup>1</sup> Woodward Alan : *Marx, Bakunin or what ? What Next ?* 28, [2004, 7pp]

The booklet therefore comprises :

- The briefest of considerations of existing political economy with special reference to relations at work, and in the workplace,
- A chronological outline of the pre history and general development of workers socialism within the labour movement.
- Quantification is difficult for obvious political reasons but there is also the problem of language obscuring meaning in a world wide phenomena. This is addressed in appendix one .
- Specific features and characteristics of workers councils, their associated institutions and socialism as they have appeared in history are examined next.
- Appendix two looks at these appearances from the viewpoint of individual countries in a gazetteer, and summarises the causes and consequences.
- The study concludes with a selection of theoretical contribution of writers and writings,
- A final appendix reprints extracts from an article on workers socialism in practice in an engineering workplace
- The index is in two parts - one looks at books including many recent publications, while the other references other subjects.
- The programme of workers socialism is reprinted on the rear cover, taken from the quarterly bulletin "*Declaration*".

Conscientious readers will have to excuse some repetition in the text and some simplification of the arguments. The booklet is intended for new and selective readers, rather than academic ones. Its purpose is anyway overtly political not informational in a historic sense.

## Starting Point

There are two models concerning the organisation of ownership, forms of production, and the structure of social institutions in societies, the details of which need not detain us beyond the broadest classification -

- that where the means are owned by private entrepreneurs, and the global system within a society are "free market" regulated.
- that where the State owns the enterprises and controls the economy, but as we shall see this form tends to converge with the original model above over time.

### Firstly market domination and capitalism

The characteristics of this have been broadly identified, by writers such as Karl Marx, as :

- economic organisation centred round the extraction of surplus value, both absolute and relative, from waged employees.
- the use of this resource, subsequently defined as profit but minus money paid out to shareholders, to fund future investment or capital, in enterprises, frequently in technological developments,
- the circle is completed with further profit taking, and investment, etc,
- the erection of a institution of the State to correct and ameliorate the effects of the market, and to offer protective legislation in the selected aspects such as health, safety and welfare, etc. The overwhelming role of the capitalist State is repressive, perhaps seen best in its "lawful" operation of the legal system and prisons.

### Social relations

For our purposes, the most critical feature is the internal social and political relations with workers which are characterised by primarily authoritarian regulation, symbolised by the payment of the lowest wages possible to maximise profits. However this tendency is modified by the bargaining power due to skill, tradition or residual union influence or professional associations . There are many and various sources on features of capitalism in its fundamental and subsequent stages <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Marx is difficult to read in the original but Ernst Fischer ; Marx in his own words [1970, 187pp] is better ; Rosa Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital - an anti critique* and Nicolai Bukharin : *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital* [1972, USA, 289pp] add further information and Michael Kidron : *Western Capitalism Since the War*, [1970, 196pp], presents a later perspective.



Secondly, state control

The alternative mode is that where the State acts as the sole owner and controller, the classical form of which is the Russian "communist" state after the 1917 revolution. In fact, as it has developed, it shares many of the features of privately owned capitalism <sup>3</sup>.

From the beginning, the alleged new world has been termed by many as state capitalism <sup>4</sup> by its detractors and this categorisation has become more popular, though subject to much debate, The main critics have been from writers whose affiliation has been "council communist" or some sections of the anarchist movement.

Whatever the macro economic structures, the implications for workers as a whole and individually, has created growing if repressed opposition parallel to that in conventional society <sup>5</sup>. This was particularly so after the Russian state extended its boundaries into eastern Europe, as we shall explore below.

Opposition

On a historic scale resistance by workers and their families to existing arrangements is due to two main features, exploitation - resulting in mass poverty, slaughterous condition in work and home, unemployment ill health, early death, and alienation - which excludes people from any purposeful, creative or meaningful participation in society.

While exploitation is still technically as great as previously, the associated results of mass unemployment, poverty, etc have been largely ended. The writer experienced some of these conditions but his grandchildren have a surplus of almost everything.

There is still horrendous exploitation within the world wide boundaries of international capitalism but for whole area of the globe the economic progress that has been made would seem miraculous to the citizen of say the 1920s. As the system is inherently unstable, we cannot rule out a

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<sup>3</sup> Miklos Haraszti: *Worker in a Workers State - piece rates in Hungary* [1977, 175pp]

<sup>4</sup> Anton Pannekoek : *Workers Councils* [2002, 219pp] , and anarchist writers.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Aves: *Workers Against Lenin ; labour protests and the Bolshevik dictatorship* [1996 220pp]

return to the past but this time we will know what could be, and resistance would be great. The anti capitalist movement is just too strong for all but the most extreme forces<sup>6</sup>.

The struggle for economic equality continues anyway, and is particularly powerful for newly arrived, unrepresented and various minorities of workers. This centres on the development of workplace union organisation and its institutions

The second cause for resistance, alienation, on the other hand is growing not declining. The problem arises from the inevitable consequence of modern production to divide up the management of work from the those who do it. Within that division, to break down the work operations into processes that are usually repetitive, boring, devoid of creative interest, etc. Such labour is typically closely regulated, even in advanced technological workplaces<sup>7</sup>. Degradation of labour and de skilling are the order of the day<sup>8</sup>, as new technology is used to regulate rather than improve conditions.

Marx, among others, termed the resultant attitudes among those who work as alienation and this too is a well explored subject. Programme of job satisfaction or enlargement are intended to moderate the process though many would agree they are only cosmetic in effect.

So the looming problem facing capitalism today is that of human nature. We are not automatons who merely react passively to circumstances - as a species humans are always seeking to control their environment as they have done increasingly for tens of thousands of years. After hunter-gather and agricultural societies where the struggle is primarily against nature, industrial society presents new man made challenges.

### Work in industrial society

So from both these sources, our attention focuses on work. Today individuals still wish to control the conditions associated with their labour. The centrality of work is indeed pivotal to the new philosophy of

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<sup>6</sup> Emma Bircham and Jon Charlton : *Anti Capitalism - a guide to the movement* [2001, 401pp] and , Murray Bookchin : *Anarchism, Marxism and the future of the Left - interviews and essays 1993-1998* [1999, 352pp] for a leninist and anarchist view respectively.

<sup>7</sup> the astonishingly mis-titled book by Geoff Brown: *Sabotage* [1977,400p] actually an excellent survey of workplace conditions in Britain over the last 100 years.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Braverman: *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*, [1974 USA, 333pp]

workers socialism. It is because work is a universal, constructive, unifying feature in human experience, and one that results from the deepest instincts. Observation of children confirms that humans are naturally curious, inventive and keen to impose a form of systematic order and to create an individual contribution of personal construction to the world.

In practice nearly everyone "works", has or will work, and therefore be associated with a place of work -

- manual, administrative and professional workers alike
- mothers work bring up children, perhaps the most important job of all, despite being unpaid
- students work at studying in colleges or schools,
- even transport and home workers have a base or depot
- creative workers work at producing their vision within a work environment,
- even self employed workers usually have some form of geographical base, albeit imperfect, rather like trade union branches.
- the retired will have an attachment to a workplace
- children study at least partly for a work role in a school, etc, etc.

Work is the one experience unifying experience that virtually all people have in common. By definition, it is social, collective, dependent on others, and an expression of the urge to create. Marx argued, above, that alienation - or frustration of creativity - was a key component of consciousness. Anarchist thinkers have consistently repeated the importance of control of people's lives against pervasive capital and statist manipulation.

Hence some form of representation from the social base of work is the single unifying process that potentially encompasses the widest section of society. Everyone contributes to the production of the world as we know it and under workers' socialism this is likely to be the basis of government. This is much more so than political views, or age and gender, or position. When Antonio Gramsci argued in 1920 that all workers in Italian factories, not just union members, should have the right to vote for their union representatives, he was expressing this universal truth<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Antonio Gramsci : *Antonio Gramsci - Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920*, ed Quintin Hoare [1977, 393pp]

Industrial society

Our rulers go to enormous lengths to persuade us that we really live in the best of all possible worlds. But on the ground few people have any illusions about the undemocratic nature of society. Workplaces are now authoritarian unless there is rudimentary union organisation. State and municipal institutions appear structured to transfer money from tax payers to private interests and large salaries for non electable fat cats.

Social services, despite the best efforts of staff, seem inadequate or misconstrued for their alleged tasks. Education for example becomes a divisive mechanism, with the factual recognition of present day political, economic and social arrangements as the chief subject on the curriculum. Socialisation of the next generation has reached a very high level of sophistication and comprehensiveness<sup>10</sup>

Another tactic

Additional disarming can be achieved by the constitutional mechanism of separating grievances into the ideological category of "economics", while more general issues are termed "political". Economic matters are said to be subject to certain irresistible laws - supply and demand, right of owners to manage, etc. Politics are exercised within "democracy", or a protracted system of unrecallable parliamentary representation.

Elections for this were originally between candidates who presented two similar but different perspectives, but recent decades have seen the original differences dissolve and apathy at the polls grow as a consequence.

The new philosophy

It is against this background that we locate opposition to capitalism and the basis for socialism in workplace organisation. In particular we say therefore that assemblies at "work" and representation from this, historically in the form of unofficial councils, are both the centres of resistance to capitalism and the basis of the new socialist society, as the Italian writer Gramsci noted in his early writings. So our next consideration is the development of workers organisation

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<sup>10</sup> Maurice Brinton ( Chris Pallis) ; *The Irrational In Politics* [1975, 96pp] reprinted in Goodway , David, editor : *For Workers' Power - the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379pp]

How workers organisation developed

As befits a system which grew out of practical events rather than from a theoretical blue print, we will examine the chronological manifestation of workers' socialism alongside some theoretical points.

Since the introduction of capitalism, those who work have displayed a persistent tendency to collective organisation. This can be either a formal structure<sup>11</sup> or, more likely, an informal one. Such collective organisation constitutes a potential, within either of the two forms of existing ownership identified at the outset, for an alternative ownership of the means of production and therefore be the basis for a the construction of a political economy.

This is only realised in its fullest extent when the existing authorities or forms of government/regulation - employers or state - fail to meet the interests of workers. This shortfall is generally associated with a political crisis like war, social repression, military occupation/defeat, or one of an economic nature like financial collapse. There are historical examples of both.

I characterise the response above as collective workers' socialist response, or workers' socialism [WS] with all its attendant changes in relations.

Appearance of the new system in history

This occurred dramatically during the first Russian revolution, of 1905. During this neglected revolution, workers mounted a fundamental challenge to existing Russian society. Workplace organisation grew exponentially into hundreds of workers councils. The resistance transmuted itself into political formations of committees organised around workplaces, or councils.

Later a specifically Russian form, the area soviet of workplace delegates appeared. This structure has remained associated exclusively with Russian history and does not appear in the numerous subsequent appearance of workers councils and their political associations.

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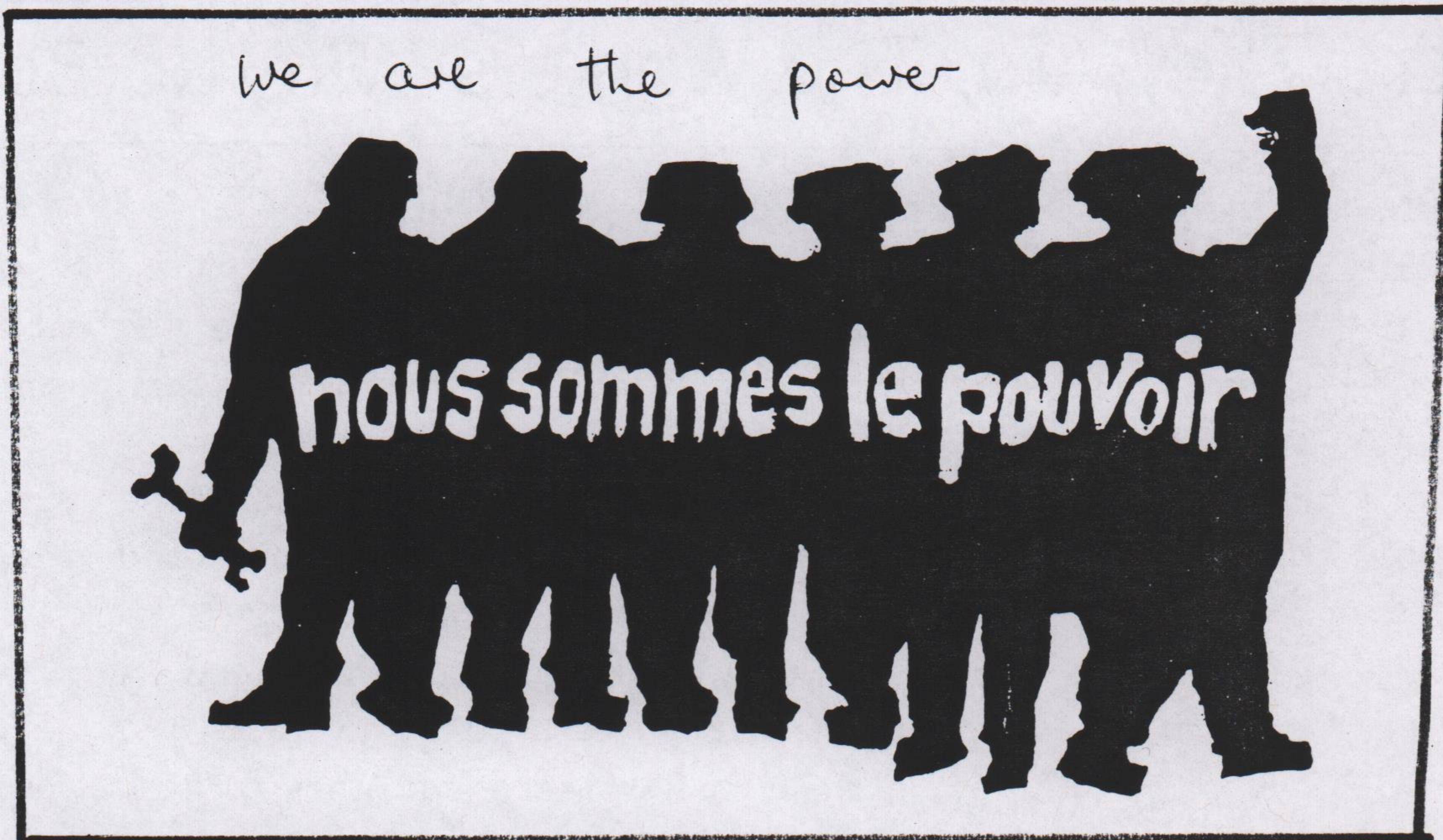
<sup>11</sup> an early form of collective organisation was the provision of benefits by, and for, workers seeking jobs by tramping or walking around the country, UK, see Leeson, R A : *Travelling Brothers* [1980, 348pp]

The events of 1905 represent the foundation of a new epoch<sup>12</sup>. though recognition of this was sparse. The analysis was drawn, incompletely, by two socialists on the Left wing of the nominally marxist German Labour Party or SDP. Rosa Luxemburg wrote a politically incisive book contrasting the complacency of the German nominally marxist party with the collective aggression of the east European workers and their strike wave<sup>13</sup>.

Anton Pannekoek greeted the new movement more systematically in a booklet *on Tactical Differences in the Workers Movement*<sup>14</sup>. He was actually Dutch, but active in Germany. Anarchist writers were to draw similar conclusions and their ideas were to result in the formation of new anarcho syndicalist movements in many countries. This was to cause much debate in those circles as many of the old school were critical of the exclusiveness of the innovation, and its over reliance on a single feature, the general strike.<sup>15</sup> There was much in their critique.

More explicit formulation

Anton Pannekoek identified councils as the key structures in the new stage into which he believed society had moved with the new twentieth century.



<sup>12</sup> Sidney Harcave : *The Russian Revolution of 1905* [1970 USA, 316pp]

<sup>13</sup> Rosa Luxemburg : *Mass Strike - the political party and the trade unions* [1906 & 1986, 90pp]

<sup>14</sup> reprinted in Serge Bricianer : *Pannekoek and Workers Councils* [1978 USA, 306pp]

<sup>15</sup> Paul Avrich : *The Russian Anarchists* [1967, 200pp]

He later worked with Herman Gorter to lay the foundations for a political movement in which the revolutionary party did not rule authoritatively over the workers in the industrial bases. This was council communism<sup>16</sup>.



"Here They Are, The Workers With No Bosses"

Previous stages of social development that he identified were -

- that of the condition of no organisation at the workplace, hence total employer hegemony, marked by insurrections that were either heroic but doomed or to help another class - capitalism - seize power against feudalism,
- reformism, characterised by parliamentary representation [not democracy], labour parties, national trade unions and their formations, and small disjointed and sometimes suspect revolutionary groups. This was the age of winning and using the right to vote, securing minor changes around the edges of society, and a period of learning for workers and their organisations. Regrettably, capitalism has proved able to prolong this phase, and delay the new stage, but not, hopefully, for ever<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Philippe Bourrinet (unascrbed /ICC) : *The Dutch and German Communist Left* [2001,416pp] - note - he persists in using the term 'communist left'.

<sup>17</sup> Serge Bricianer: *Pannekoek and Workers Councils* [1978 USA, 306pp]

Of course Pannekoek was not alone in having identified the rise of mass organised labour as a precondition for the transmutation of workers socialism from a passive form of social resistance into a positive force capable of creating an alternative society. Although political thinkers had proposed theories about political economies for the working class<sup>18</sup> decades before Marx fused several of these into a comprehensive concept of class conflict<sup>19</sup>, the conditions for its realisation have been most persuasively dated from the Russian revolution of 1905.

In summary the workers' socialism depends on work based councils - unofficial, revolutionary and based on direct action - which are the pivot around which our theory stands. They are the realisation of control over our lives, which is the core of socialism. This idea, applied to the most universal experience of work, is the meaning of workers' socialism.

Another version of "socialism"

From the turn of the century, Vladimir Lenin, pursued the revolutionary idea by proposing a theory of the highly centralised professional party which would lead the workers and peasants<sup>20</sup>. His main reason for this, that workers could not alone develop their own political policies or practice, has been shown to be invalid but his point about a central party in face of the grossly reactionary government and vast size of the country, may be partially justified.

But his overall theory was rejected even by such future colleagues as Trotsky - "a potential dictatorship" he said - and certainly a whole range of traditional "left" and libertarian activists. Their warning were to come only too tragically true.

A new political economy begins to emerge

The events of the first Russian revolution occurred at the start of what was to become the greatest wave of workers activity, The decade from

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<sup>18</sup> Noel Thompson, : *The Real Rights of Man - political economies for the working class 1775 - 1850* [1998, 198pp]

<sup>19</sup> The Chinese anarchist Shen Zhongjiu wrote for the long running *Peoples Tocsin* in 1927 that Marx had copied his most basic ideas from others - class struggle [Guizot, Considerant, Blanc, Proudhon], surplus value [Sismondi, Blanqui], the concentration of capital [Considerant], rate of profit [Ricardo], historical materialism [Vico, Herder], quoted in Arif Dirlik : *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* [1991 USA, 326pp]

<sup>20</sup> Lenin, Vladimir ( Vladimir Ulanov ) : *What is to be Done ?* [1902 & 1988, 261p],



the beginning of the century was the time when there were an increasing number of strikes, coinciding with the expansion of what was termed revolutionary syndicalism, a new development within anarchism. Some comment on this are contained above in the paragraphs on Pannekoek.

Up to 1914

The period was marked by the growth of negotiating power of workers in the larger and more structured workplaces but also the establishment of the institution of collective bargaining arrangements between unions and employers, Behind this came a drift to the right of official labour parties and a bureaucratisation of marxist parties.

Syndicalism which emphasized the workplace, rather than leadership, was a much more attractive proposition. Even in countries with little existing syndicalist organisation like Britain and Russia, new organisations were set up, joining the established movements in France<sup>21</sup>, Spain and Italy. The Russian called themselves anarcho syndicalist to clarify their affiliation, and the expression was adopted elsewhere<sup>22</sup>.

In Britain for example, pockets of resistance grew while the Marxist BSP studiously neglected the industrial struggle<sup>23</sup>. The workplace activists of the "great discontent" decade were to become significant all over Europe in the crisis towards the end of the cataclysmic war soon to be unleashed.

World war one and the first international outbreak

The political earthquake of the world war added fuel to the situation of an old political order trying to retain social control while fighting among themselves. Workers in the combatant countries were to quickly lose their nationalistic chauvinism as material circumstances worsened and governments became openly more oppressive.

In Britain and Germany especially this was so and in the former case, a combination of organised workplaces, syndicalist politics and a deviant marxist party, the SLP, were to combine into a new rank and file movement, the Shop Stewards and Workers Committee movement. Based on firmly anarchist principles of organisation, they had a practice

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<sup>21</sup> but see Larry Gambone : *Revolution and Reformism- the split between moderates and revolutionaries in French anarcho syndicalism* [1995 Canada, 17pp]

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Skirda : *Facing the Enemy* [2002, 292pp]

<sup>23</sup> Bob Holton: *British Syndicalism 1900-1914* [1976, 232pp]

of supporting the FTOs as long as they supported the workers, and became influential from 1917. Essentially the elected leaders, not an executive but an administrative committee, were closely bound to representative meetings.

A national structure

Originating in the Scottish Clyde Workers Committee but spreading to the big armaments works of Manchester, London and so on, the new structure was grounded on a principle of dual representation - by the union nationally but by the SS&WC organisation for the workplace. It should be remembered that the official trade unions, like the labour party, were committed to the war. This was true on both sides, despite the rhetoric about internationalism, a situation strangely familiar today. Dual representation anyway was not quite the head on conflict that dual unionism implied, as believed by some anarchists.

Be that as it may, industrial disputes strengthened the SSWCM and it was only with peace that employers, government, and union leadership took their revenge. Victimization and then unemployment was to be the fate of the shop stewards, like many of their constituents. They became leaders of the unemployed in the 1920s, and of the mass unemployed of the 1930s. The general strike of 1926 registered the final re-establishment of law and order and reformism, and the defeat of even the remnants of anarcho syndicalism in Britain.

The strongest case

In Germany at the end of 1918 resistance was even stronger and a huge wave of workers councils came with military defeat<sup>24</sup>. The labour party, SPD, led the retrenchment of the old ruling class, amid this greatest crisis to hit the country to date<sup>25</sup>.

The small number of German revolutionaries adopted a policy of by passing parliament in favour of workers' councils and rejecting work in the ultra reformist trade unions, copying almost exactly the Bolsheviks successful programme of 1917. Lenin's response, two months after the war, was that circumstances had changed and that the revolutionaries

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<sup>24</sup> for a full but conventional account, see F. L. Carsten: *Revolution in Central Europe 1918 - 1919*, [1972, 360pp].

<sup>25</sup> a graphic and comprehensive account by a life long Trotskyist imprisoned by NAZIs and Communists is in Oscar Hippe: *... And Red is the Colour of Our Flag* [1991, 310p]

should participate in parliament and existing the existing union organisation. The majority of the revolutionaries, as represented at the inaugural conference of the German Communist Party, rejected his directives <sup>26</sup>.

### Split

The dispute grew and readers can speculate at will about the Bolshevik leaderships' policies, but the end result was that the Germans rejected the Russian "guidance" and were thrown out of the official Party, KPD, and the Third International, or Comintern. After a long political debate, the highlight of which was Herman Gorter's destruction of Lenin's arguments in *Left Wing Communism, an infantile disorder*, they set up their own organisation, the German Workers Communist Party, KAPD.

They had developed their political programme, starting with the denial of the CPUSSR's right to dictate international policy. The economic, political and social structure in Europe was different to Russia's and hence they claimed the right to determine their own programme. From this developed the analysis of Russia and the adoption of the anarchist critique of state capitalism.

### Council communism

By 1921, there were council communist groups in several countries, an international structure, and an independent policy. This kept much of the marxist theory but posited a non authoritarian revolutionary party. Aspects of anarcho syndicalism, for example that councils were both a centre of resistance today and the basis for the new society tomorrow, were incorporated <sup>27</sup>. The Italian marxist Antonio Gramsci had used this idea in his activity in the Italian councils <sup>28</sup>.

### The anarchist contribution

Another point taken from "libertarian Socialists" was the importance of the personal initiative over issues, rather than passively following party

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<sup>26</sup> Alan Woodward: *Party Over Class; how Leninism has subverted workers council organisation* [2002 - second revised edition, 77pp]

<sup>27</sup> perhaps the most coherent account of the policies and practice of these years is in Richard Gombin: *The Radical Tradition - a study in modern revolutionary thought* [1978, 153pp]

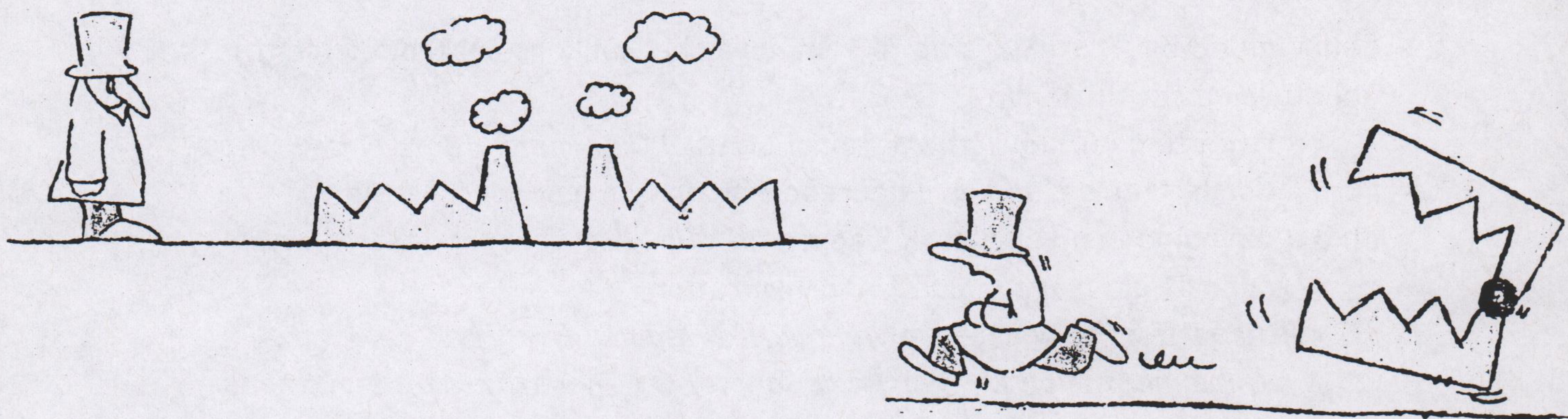
<sup>28</sup> Antonio Gramsci, and Palmiro Togliatti: *Workers Democracy*, [4pp] in *The New Order*, 1/7, June 1919, reprinted in Antonio Gramsci: *Antonio Gramsci Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920* ed Quintin Hoare [1977, 393pp]

directives. This was applied in the KAPD which as a result was universally acknowledged as more effective than the official KPD. The latter was to be increasingly composed, as the decade progressed, of party apparachniks of varying affiliations and their followers.

One final point about the political basis of council communism/worker's socialism. The use of electoral action - Gorter pointed out in his demolition of Lenin's argument that the current revolutionary struggle required the most effective political weapons and that consequently electoral means which had proved highly ineffective in the revolutionary crisis, could not be deployed. Elsewhere he considered the struggle in more stable periods and said that in those circumstances, it may be justified to use it as a tactic.

This contrasts with Leninist ideas for advanced societies which appears to encourage the conclusion that the emphasis on political method results inevitably in electoralism having a prominent role. The role of modern leninists like the Socialist Workers Party and their devotion to the Respect Unity Coalition gives every sign of this tendency.

Gorter's concept also contrasts with the view of most anarchists who regard anti parliamentary action as a principle, rather than a tactic. In practice some anarchists like Guy Aldred have used it as a tactic and ventured into the field <sup>29</sup>. Workers' Socialists believe in fighting on all fronts wherever the political struggle occurs. This includes both participating in elections <sup>30</sup> and using the hard won right to vote and standing for elected office at all levels, as part of the struggle <sup>31</sup>.



<sup>29</sup> John Taylor Caldwell : *Come Dudgeons Deep - the life and times of Guy Aldred*, Glasgow anarchist [1988, 290pp],

<sup>30</sup> A Y Badayev : *Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma* [1987, 248pp], but read the Introduction by Tony Cliff

<sup>31</sup> See *One Page Guide to Elections* in WS newsletter *Declaration* 6 [2004]

So council communism as it emerged was marxism plus anarcho syndicalism. It was strongest in Germany where its industrial base was around the councils until they were emasculated into little more than works councils,. Most of the activists were in the AAE industrial union and the council communists were to be especially active in the lost German revolution of 1923 <sup>32</sup>.

The history of the KAPD during the first decade reflected both a decline due to state repression and recruitment from the official Communists as Stalinism was imposed. In 1933, Hitler destroyed most of the genuine labour movement and the political left. Numbers of KAPD comrades escaped to Holland where the GIK assumed leadership. Council communism kept going, with Pannekoek writing his major book in 1947. He died in 1961 after the Hungarian revolution re vitalised the movement in 1956.

#### The second revolution

But the 1918 wartime crisis was greatest in Russia. The revolutionary insurrection for a new society in Russia, recorded a promising start, but was to be hijacked and manipulated by Lenin's bolsheviks and their theory of Party control within a few months.

When the second revolution <sup>33</sup> broke out in February 1917, Lenin's Bolsheviks did carry out their pre-ordained role and acted to secure what appeared to be the first workers state. However, their theory soon ensured that the Party were in charge not the workers. The resulting society was not socialism.

Lenin, aided by Trotsky, was to eliminate the workers control element in the Russian revolution in 1917/8 by :

- rejecting outright the national Central Council of Factory and Shop Committee's plan for a new society, and an amended version.
- bringing in a very weak Decree on Workers Control despite stiff opposition, more a plan for consultation.
- negating the workers own *Practical Manual For The Implementation Of Workers Control Of Industry* by instructions in a Counter Manual

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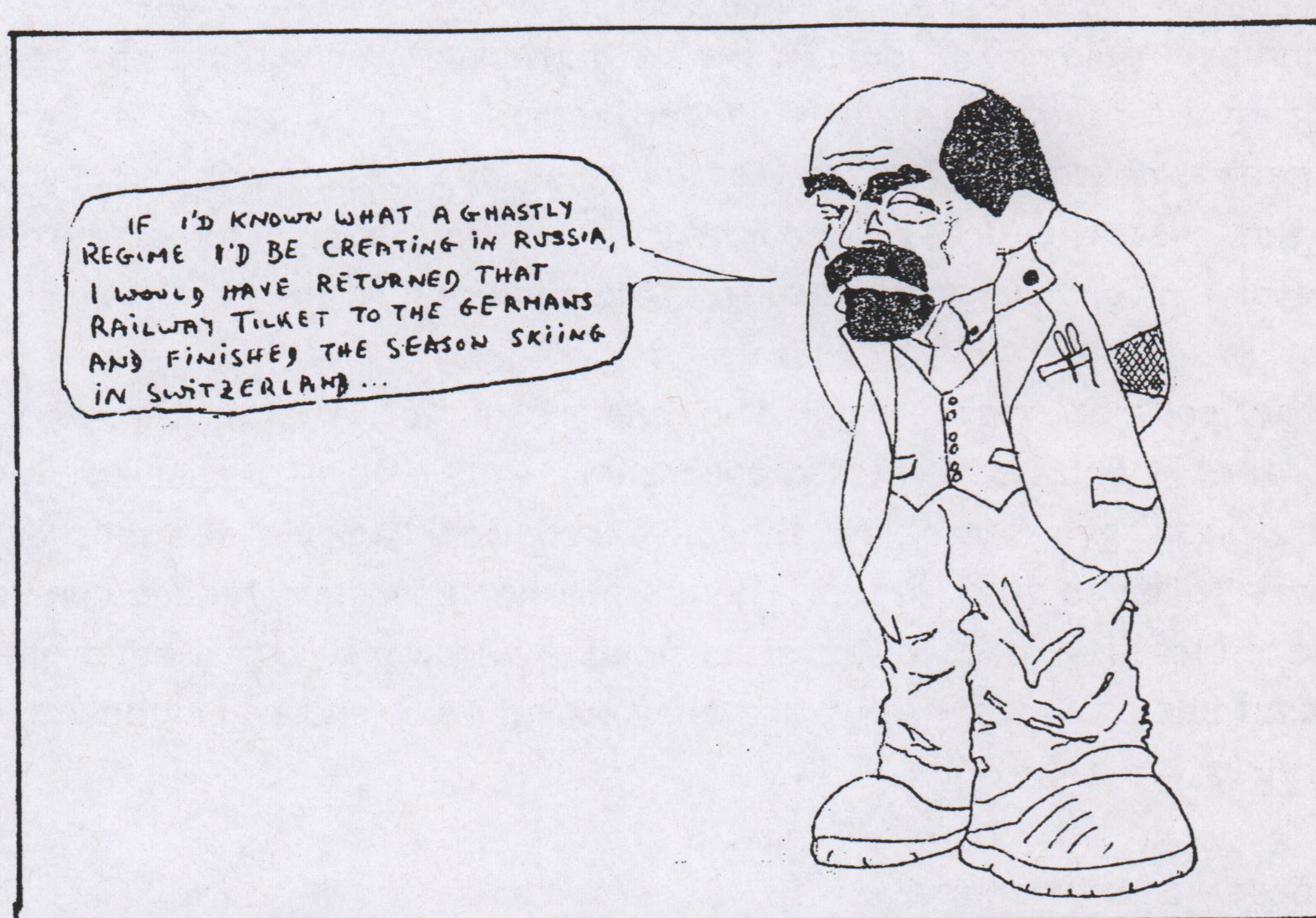
<sup>32</sup> A full, but leninist, account is in Chris Harman : *The Lost Revolution - Germany 1918 -23* [1982, 330p]

<sup>33</sup> Oscar Anweiler : *The soviets - the Russian worker's, peasant's, and soldier's councils 1905 to 21* [1974 USA, 337pp]

- amalgamating the workers councils into party controlled trade unions and other State bodies
- by-passing the soviets - second layer of councils - with State institutions, up to the governmental Commissars at national level,
- imposing one man management, and other techniques, in workplace,
- over riding various decisions by workers organisations
- repressing workers and their organizations , most bloodily at Kronstadt in 1921 <sup>34</sup> .

The possible third revolution

After the repression of the this in 1921 - the general strikes and insurrections <sup>35</sup> - the regime rapidly consolidates its state capitalism and was developed under Stalin and co until its collapse in 1989.



Elsewhere after WW1

Insurrections, uprisings, general strikes, mutinies, revolutions, tumbled over one another in Germany, France, Austria, Hungary, Bavaria, Britain, Italy, China,, etc . These met a variety of fates, described in Appendix Two.

<sup>34</sup> Maurice Brinton : *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-21* [1970, 86pp] reprinted in Goodway , David, editor : *For Workers' Power - the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379pp] and Woodward, Alan : *Party Over Class ; how Leninism has subverted workers council organisation* [2004 - second revised edition, 50pp]

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Aves : *Workers Against Lenin ; labour protests and the Bolshevik dictatorship* [1996 220pp]

The 1930s - "Midnight in the century" <sup>36</sup>

The dramatic events above occurred in the early decades of the twentieth century but from around 1930 or so, new and more explicit sources of discontent appeared. These were associated with the biggest yet industrial crisis and decline in the west. The great slump arrived.

There had always been small scale deprivation of work but mass unemployment was a large international phenomena. Workers were cut off even from poorly paid, dangerous, or repetitive labour. The disturbances mentioned above became an alarming feature of industrialised society. Non conventional political ideas of both left and right were suddenly popular.

Perhaps the most extreme form of this on the left occurred in the Iberian peninsular. In Spain in the revolutionary war against the fascism of General Franco, a slightly longer period of a experimentation and creativity was allowed before totalitarian oppression was imposed, but this was just the dress rehearsal <sup>37</sup>. The Spanish experience, and betrayal by Communists, is a subject we shall return to.

On the political right wing, the end result of the mushrooming of discontent - and its ruthless repression - was a turn to fascism by the owning class in a sector of the advanced world. Some sections of the workers followed their lead. The lesson that economic failure can result in the instability of totalitarian regimes - and war - was a hard one for the captains of industry but one they learnt well, and remembered, until the 1980s.

The post war settlement

With the end of hostilities in 1945, the ensuing economic prosperity presented new problem for capitalism. Deprived of the disciplinary role of unemployment, the controllers of society found a new tactic - diversion.

Historically the potential of workers socialism from the introduction of capitalism <sup>38</sup>, had generally remained a latent force but one

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<sup>36</sup> from Victor Serge (Victor Kibalchich): *Midnight in the Century* [1982, 250pp]

<sup>37</sup> Sam Dolgoff editor: *The Spanish Collectives - workers management in the Spanish Revolution 1936-39* [1990 Canada, 194pp]

<sup>38</sup> EP Thompson: *The Makings of the English Working Class* [1980 987pp] and Noel Thompson, : *The Real Rights of Man - political economies for the*

characterised by participation in occasional and violent insurrections<sup>39</sup>. Those who constitute the authorities have always sought to channel the insurrectional forces, demonstrated for example in Russia, 1905 or France 1968, into acceptable forms like trade unions in individual workplaces. Now this became a priority.

Unfortunately for them, the latent organisation still finds expression in shop stewards organisations, frequently unofficial or outside approved and regulated trade unions. At least, viewed from conventional perspective, the "pernicious philosophy"<sup>40</sup> is isolated, and treatable by further special repression.

In more modern society and less exceptional circumstances in the western industrial societies generally, the subverted drives of the employed class materialised into ever stronger workplace organisation - a beast that had to be fed, at least until the 1980s. In the western industrialised world, workers beavered away and built their union castles within factory, mill, dock, welfare buildings and even offices.

#### Workers socialism in a more stable economy

CLR James describes the existence of a "counter culture" in the USA which is perhaps the least propitious of circumstances in the western world<sup>41</sup>. Later Lipsitz was to catalogue the little known US general strike wave of the late forties<sup>42</sup>. This was against the trade unions as much as the bosses, and we have recorded already the universal hostility of official trade unionism, especially the full time officers, FTOs, leadership to both shop stewards and workers socialism.

In Britain, the unofficial movement was probably at its strongest. Whole sections of industrial workplaces in engineering, printing manufacturing and parts of transport were under stewards, not FTO, control. A brief but quite explicit description of the gang system in the

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*working class 1775 - 1850 [1998, 198pp]*

<sup>39</sup> Peter Kropotkin: *The Great French Revolution* 2 vols [1986, 301pp & 301pp]

<sup>40</sup> an expression of Beatrice Webb, commenting on the failure of the British general strike of 1926, as a weak variant of workers' socialism.

<sup>41</sup> CLR James, as JR Johnson, Grace C Lee and Pierre Chaulieu (Cornelius Castoriadis): *Facing Reality: the new society, where to look for it, how to bring it closer* [1958 USA (listed under Lee), 174pp].

<sup>42</sup> George Lipsitz: *Rainbow at Midnight* [1994, USA, 359pp]



Coventry car factories show the employees exercising almost full practical control <sup>43</sup>.

A union convener writes eloquently about his workplace and the metal workers <sup>44</sup> in the same city. A London engineering works illustrated similar tendencies <sup>45</sup>. Later, brief accounts describe North London print and furniture workers firmly in charge of their respective workplaces <sup>46</sup>.

" Socialism exists in the factories " was the unacceptable message for the owners, managers and their agents in the state. Their version was "sectionalism", an undoubted element in the structure, but of course their real objection was the exercise of workers power.

This was a the age of the unofficial strike, perhaps the most typical expression of workplace power. The "British problem" was never off the television screens of the more serious programmes. A government report records just 60 official strikes against a total of 2,000 unofficial ones in 1966, amid talk of the two systems <sup>47</sup>. Academics wrote volumes on the subject, without mentioning the revolutionary political dimensions, including those with the best left wing credentials <sup>48</sup>.

Industrially, the politics of rank and file socialism began to infiltrate into the higher reaches of the official trade union movement. The crisis year of 1972, following the Tory anti workers legislation, was the high point <sup>49</sup>.

Even revolutionary political leaders agitated on aspects of the struggle , though again avoiding, either completely or virtually, the issue of

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<sup>43</sup> Reg Wright : *The Gang System in Coventry* [in *Anarchy* 2 , 1961, 7pp] see Appendix Three for a reprint.

<sup>44</sup> Philip Higgs : *An Account of Work- the convener* in *Work* 2, edited by Ronald Fraser, [1969, 365pp]

<sup>45</sup> Colin Barker, and Joyce Rosser : *A Working Class defeat - the ENV story* [ISJ old series number 31 , 9pp]

<sup>46</sup> Mac O'Connell and Paul Rennie, and Jack Moss in Alan Woodward, editor, : *Fragments - episodes in local labour history* , vol. 1, [1998, 120 pp]

<sup>31</sup> Lord Donovan : *Royal Commission on trade Unions and Employers Associations* [1968 , 352pp]

<sup>48</sup> Richard Hyman : *Strikes* [1972, 218pp]

<sup>49</sup> Ralph Darlington & D Lyddon : *Glorious Summer - class struggle in Britain 1972*, [1998, 316pp],

revolutionary politics <sup>50</sup>. These three books get little mention in the autobiography of Tony Cliff <sup>51</sup>, though the history of the International Socialists is more informative, published soon after the Group became the SWP <sup>52</sup>.



Political expression of the revival of the shop stewards from 1940, and the subsequent changes, centred on the communists. The Communist Party of Great Britain had been at the centre of the revival of the shop stewards moment after 1940.

This was despite the communists primary commitment to the foreign policy of Russia, as their industry policy of no strikes during world war two illustrates. The old pre war Minority Movement was replaced by new groups whose prime purpose was the election of "progressive" full time officers, FTOs. But the policy of supporting both the rank and file and the opposing left leadership FTOs and their attendant reformism began to fail,

On the political level, two main organisations emerged from the wreck of the Communist Party of Great Britain after the Hungarian revolution. Firstly *Solidarity For Workers Power*, 1961 - 92. For more than thirty years, Solidarity published regular journals, and irregular but equally

<sup>50</sup> Tony Cliff and Colin Barker : *Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Steward* [ 1966, 136pp]. Tony Cliff : *The Employers Offensive : productivity deals and how to fight them* [1970, 234pp]. Tony Cliff : *The Crisis : social contract or socialism* [ 1975, 192pp.

<sup>51</sup> Tony Cliff : *A World to Win : life of a revolutionary* [2000, 247pp]

<sup>52</sup> Ian Birchall : *The Smallest Mass Party in the World - building the Socialist Workers Party, 1951-79* [1981, 31pp],

informative booklets, on workers power - or anything else related to it. Chris Pallis, aka Maurice Brinton, and Ken Weller were the leading activists.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, the old International Socialists, soon to move from its federalist, non centralised group structure into a bolshevik style Socialist Workers Party, was small and student based. Beyond these, both communists and trotskyists groups clung to their declining industrial membership, the Labour Party to the myth of constitutional "power".

In the new situation, and the SWP was able to establish rank and file organisations and journals. This was consolidated by the attendance at the National Rank and File Organisation conference in 1974, and two more up to 1977.

The thousands of delegates could have provided the basis of a new movement but the SWP were to pull out of their rank and file organisation in 1982, on the pretext of "consolidating revolutionary organisation". This was two years before the most significant industrial dispute of the century, the miners strike, surely one the greatest blunders in revolutionary history.

Predictably the NR&FO has been quietly but completely cut out of history of the SWP in subsequent leadership publications<sup>54</sup>.

### Elsewhere

In France Italy etc, post 1968 insurrections threatened the existence of the state and CLR James again describes a workers council ready for operation while De Gaulle hovered on the brink of resignation in 1968<sup>55</sup>.

### Insurrection in the East

In the eastern bloc, so called "communism" was shaken when workers as alienated as any, and deprived of political expression by Stalinism, rose up. The best example was in Hungary in 1956 where the workers, in their councils, displayed astonishing political and tactical acumen against

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<sup>53</sup> David, Goodway editor : *For Workers' Power - the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379pp] which includes useful accounts of debate over the original publication, plus reprints of his three main works.

<sup>54</sup> see the very mediocre Alex Callinicos : *Socialists in the Trade Unions* [1995, 79pp], one of the worst publications on this subject.

<sup>55</sup> C L R James, above, p 114 - 117

military force <sup>56</sup>. The events were to be played out repeatedly over the next three decades.

The Hungarian events did enormous damage to world wide communism, inspired further revolts in east Europe and marked the rebirth of workers' socialism. The new political economy developed in this exceptional hothouse, as much as in the west.

#### Modern society

Back in the west meanwhile, the economic fabric began a slow process of collapse. Re structuring was called for, regardless of the cost in social discontent, and waste of material and human resource. Mass unemployment re appeared , and with it the resistance of organised labour.

By the 1980s, hard political decisions had been faced and taken by those who run society. Workers in their confident new ideas would have to be broken in the traditional manner, was the new political message. The post war settlement would be abandoned, it was time to assert managerial control again. Air traffic controllers, miners, printworkers and dockers, were carefully isolated and defeated by the well trained and armed forces of the State

#### Workers alternative production proposals

Engineering workers in the sophisticated J Lucas company in the industrial heartlands responded to plans for mass unemployment with a detailed and extensive plan for alternative production. Their plans filled a dozen large files, with viable proposals. Both the owners and the well trained national trade union leadership worked long and hard to destroy this brilliant initiative <sup>57</sup>. The period was marked by employee take overs or well thought out proposals across much of industry.

The new political economy of workers control and socialism was badly dented, to the enormous relief of the official trade union and Labour movement as much as the capitalists. After a decade or two, the new movement struggles under economic and political repression. Such periods have occurred in the past before deeper forces resume operation. Already a new social and political movement of anti capitalism

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<sup>56</sup> Andy Anderson : *Hungary '56* [1964, 120p]

<sup>57</sup> Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliot ; *The: Lucas Plan - a new trade unionism in the making* [1982, 280pp]

has grown since the joint action of environmentalists and workers in Seattle in 1999.

Basic composition

The concepts of council communism, forerunner of workers' socialism, can be seen then to comprise :

- an industrial base at workplaces - a base located at the point of production in the workplace and maintained by union organisation. The rank and file control of the workplace is posited on the proposition that the elected workers have full accountability over the council. This principle is to be carried over in all organisations and formation from collective to co-operative enterprises<sup>58</sup>. As Gramsci noted " the socialist state already exists potentially in the institutions of the social life characteristic of the exploited working class "<sup>59</sup>.
- beyond this a federal structure - this are structures which is federated rather than centralised, and thus characterised by autonomy and control from below. This applies at all levels. The best example is from Spain 1936-39,
- a revolutionary party , or parties - a complimentary political party which is revolutionary in that it seeks the overthrow of the political, social and economic system but in not authoritarian as in the leninist tradition.
- activity within , as well as those implied above, a changing pattern struggle in various areas - a practice that seeks to contest the political ground wherever and whatever the conflict occurs, including electoral, again under the provisions of rank and file control. Apart from the areas mentioned above, such struggles may be short-term but also include the permanent electoral system of present society.

Sources

Those readers with a historical interest may wish to trace the proportions of the debt to anarcho syndicalism and marxism. Broadly this is :

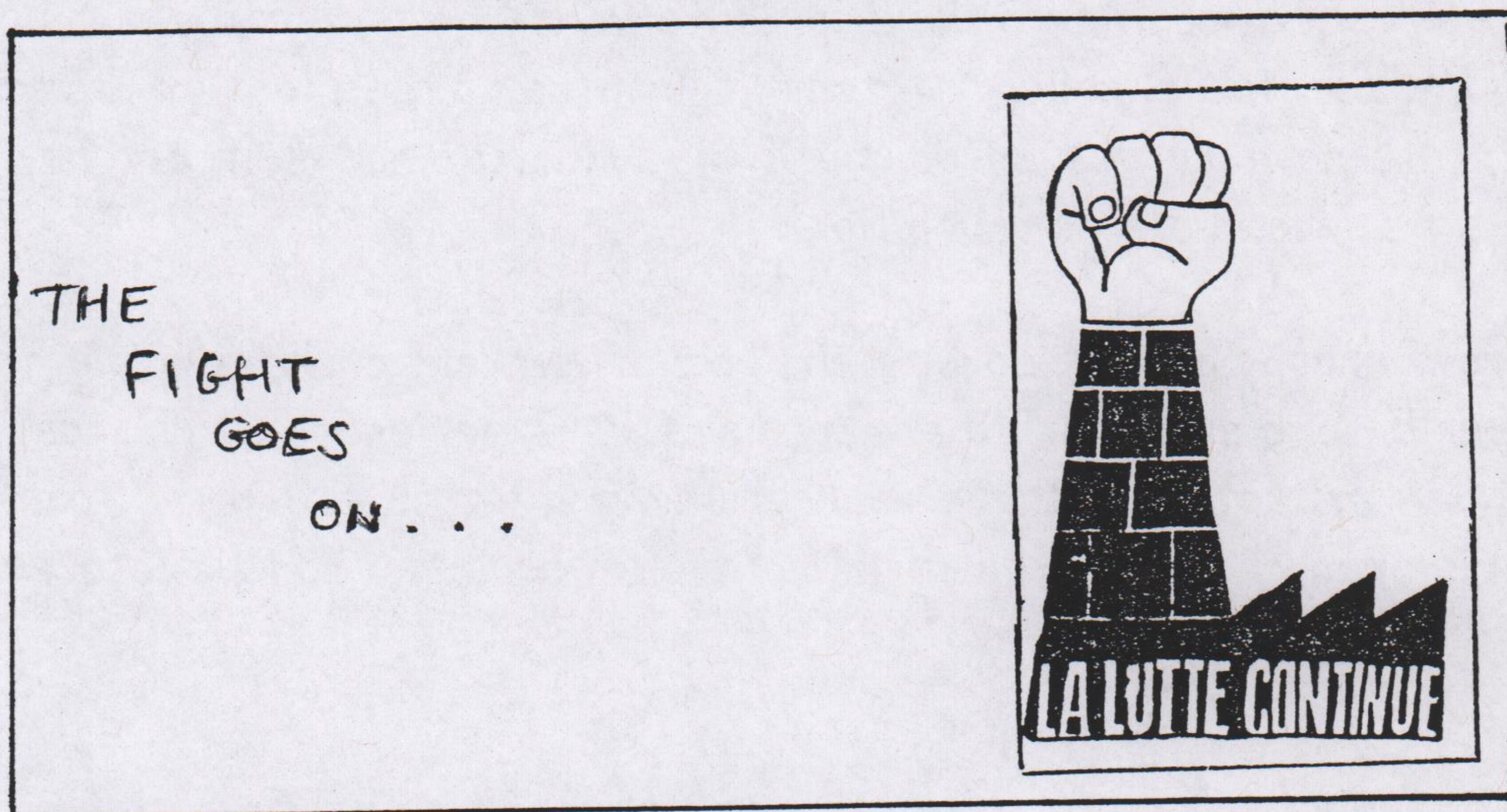
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<sup>58</sup> *Workers without Bosses - self management in Argentina*, [Anarcho Syndicalist Review 29 , 2004]

<sup>59</sup> Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti : *Workers Democracy*, [4pp] in *The New Order*, 1/7, June 1919, reprinted in Antonio, Gramsci : *Antonio, Gramsci Selections from Political Writings (1910-1920)* ed Quintin Hoare [1977, 393pp]

- an emphasis on local control of workplaces and neighbourhoods by elected councils, first spelt out by Bakunin <sup>60</sup>,
- a general acceptance of economic, social but not political analysis within the classical marxist tradition <sup>61</sup>
- a preference for institutional form of federalism over centralism, best exemplified by the Spanish anarchist movement, notwithstanding its faults <sup>62</sup>,
- a reliance on a revolutionary party that compliments but does not dominate workers industrial organisation <sup>63</sup>.

To summarise the development then of workers socialism, there is the defensive action of workers within relatively stable capitalism where the struggle in the workplace is the dominant form. Not exactly socialism in the factories but equally clearly inroads have been made and the ideas lodged in people's minds. This general situation will return, as it always has, and provides one basis for revolutionary action.



The crises that are inherent in capitalism provides the other path. Even in present day conditions where the red empire has been defeated, Argentina has erupted and a big picture that includes massive Chinese expansion, dwindling energy reserves, financial fragility, etc, the potential for further episodes remains high.

<sup>60</sup> Daniel Guerin, editor; *No Gods, no Masters - an anthology of anarchism*, 2 volumes, translated by Paul Sharkey [1998, 294pp and 276pp]

<sup>61</sup> Richard Gombin: *The Radical Tradition - a study in modern revolutionary thought* [1978, 153pp]

<sup>62</sup> Vernon Richards: *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution* [1983, 259pp]

<sup>63</sup> Herman Gorter: *An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* [1993reprint, 41 pp]

### Specific features of councils

We next examine the central feature of workers' socialism, the workers council and its associated organisations. This includes the revolutionary parties, or party.

In this context, it can be noted that revolutions generally move through stages, not necessarily in the following sequence :

- a workplace revolt which results in these becoming workers fortresses, run by councils, and self managed units
- much street activity and self organisation which results in a consolidation of industrial organisation into national structures
- the development of political consciousness accompanied by the growth of political parties, which are inter dependent,
- co-ordinated action leads to the take over of the state institutions,
- the revolution is declared,
- re construction begins around the idea of social control of society unless a counter revolution intervenes , as posited in Errico Malatesta's excellent statement, printed at the front of the book.
- international responses, both of solidarity and self activity and the spread of the revolution

We are primarily concerned with the role of workers councils within these processes. As a survey of the accumulated experiences of the last 100 years demonstrates, whenever workers move into the action that can lead to their open challenge for social control in society, some features are likely to result. These are :

**One** industrial action. The strike is often the first sign of the crisis, perhaps undertaken defensively for jobs or working conditions, Later strike action can be extended to workplace occupations, or occupational work ins and /or collectives, sometimes with continued production . Examples of a take over of the site either in the form of co-operatives as in Argentina in 2002, or outright occupations as in France '68 may follow. Foreign employers, especially those who flee, may more at risk, as in Algeria in 1962, but can sometimes be protected by less than revolutionary governments, as in Spain 1936-9.

At times the strikes become general usually in a town, industry, city, region or even nationally. This can become a political expression of the

case for workers socialism but not automatically. The almost religious belief that anarcho syndicalists had for some decades in the general strike as almost the revolution is quite misplaced <sup>64</sup>, Experience has shown that they can be another negotiating tactic by FTOs or an adventure by so called "revolutionary" groups.

Moreover, at even the most complete, industrial power is only half way to the revolution and the more tricky problem of winning political struggle over the institutions of the state - armed forces, financial and governmental institutions, etc - remains. Petrograd 1917 is a case in point <sup>65</sup>. This requires political organisation, another dimension entirely.

Having said that, the strike is very often the outward indicator of the move from the passive to the active, from the industrial to the political. A brilliant example comes from Republican Spain. Readers may need to be reminded that the Republican area which had militarily defeated the fascist revolt under Franco in 1936 comprised about 50% of the population, and much of the east of the country.

Within this there were over 400 agricultural collectives in Aragon, 900 in the Levante and 300 in Castile. Industry was socialised totally in Catalonia and more than 70% in the Levante. A workplaces that was controlled by the workers, or socialised, was termed a comite, and the collective federation for groups of these were syndicates.

#### Barcelona Tramways

Perhaps the one of the best examples of socialisation was that of the Barcelona Tramways, described extensively by Gaston Leval <sup>66</sup>, It covered trams, buses, underground, taxis and two funicular railways, and 7,00 workers of whom 6,500 were CNT. There were 600 operating trams and July 20, (the Franco revolt), saw many still in street barricades, extensive road damage and the main company Offices guarded by Civil Guards.

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<sup>64</sup> see the imaginative novel by eminent syndicalists Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget : *How we shall bring about the revolution -syndicalism and the co-operative commonwealth* [1909 and 1990, 237pp]

<sup>65</sup> See Steven A Smith. : *Red Petrograd - revolution in the factories 1917-18*, [1983, 347pp]

<sup>66</sup> Gaston Leval (Pierre Robert Piller) : *Collectives in the Spanish revolution*, [1975, 368pp] page 245



Armed workers saw off the troops and found the building deserted except for a lawyer left behind to parley. This man was well known as he had led the prosecution two years previously of workers leader Comrade Sanches which resulted in a 17 year sentence. He had demanded 105 years for the crime of heading a 28 week strike ! The workers wanted to shoot the man on the spot but Sanches opposed that and even arranged for an appointment the following Monday and an escort home. Predictably he was never seen again.

Workers got organised - the Comite of Seven called an immediate meeting of delegates from various sections - the power station, repairs, cables, traffic, conductors, stores, accounts, offices, etc The workers were in control and began organising . A radio broadcast recalled all workers except a tiny number of extreme right wingers. Company engineers accepted the authority of the comite, including a former colonel who had been victimised for supporting the union.

#### Back on the road

After day and night working, five days after the fighting there were now 700 trams on the road, an extra 100, doing away with the trailer cars that caused so many accidents. The vehicles were all repainted in the red and black colours of the CNT/FAI. Other technical improvements included the replacement of 3,000 awkward metal support poles by aerial suspension, a new safety and signalling system, a new electric furnace, milling machines and electrode welding sets.

The new system worked well . Each section was headed by a workers rep and an engineer, nominated by the syndicate. Every decision was approved by the comite Assemblies were held on sectional issues and a general assembly ratified major points, like one to carry out the additional repainting without overtime. At one assembly, efforts were made to get the hundreds of shareholders to attend but only one middle aged woman who owned 250 shares, attended. She declared herself happy with the arrangements, and Leval recounts that the woman was unlikely to be deprived of her means of support

#### More production

The service was substantially improved. Monthly income was 12% up on 1935 figures. 1937 figures for passenger carried went up by 50,000,000 to 233,557,506. A uniform fare charge of .02 pesetas meant a substantial reduction for most people. It was 20 months before

fares were increased. The war and the blockade meant that internal workshop production of materials and parts used went up from 2% to 98%. All debts were paid off, unlike many situations, and financial assistance rendered to other municipal undertakings.

Better conditions

Working conditions were both equalised and bettered. Previous day rates of 8,9,10, 11 and 12 pesetas were now 15ps for labourers and 16ps for skilled engineering workers. Washbasins and showers were installed and an occupational health service introduced. 30 district doctors were appointed who treated workers and their families. A home help service was set up. A well equipped clinic was appropriated, specialists installed and put at the service of the Syndicate.

There was full sick pay. Discipline at work was typical of that in other comites. Serious cases were dealt with by assemblies, and dismissals usually became transfers. Drunkenness resulted in the pay being made to wives. An effective sanction in workplaces was the "naming" of irresponsible workers on a displayed blackboard, which presumably allowed a variety of personal responses.

Defended against State take over

The value of the collective organisation was obviously recognised by the workers as much as the public. When the government tried to assume control of the tramways in June 37, as part of a whole scheme to take back all the utilities and public services, the workers mounted a massive campaign. Huge posters called for rejection of "municipalisation", the euphemism used by the reformists for their planned destruction of the system. All the gains itemised above were listed and such was the response that the plans were shelved<sup>67</sup>.

Conclusion

The success of the tramways comite was due to the superiority of the workers management and external factors. Petrol shortages meant more use of the public service and the crippling effects of the war and blockade were minimal in the industry. The old regime were conservative and reconstruction was overdue. Other collectives were less able to stand the pressure and potash mining ceased as a result of international constraints for example.

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<sup>67</sup> Felix Morrow: *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain* [1976, 300pp], page 154.

Some general points are worth making. Pay differentials between workers and "technical" grades [i.e. ex managers, etc] were about 2:1, that is around 400 pesetas per month to around 900 ps. The comparative figure for the USSR was 18:1. There were still examples of differentials against women, in some cases by as much as 15%.

The Nationalisation option for industry generally

The tramways situation should be put into the framework of the general situation - reformists in the Spanish State and their proposals to assume control of the Catalonian war industry, etc. This meant the government administered the thousands of workplaces though conventional government departments and was an essential part of the counter revolution in this context. It was a mortal blow to the long term perspectives for workers control, being a reversion to capitalist state rule.

On the credit side, the Catalonian Regional government assumed effective control over the failing collectives when it paid out the wage bill and to all extents and purposes, municipalized them. The Generalitat or government was always represented on workers councils but appointed the Director in such cases. The expression "pawn bank" was used derisively to cover such arrangements.

**TWO** self organisation - meetings are held usually in the form of the general assembly or mass meetings. A discussion of the situation is held. A workers council is elected, or this can be done at sectional or workshop meetings as was the practice of the Moscow printers in 1921 when Bolshevik practice was to intimidate bigger assemblies<sup>68</sup>. These internal delegates or officers are expected to follow policy as a matter of course, and defection usually results in instant removal, as in Hungary in 1956.

If there is organisation above the workplace, external delegates would be elected but these are recallable, as in Paris Commune in 1871. In fact this provision appear to be unused in this first instance but John Reed reports that some delegates to soviets after 1917 were successfully replaced after Bolshevik repressions.

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<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Aves : Workers Against Lenin - labour protests and the Bolshevik dictatorship [1996 220pp]

Workers councils frequent sit in permanent sessions or at least daily, and the Polish example of broadcasting and recording the proceedings has obvious examples. Sub committees appointed to oversee specific aspects, like discipline, would report to the general assembly and seek ratification for its decision, like public disgrace for those breaking a 'no alcohol' rule, for example.

**Three** workers/union organisation is extended downwards and outwards for specific roles. It is common for workers assemblies to elect/appoint sub committees, either production related or for welfare issues, as in Russia in 1917-8. On occasions these sub committees grow into area bodies which monitor social conditions in the immediate neighbourhood as in Portugal in 1975 and at the women's prices committee in Nantes in France in 1968. The neighbourhood committee here tightly controlled transport and drivers required a permit to travel around and at the "borders"<sup>69</sup>.

**Four** for self defence, bodies of armed troops are raised. For security against State counter revolution, workers generally raise militias. Most remarkably, the Red Army of the Ruhr fought off the German Regular Army for some weeks in 1918. This was made up of workers, and active council communists, anarchists and reformists from the SDP, and its unions. Nestor Makhno's armies held off both white and red armies for nearly two years in post revolutionary Ukraine<sup>70</sup>.

The state's own armed forces can be won over, perhaps as a result of soldiers' or sailors' councils being set up, see below, as was a big factor in all three Russian revolutions. The earliest soldiers organisation was the Regimental Agitators in the Soldiers Council of the English Revolution in 1647 but few comparisons are valid. More recently the Paratroopers in the Portuguese Army in 1975 rallied to the inspirational slogan chanted by workers that "The soldiers are the sons of the people",

Alternatively a liberating army can result in workers democracy, as in the Northern Expedition in China in 1926/7 or Durruti's Column in Aragon, Spain in 1936<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Andree Hoyles : *Imagination in Power - the occupation of the factories* [1973 , 73pp]

<sup>70</sup> Voline [ V.I. Eichenbaum ] : *The Unknown Revolution*, [ 1990, 717pp]

<sup>71</sup> Abel Paz : *Durruti - the people armed* [ 1976 Canada , 323pp]

**Five** supra workplace bodies generally appear, either federations or soviets in an area or national structures of councils. Union branches grow into national revolutionary general workers unions

Structures beyond the immediate area are constructed to extend workers control, invariably in the form of federations. These can be for industrial estates in Valparaiso in Chile in 1972, cities or districts as in Petersburg and Moscow, etc in 1917, regionally as in Catalonia and Eastern Spain in 1936, or nationally, as in the Central Council for Factory and Shop Committees in Russia in 1917.

The German AAU, or General Workers Union, formed from the most revolutionary workers councils and associated with the Red Army outlined above lasted for over a decade despite adverse circumstances

In exceptionally circumstances, political soviets can emerge as in Russia 1917 and Germany 1918, but more recently explicit political representation has been banned, as in Poland, Portugal and Argentina.

#### Federal authority

A short digression here would perhaps be appropriate on the question of federalism, as opposed to centralism. For marxists with their emphasis on political action and the role of the state, the significance of centralisation is obvious. Their whole political strategy depends on it, but of course for anarchists the dangers far outweigh the advantages. So Bakunin's timely warning, quite specific about the potential hazards of Marx's authoritarianism, applied to Lenin, Trotsky and perhaps inevitably Stalin<sup>72</sup>. Worker's socialism endorses this response.

Federalism was seen at its most effective in the Spanish revolution 1936-9. It represents the basic idea of control over peoples lives related as much to the field of social organisation as the workplace. There is no point in securing control over work, etc, if social organisations as in housing, are still restrictive and centralised into a bureaucracy.

Hence federalism -

- can be defined as a consensual and equal association
- is a bottom down idea

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<sup>72</sup> Alan Woodward: *Marx, Bakunin or what? What Next?* 28, [2004, 7pp]

- and is a defence against the dominance of political systems and theories that may well turn out to be undemocratic in practice.

Closely associated is the concept of autonomy, the right of organisations to govern themselves. This includes a basic right of withdrawal even from a properly constituted federation, and to attempt to go your own way. Though there are obvious difficulties in such a freedom, this must be balanced against the inherent dangers of centralisation and the ever present threat of conflict that this alternative formation holds.

Federations in view of the subsequent experience of the degeneration of all marxist revolutionary parties, would appear to make sense. Likewise, federation of institutions within an autonomous framework, and federations of federations above that in a geographical sense.

#### Another practical case

Spain provides the best examples. A typical example occurred at the town of Graus which had 2,600 inhabitants and was the centre for 43 villages, about a quarter of which were 50% collectivised. In a mountainous area of the Pyrenees, transport was difficult, the land often ungenerous and multiple occupations common. Some 40% of the land was owned by two proprietors. Youth emigration to the towns or France was normal.

Gaston Leval describes how, from October 36, a formal agrarian collective was set up, and transport, printing, the remaining food shops, metal and wood workshops, plus health and business enterprises were collectivised<sup>73</sup>. Trade had been at first controlled but then socialised with a food co-operative. Other co-ops were set up from local shops which were rationalised. The initiative came from socialist and libertarian syndicates.

A comite was set up which became a liaison comite and then a municipal council in succession. The function, control of the whole community, remained with the workers, land labourers and peasants. Under this structure, agriculture was quickly rationalised. A threshing machine, seed drills, reaper - binder, vine spraying machinery a ridge plough, were introduced; the cultivable land increased by 5-10% and re-organised.

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<sup>73</sup> Gaston Leval (Pierre Robert Piller): *Collectives in the Spanish revolution*, [1975, 368pp] page 92 -

All this resulted in a 50% increase in production for most crops and 100% for sugar beet. Livestock rearing was considerably improved. Sheep, pig and chicken numbers plus accommodation, were massively increased, and rabbit and turkey breeding began.

Link

An industrial element was also present, and non agricultural activities were extensive. The collectivised factory making clothing and was staffed in two short day shifts. Of the 30 staff, many were young dependant women, who came voluntarily as their subsistence was part of the family wage. The production was mostly war contracts. A new mill for olive oil production was installed, with the waste used to make soap. Two 8 ton lorries, a weighbridge and two electric washing machines were bought. Bottling was centralised and collectivised to cover wine, lemonade, beers and liqueurs.

Activities covered were drinking water, goat skin bottles, carpentry, mattress making, cinematography, cartwrighting, flour milling, photography, silk spinning, chocolate and sausage making, electricity, oil-store, forges, gypsum kilns, paint and tin and sewing machine shops, cycle repairs, dressmaking and assembly and printing workshops, tile works, dairy farm produce and building materials

Better conditions resulted and standards of living showed considerable advances. The family wage was household based and relieved some of the large family poverty, through a special subsidy. Payment was for 52 weeks. Housing was free with gas and water charges halved. Medical services and prescriptions were free, as a collectivised service. Family land plots were free as were seeds and fertilisers.

Education was prioritised not least by a new Art School. This sought to expand cultural awareness, for pupils in the day and young workers in the evenings, by a wide variety of activities. A settlement for 80 young refugees was made in an expropriated mansion. A school was generously staffed by five teachers and the full provision made by the collective. In all, Leval estimates a rise in the general standard of living of 50 to 100% and a substantial increase in productive capital, all with many young people at the war Front.

Social services

These would be similarly structured, most dramatically the health services, that is socialised medicine, in Catalonia initially but also other cities in Republican Spain. Deriving from a Syndicate of Liberal Professions, the Syndicate for Sanitary Services, SSS, was set up in September 1936 to tackle the problem of health. Spain had high infant mortality 18 or 19 per 1,000 and this disguised the fact that it was double in working class areas than elsewhere. There were many other problems as well <sup>74</sup>.

The initiative was taken by CNT Ministers in the Central and Catalonian government and the resulting health service was often staffed by political members. This political lead was to become a disadvantage when the counter revolutionary forces removed CNT personnel from 1937. This included Dr Marti Ibanez who had been Director General of Sanitary Services and Social Assistance in Catalonia, just one of luckier of the victims of the Stalinist counter revolution, who lived to tell the tale

By February 1937, Laval writes that the SSSA had on roll 1,020 doctors of different specialities, 3,206 nurses, 330 midwives, 633 dentists, 153 pharmacists, 633 assistant pharmacists, 335 preparers of dressings, 81 other specialists, numerous masseurs and 220 veterinary surgeons. In all, a total of 7,000 people to cover a Catalonian population of 2.5 m. By June, there were in Barcelona, 18 hospitals (six of which had been set up by the SSSA), 17 sanatoria (9 new), 22 clinics, 6 psychiatric establishments, 3 nurseries, 1 maternity hospital and two very modern annexes to the General Hospital, one for bone TB and the other for orthopaedic treatment.

Outpatient departments were established in all principal localities and smaller localities were attached. These were adequately equipped and staffed to deal with problems. Funding for these as for other parts of the SSSA was from central and local government. Operations were free in the new clinics as was psychiatric treatment.

### Doctors

Doctors responded in different ways. The older established ones were suspicious and a number left the country. Younger staff were enthusiastic generally about the new system. Previously new doctors were virtually unpaid, worked in poor conditions and waited their turn to fill

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<sup>74</sup> The following account is from Laval, page 264



dead men's shoes. Now all hospital doctors were paid 500 pesetas a month for three days work. In addition, they could have private patients but this practice was closely supervised to prevent excesses.

No doctor could receive two salaries and the widespread practice of neglecting official work for private practice was ended. A majority of staff also worked voluntarily in addition to their posting.

A series of reviews of related areas were begun. For example, pharmaceutical products were to be re-organised from laboratories to outlets. Health and safety at work was re-structured to begin an occupational health service and insurance companies involvement reduced in favour of State provision.

As well as the Catalanian SSSA, there were a number of other health syndicates set up. Some date from 1936, like the Mutual Aid Society of the Levant in Valencia, which in fact survived the Franco years. In Valencia in February 1937 a Congress of Federations of Health Syndicates was held. These were from all over Republican Spain, over 40 in total with 40,000 staff. An important aspect of the Congress was a planned further development in organisation especially with regard to diseases like TB. This of course would involve consideration into housing and schools and other aspects of public health.

While not all syndicates were as comprehensive as the Catalanian model, they represent a pioneering venture into a national health service well in advance of other countries. Much of this was due to the CNT and practically nothing except funds from government. In many cases, military personnel provided field hospitals and dealt with right wing pharmacists. CNT generally organised evacuations from the war zone, bomb shelters and anti gas brigades

In conclusion, the achievements in health were far from being the version that socialists would like to see. Private practice and ownership remained, old ideas and practices were not completely removed. The constraints of war and the trade blockade imposed obvious limits. It was an experiment in un-propitious circumstances and was generally terminated with the victory of the military forces of the Right. It does represent an extension of workers power into social welfare, beyond the workplace limit set by anarcho syndicalist theory. It demonstrated that workers could effectively manage society as well as their workplaces.

Computers too

Pannekoek astonishingly prophesied in the 1950s the use of computing to facilitate this. It should be noted that in the Spanish land collectives of 1936-8, agrarian workers who did not wish to join the communal organisation were allowed to withdraw and function individually, as long as they did not employ people. It appears to have functioned well in practice <sup>75</sup>.

Political structures, particularly in the likelihood of multiple parties, seem especially suitable to autonomous organisation. The result may well prove to be a long winded and possibly convoluted process, but like democracy would be preferable to the alternatives.

In the present, workers socialism accepts, as well as the federal structure, the notion of autonomy in one particular form. Workplace industrial organisation should be independent from the official trade union movement under capitalism and function with its own structures. Activities like unofficial strikes, occupations and work ins, and lastly any political commitment to revolution, are most encouraged by this freedom.

Six

the appearance of other supporting councils. Peasant, student and soldiers councils can emerge either as joint bodies with workers as in Russia in 1917 or in the movement of collectives in the Ukraine under Makhno 1918-20, or in Republican Spain from 1936-8. Student organisation was most apparent in France in 1968, but was also present in other situations like Russia 1905 <sup>76</sup>. Soldiers councils were powerful in Russia 1917 and Germany 1918.

Seven

The level of political consciousness is widened and multiplied, ideas get taken up and political organisations begin to grow. As noted above the growth of consciousness and organisation is mutually dependant and

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<sup>75</sup> Sam Dolgoff editor : *The Spanish Collectives - workers management in the Spanish Revolution 1936-39* [1990 Canada , 194pp]

<sup>76</sup> Solomon M Schwartz : *The Russian Revolution of 1905 - the workers movement and the formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism* [1967, USA, 361pp]

political parties compete for support in the crucial struggle ahead - that for control of the State . Will the old order manage to hang on ? Will popular control win but be subverted by those who want their Party and ideology to be exclusively in charge ? Will popular institutions subject to constant and comprehensive and actual democracy, assume control ?

These questions can best be answered by a chronological examination of the three ideas we are concerned with - anarchism, marxism and workers' socialism.

But before looking at these, we need to consider some brief points about the correlation of ideas with peoples' activities. We are concerned with the extent to which ordinary people's beliefs change in the new circumstances aided by the practice of existing political parties or organisations. It is of course extremely difficult to quantify these beliefs without first hand experience . The most that modern writers can do is to read whatever books are available , with all the possibilities of bias that this entails.

Nonetheless, this is the methodology we are stuck with, and that means we have to measure and assess the extent and nature of the roles of the political groups. This means some assumptions have to be made. We can assume that all members/ associates of political party act to promote the workers revolution within their understanding. Now we have established that the practitioners of the two main groups - anarchism and marxism - and possible the third group - council communists - have their own distinct interpretations of this, which needs to be remembered.

It is also clear that the revolutionary groups are also subject to the effects of chauvinism. This results in their functioning quite independently and separately. Each group of supporters limit their activity, knowledge, references and contacts to their own chosen field and think of their equivalents in the most stereotyped and crude concepts while fighting much the same struggles. This movement identity or "chauvinism" is truly amazing and an enormous tribute to the pervasiveness of capitalist ideology, as Karl Marx commented.

They also share another feature - each movement reflects within itself political differences with a range of political divisions into sub groups or parties. Identification with the selected group/party breeds fierce defence of its particular concepts and organisation and so we see the

resulting organisational "chauvinism" where group members argue endlessly with other groups - a division into internal war which neglects unity to fight the real enemy.

While chauvinism as described may not lead to the displacement of aims so favoured by some academics, it is very likely to restrict unity in a substantial way - a further hindrance to conscious action.

Finally we should not assume automatically that members and supporters of political organisations agree entirely with, or act in accordance with, those organisations. People join the groups that are nearest to their own views but generally the two sets of ideas do not overlap entirely.

With these qualifications, we can proceed with our chronological consideration of anarchism, marxism and council communism/workers socialism.

Anarchism was until the 1920s the most influential movement on the left politics, if we place labourism into the class collaboration category. Though it was divided into different sections - lifestyle individualist, mainstream anarchism and anarcho syndicalism, etc - we are concerned with the latter two.

The first major episode was the first Russian revolution of 1905 during which there was a huge growth especially around the western borders of the Empire among the Jewish population. In Bialystock, 15 or so members became an estimated 250, and groups continued well into 1906 with both agitation and assassination. Even the moderate Peter Kropotkin sanctioned killing as long as the victim was carefully selected, but this was not always the case.

The Social Revolutionaries, though a political party, was based on anarchist principles and this was possibly the largest group. In 1906 an open anarcho syndicalist party, the Anarchist Party, was formed by Novomirsky as a result of the expansion.

During the 1917, many anarcho syndicalists were active especially in the workplace councils. Many exiles came back, as did other well wishers and joined the revolutionary process. They were active in the resistance against the leninist measures to integrate councils into Party controlled trade unions. The anarchist movement expanded greatly with leaders

like Roshchin but these were strongest in following established libertarian ideas.

Victor Serge, a veteran anarchist before coming to Russia, summarised the position in 1920, He saw three categories :

- Anti communists who were totally opposed even to this , the people's revolution and often took strong action, from the underground , against the regime,
- The vast majority who were offered critical support but were clearly disconcerted by the moves towards totalitarianism that were now apparent to all. This constituted the centre. comprising the official organisations like the Ukrainian NABAT.
- Another small percentage who had become persuaded of the need to support the regime. This included people like himself and Bill Shatov, the US labour leader, who were in the communist leadership. Shatov retained his political affiliation. Also the so called soviet anarchists who either accepted the ideological point about the dictatorship of the proletariat or even the militarisation of labour in 1919, or were in agreement with the communists over tactical issues. Roshchin was the most prominent of these <sup>77</sup>.

With the Bolshevik/Communist take over of the revolution, resistance expanded and whole sections of the trade union movement were solidly anarchist by 1921. For example, Moscow bakers and chemical workers and sections of the print workers became oppositionists, a mixture of libertarians , SR and dissident mensheviks. Kronstadt, sailors upholding the politics of 1917, went into revolt, demanding "Soviets without bolsheviks " rather than the more moderate calls for a new Constituent Assembly.

From 1920 to 22, all resistance was crushed , as the text above relates, and most of the anarchist movement who were not executed, or in prison, joined the communists or went into exile . In 1926, the Platform Organisation was formed , a hybrid structure with a central committee, and its supporters included Nestor Makhno, the betrayed leader of the Ukrainian Regional Collectives, then in Paris.

In the Chinese second revolution of 1925-7 (the first deposed the monarch) the long standing anarchist movement had a large working class

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<sup>77</sup> Victor Serge ( Victor Kibalchich) : *Revolution in Danger* [1997, 125pp] pages 83 to 119.

base, despite Communist inroads. Leaders like Shifu had provided the drive to organisation, but a section of the leadership was close to the Nationalists around Sun Yet-Sen and later Chiang Ki - Chek.

In 1927 Nationalists switched policy from overt liberation to a massacre of the working class revolutionaries. Anarchist activists, like communists, became victims. The surviving anarchists who had resisted integration joined the governmental forces before they too were rejected and defeated.

The role of the anarchists in France, Britain and Germany from this time has already been examined and the Irish anti imperialist movement had an earlier experience of that of the Chinese.

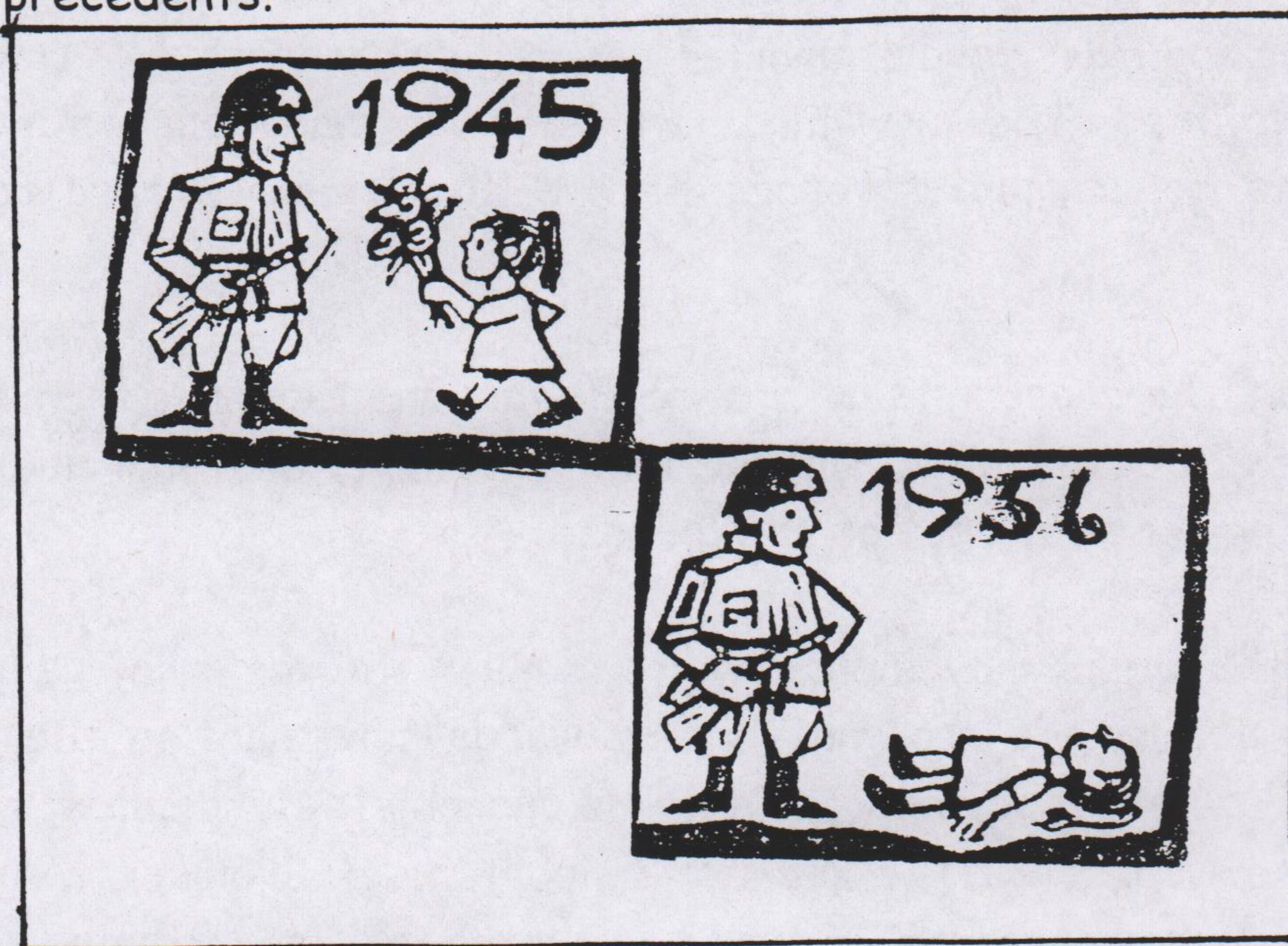
In Italy, the labour movement developed much the same way as in Britain, Germany, etc with a growing shop stewards movement in the northern industrial cities, especially Turin. The anarchists' syndicalist movement, around the USI, were the keenest supporters of Gramsci's *New Order*. This small marxist group tried to influence the commissars, or shop stewards as described in the text above. The other main character was the veteran Errico Malatesta, a long standing cynic about syndicalism, who was associated with the orthodox anarchist UAI.

During the tumultuous events of the "two red years", there was a long strike in Turin, repressed by the military, and the nationwide occupation of the factories, both in 1920. The revolutionary movement was deflected by the reformists in the trade unions and Labour Party, leaving an isolated marxist Gramsci with a syndicalist supporting movement. In the killings from the fascist take over by the ex marxist Mussolini, anarchists and their working class supporters were the main victims. The anarchist Pietro Ferrero is especially remembered.

The Spanish events have been outlined above but mention must be made of the useful role of the independent marxist POUM, originally trotskyist, but firmly on the right side in the crisis. The defeated Spanish revolution bring this first period to a close but the developments around the dissident Friends of Durruti - see below - provided an interesting interlude.

In the popular revolts against the Russian occupation of east Europe after 1945, explicit anarchist influence does not appear to have been.

large, though the politics of much of the resistance appears to have an objectively syndicalist element, perhaps in reaction to the alleged marxism of the state capitalist Russians. The pattern of courageous fight back against a repressive state certainly has anarchist, rather than marxist, precedents.



In the modern era, the Algerian and Iranian experiments can be said to have succumbed to nationalist and fundamental muslim forces respectively. The Portuguese councils in the revolutionary episode of 1974 to 75 succumbed to a more typical alliance of conservative forces, the Labour Party and two conflicting versions of stalinism.

Salazar's repression complemented that of Franco in Spain over the Iberian working class, and Maurice Briton accounts this, and the fragmented composition of the workers movement, as the reasons for the lack of development in an anarchist constituency <sup>78</sup>.

The actual mechanism was the forced growth of Labour against a background of internecine conflict between the reformist nationalism of the communist party and the obsessive sloganism of the Maoist version.

Brinton comments that the word "apartidario", or non party, was coined in this situation, where representation from political organisations was banned at council Conferences. It will be remembered that in Russia political representation had been encouraged until two years or so after

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<sup>78</sup> In his Introduction to Phil Mailer: *Portugal, the impossible revolution*, [1977, 399pp.] reprinted in David Goodway editor: *For Workers' Power - the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379pp]

the revolution when there was the start of selective bans even on delegates from organisations which were designated as oppositional.

Curiously there were no mass killings when a section of the divided armed forces finally staged their coup on 25 November 1975, a change of tactic by the ruling class ?

The South American revolutionary movement has a long and mixed history, and has existed nearly as long as that of Europe. Revolutionary anarchists built bases in the working class all over but especially in such countries as Argentina <sup>79</sup>, Mexico <sup>80</sup>, etc and, of course, Chile <sup>81</sup>. Such countries also had anarchist movements involving mutual aid schemes and some backing among peasants. In modern times, the revolutionary guerrilla movement in this region claims widespread libertarian support.

But while the Chilean heritage includes a long history of anarchism of various forms, the Allende political movement clearly owed a debt to Stalinism. His Popular Unity government was consistently reformist/nationalist. Against the forces of US imperialism such tepid political leadership had no chance despite the heroics of the workers. "After the bosses strike of 1972, the workers did not wait for Popular Unity to intervene but occupied factories and began production on their own, without state, or trade union assistance. Cordones industriales . . . were formed in the factory complexes " <sup>82</sup>. Regardless Pinochet won . . .

Perhaps a final look should be at the May insurrection in Paris and France in 1968. Coming in the period of the rebirth of councils after Hungary in 1956, but completely unexpected for all that, the revolt was detonated by students among whom anarchist politics of one type or another were common. Daniel Cohn Bendit and his brother declared themselves council communists and are examined in the section below on WS readings.

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<sup>79</sup> Ronaldo Munck, Ricardo Falcon and Bernardo Galitelli : *Argentina from Anarchism to Peronism - workers, unions and politics, 1855-1985* [1987, 261pp]

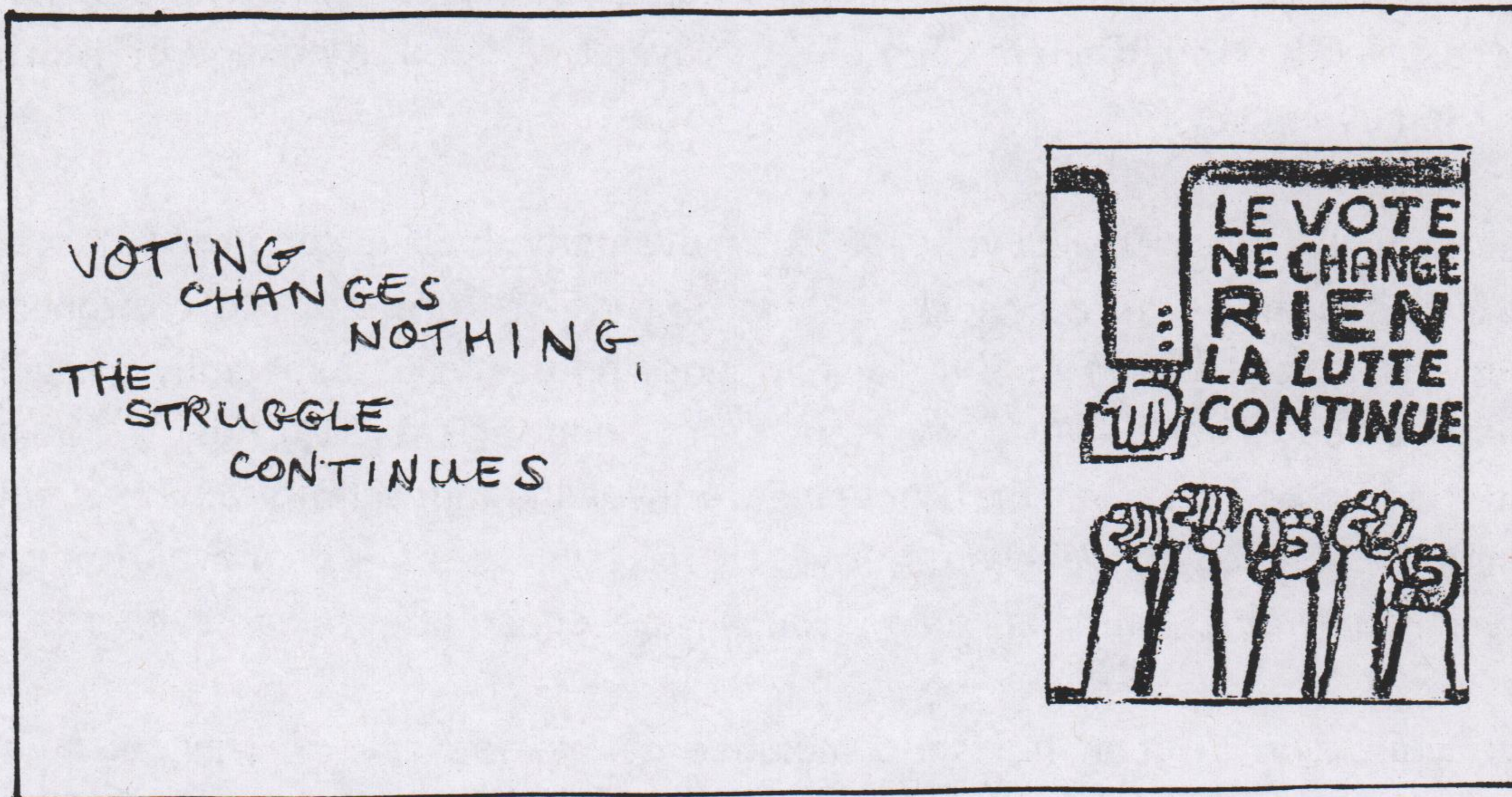
<sup>80</sup> John M Hart: *Anarchism and the Mexican Working class 1860-1931* [1978, USA, 249pp]

<sup>81</sup> Larry Gambone : *The Libertarian Movement in Chile* [ 1996 Canada , 28pp]

<sup>82</sup> Pointblank : *Strange Defeat - the Chilean revolution 1973* in Black Flag 223 , [2003, 4pp]



Since 1968 insurrection has been the aim of groups like the Enragees, Situationists etc and anarchist style tactics have been seen at the revolts of 1986-7<sup>83</sup> and 1994<sup>84</sup>.



To summarise the political role of the anarchists, it is apparent that their theory did not, and today does not, equip them to take protest movements into wider national context and against state repression. Anarchists have been at the forefront of protest for longer than anyone else, and their ideas are essential to the broader revolutionary movement, but something more is needed beyond these fundamentals. To paraphrase Gwyn Williams, "I like to think I know a good comrade when I see one".

### The marxist movement

Coming next to the theory and practice of the most comprehensive and coherent group, there is no question of gaps, just of a wrong political prescription. While Marx laid bare the workings of capital in an incomparable way, it is clear that <sup>Bakunin</sup>~~Bukharin~~ did a similar job on marxism, and this is perhaps of equal importance to revolutionaries.

Marx, practicing marxism, predictably placed his ideas of organisation over the priority of the workers organisations when faced with an

<sup>83</sup> Exchanges et Mouvement : *France Winter 86-87 The Railway Strike - an attempt at autonomous organisation* [1988?, 23pp]

<sup>84</sup> AK Press : *We Are All Hooligans - youth revolt in France, March 1994* [1994 AK, 48pp]

anarchist majority<sup>85</sup>. Lenin and Trotsky, practicing marxism, did the same thing for the Party in revolutionary Russia, as we have outlined above. Stalin and Mao, and their successors in Russia and China, practicing marxism, or perhaps negating it would be more accurate, have twisted revolutionary movements of workers to the interests of their own national interests or those of the national communist parties concerned.

The appalling record of Stalinism is now clear for all to see : those who have proclaimed themselves as "Communists" have either defused councils - France 1936 and 68, and formally repressed them by government action - Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1969 and Poland 1981. Stalinism was also actively opposed to the Spanish councils from 1936 to 1938.

Interestingly Communist governments have established puppet councils as part of their conflict with the Russian Communist regime - by Yugoslavian Communist leader Tito in 1950, and the Polish communist regime in 1956 also against Stalinism. There were elements of this in the Czech councils in 1969.

Workers councils have foundered on the politics of the so called Communist Party, with its treacherous double role as leader but betrayer of the movement for workers power. Its adoption of reformist politics, driven by the search for defence of the USSR, has been fatal to several generations of rebellion, and possibly revolution.

After Trotsky's expulsion from the USSR, the Left Opposition agitated for a "political" revolution - a change in the leadership of the regime. However forlorn such a prospect was, there is a strain of Trotskyism in world resistance to Hitler, Stalin and successive leaders of America, Britain, France, etc, despite the inadequacy of the official line. Though this has in some cases a mixed history and is always tainted with leninist ideology, it must be recognised.

This is an honourable record from China<sup>86</sup> to the USA<sup>87</sup> but needs no endorsement here, there are advocates enough already<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Alan Woodward : *Marx, Bakunin or what ? What Next ?* 28, [2004, 7pp]

<sup>86</sup> Wang Fan his : *The Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary* [1957 and 1980, 300pp]

<sup>87</sup> Farrell Dobbs : *Teamster Rebellion*, [1972, USA, 185pp], *Teamster Power* [1973, USA, 255pp] *Teamster Politics* [1975, USA, 257pp] *Teamster Bureaucracy* [1977, USA, 304pp]

<sup>88</sup> Alex Callinicos: *Trotskyism* [1990, 103pp]

In any case workers' socialists, like anarchists, are surely correct in their belief that marxist revolutionary parties inevitably degenerate into repressive and bureaucratic structures. It also seems a reasonable judgement that Leninist and Trotskyist organisations - like the SWP - have more than their fair share of careerists, apparachniks and party chauvinists. It has been remarked more than once that the price of full time centralised leadership is a relatively passive membership.

Having said that it is as well to recall the point made above that members and/or supporters of such parties do not always subscribe to the official line. It is a matter of personal experience, common observation and diligent reading that a percentage of them work to the best of their ability against capitalism. Their practice is clearly better than their theory or national policy, but ultimately founders on these.

### Workers' Socialism

This is the belief of the author and the case for this has been made throughout the booklet. The story of the KAPD in pre NAZI Germany does not need repeating and there are occasional glimpses of council communists/workers socialists in action.

One such was Daniel Cohn Bendit in France 1968. The veteran Socialist Workers Party writer Ian Birchall is fond of reminding audiences that the workplace occupations started with a proposal made by Trotskyists at the Sud Aviation factory in Nantes <sup>89</sup>. But it is equal clear that the students who detonated the insurrection were led in the first instance by Daniel Cohn Bendit whose work at the Nanterre Faculty a year earlier resulted in the March 22<sup>nd</sup> Movement, M22M, This was prominent in the student revolt.

Cohn Bendit, aka " Danny the red ", or "the German anarchist", described himself as a council communist. His book - and his brother's - looks at both the reactionary role of the communist PCF and the institutions set up by workers and students in the course of the biggest general strike in history. Written that same year and in print ever since, it is relevant today for its critique of purely political action <sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> *An Appeal by the Workers of Sud-Aviation* reprinted in Vladimir Fisera, editor : *Writing on the Wall May 1968 - a documentary anthology* [1978, 325pp] which has many other eye witness accounts of workers action including the "soviet" at Nantes, page 275.

<sup>90</sup> Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel : *Obsolete Communism - the left wing alternative*

Space is short but two unusual contributors to WS are worth a mention. The Spanish revolution 1926-39 was frustrated by the civil war between the fascist armed forces of General Franco, aided by Germany and Italy, and the Republicans. The left wing government was dominated increasingly by the communists and their Russian arms. These were also steadily opposed to the peoples' revolution, saying winning the war came first. In the event their splitting tactics managed to lose both war and revolution, perhaps not entirely unexpected.

Among the anarchists a few thoughtful people could see the weakness of the theory, and the military defeat looming, and banded together in the name of the great and loved leader Buenaventura Durruti <sup>91</sup>. The new revolutionary group, Friends of Durruti, proposed a revolutionary workers overall committee, earning condemnation from the orthodox anarchists.

#### Syndicalism revised

FoD ideas were similar to the Council Communists who, from a different tradition in Germany, suffered a similar setback twenty years before, and came to the same conclusion - a revolutionary organisation was needed, to co-ordinate, guide, and advise the workers movement but not on the pattern of the dominant marxist Party <sup>92</sup>. This was of the core of the council communists and remains as such for council socialism today..

#### Bolshevism revised

The second contribution came in a curious development which occurred in deepest Russia in 1921. Here we must change gear and move from summary form to exposition mode. After the civil war against the invading Czarist "White" armies, when the whole country was depleted and exhausted, the Bolsheviks, now renamed Communists, determined not to relax control and decided to press ahead with war communism into the period of reconstruction. The result was a year of general strikes, over most of industrialised Russia, culminating in the Kronstadt insurrection. This was the suppressed third revolution.

Social disorder on so large a scale produced both a governmental economic retreat of the New Economic Policy but also division within

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[1969, 256pp]

<sup>91</sup> Abel Paz, ; *Durruti, the People Armed* [1976 Montreal, 323pp]

<sup>92</sup> Agustin Guillamon, ; *The Friends of Durruti Group 1937-1939* [1996, 114pp],

the CP USSR. One substantial grouping, later to become the Workers Group, was associated with the long standing Bolshevik, G I Miasnikov. He had shown his colours for some years, being active in the 1905 Upper Volga insurrection and knew Lenin. He was a leading figure in the Urals, and was strong in the Motovilikha works in Perm. Basically a worker, he felt the need to comment on the ideas of leading Bolshevik G Zinoviev in 1920.

#### Real workers councils

His basic concept, echoing that of the ignored Central Council of Factory and Shop Committees some four years earlier, was that the Supreme Council of the National Economy should take over all the main economic functions, with provincial control by the area delegated soviets, lately overruled by Party and Secret Police Cheka, and often effectively derelict.

At the workplace, he proposed Councils of Factory Deputies, CFDs, rather than the somewhat compliant factory committees. These councils would fully participate in workplace management instead of the leninist practice of nominally supervising it, and would liase widely beyond the enterprise in the manner of the Spanish councils some years later.

Miasnikov was in fact publicising the existing model that existed in the Urals area. Workers there had taken over their workplaces in 1917-18 and extended their occupations to total control. CFDs, with their strong anti specialist sentiments, had industrial and geographical power in the locality, and enjoyed rank and file support even in the bureaucratic Communist Party.

Miasnikov was transferred to Petrograd where his hostility seems to have been extended to the privileged lifestyle of some communist leaders. He was linked with the Workers Opposition and like many of the leaders signed the Declaration of Twenty Two, though his platform was power to the workers delegates, not the trade unions.

#### Crisis of the "third revolution"

Back in Perm in 1921, as deputy director at the Motovilikha works, he published "*Some Problems*". Though no copy still exists, according to Paul Avrich this was

- " a crushing indictment of the Communist Party leaders,
- their theories and methods,

- and demanded the abolition of the death penalty,
- with the liquidation of bureaucratic forms of organisation,
- and the transfer of industrial administration to producers soviets, [presumably workplace based].
- It counterposed revolutionary principles to the expedients of the communists Central Committee,
- And proposed freedom of speech for monarchists to anarchists inclusive ".

This is a second hand report, presumably generally accurate but the original still provoked Lenin in a personal intervention to accuse Miasnikov of calling for freedom for the capitalists. He had clearly lost whatever grasp he had of revolutionary politics by this time.

Retribution was not long in coming. Miasnikov's own Communist Party was reported as being split into groups described as "ours" and "theirs", "workers " and "intellectuals" , "rank and file " and "officials" . An attempt to improve wages resulted in financial collapse. In March 1922, he was expelled from the communists. The following year, with others , he issued "The Manifesto of the Workers Group of the Russian Communist Party". This was notable for its characterisation of the NEP as the "New Exploitation of the Proletariat" <sup>93</sup>.

Miasnikov's plan, pragmatically centred on Bolshevik structure, is reminiscent of accounts of the FAI in the Spanish revolution <sup>94</sup>, though his conclusions are arguably not very different from those of the Friends of Durruti <sup>95</sup> . Both are re-statements of the confidence in the capacity of the organised working class to run society.

His fate, despite the clarity of his ideas and the boldness of his initiative, was inevitable. Victor Serge records how he met up with the dissident again in Paris some twenty years later, after deportation to Erivan in Armenia and escape to Turkey. Serge comments, somewhat optimistically, that the emergent totalitarianism "has already gone half way to crushing us" <sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Aves : *Workers Against Lenin ; labour protests and the Bolshevik dictatorship* [1996 220pp] from which this account is drawn.

<sup>94</sup> Stuart Christie, : *We, the Anarchists - a study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927-1937* [2000, 127pp]

<sup>95</sup> Agustin Guillamon : *The Friends of Durruti Group 1937-1939* [ 1996, 114pp]

<sup>96</sup> Victor Serge, ( Victor Kibalchich) : *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941* [ 1967, 401pp]

Modern workers' socialists have a programme *As We See It* reprinted on the back cover which updates council communism, taking much of its politics from the British *Solidarity*.

**Eight** rudimentary international responses. These tend to be not very visible or sporadic but are clearly essential for the completion of the revolution. A full study of these remains to be done, but we can highlight a few examples now

The Russian revolutions of 1917 resulted in the biggest response with countless acts of solidarity all over the world. Perhaps British dockers refusing to load a ship with arms for the White armies is best known. Official attempts to launch organisations to co-ordinate solidarity and to spread the revolution came with the Third Communist International, Comintern or CI, and the Red International of Labour Unions. RILU in 1920-1.

In brief, these were from the start little more than an arm of the Russian government and their actions were closely calibrated to this interest<sup>97</sup>. Both anarchists and council communists soon established their own versions. The CI cynically subverted workers solidarity for two decades until, as a goodwill gesture in 1943, Stalin technically, but not actually, abolished it. The organisation lived on regrettably.

The Spanish revolution produced a huge response in Europe and the aid movement in Britain has been extensively described<sup>98</sup>. George Orwell went to Spain as an International Brigade volunteer and his book, outlined below, tells much about the situation on the ground. There was considerable pressure on the Popular Front government in France about greater support for the Republican government which was predictably deflected.

A less known consequence of the problem faced by the anarchist movement was that it provoked a crisis in the international organisation. Many were disconcerted about the decision both to link with political

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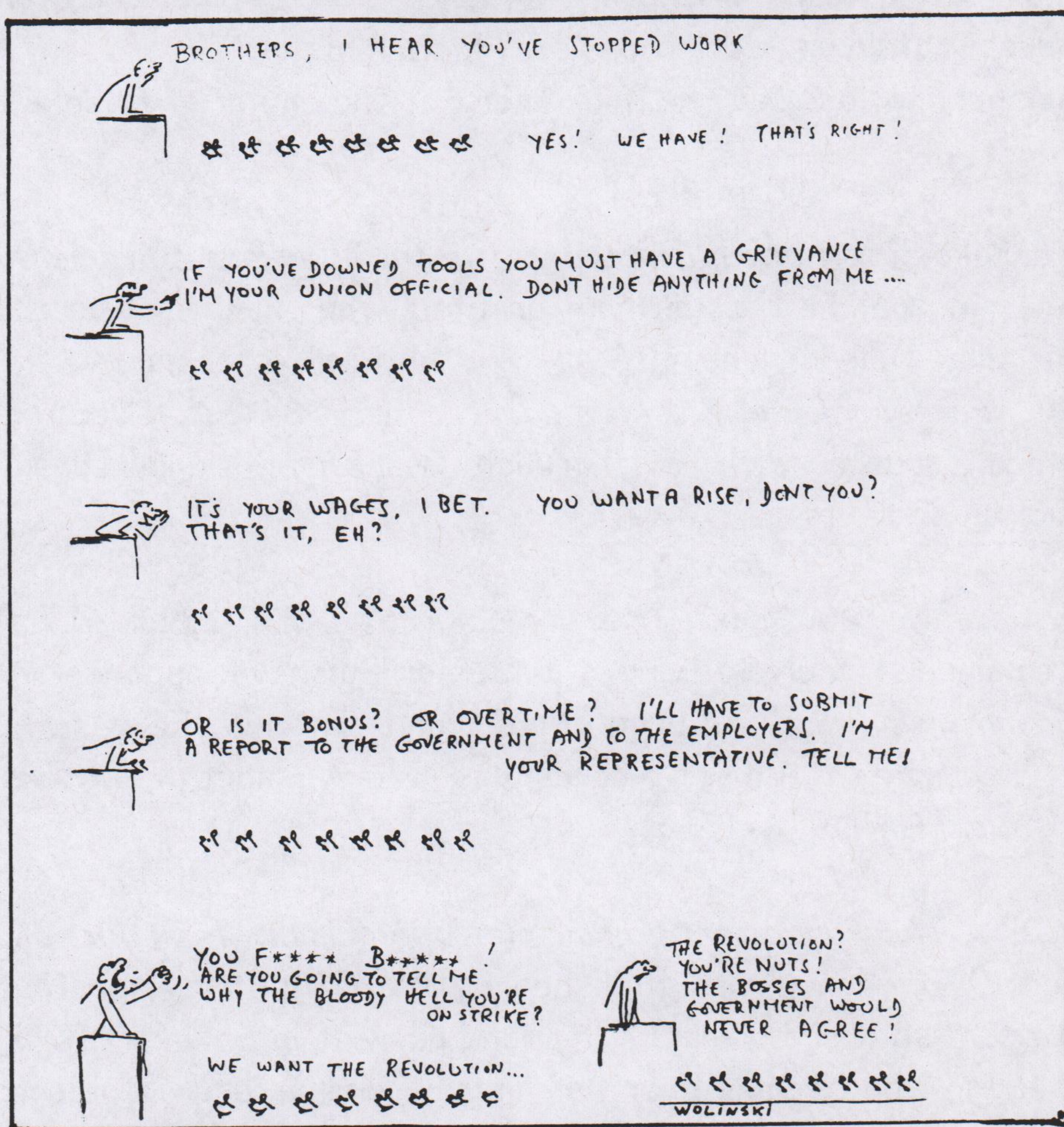
<sup>97</sup> Duncan Hallas: *The Comintern* [1985, 182pp] better than average Leninist publication.

<sup>98</sup> Jim Fyrth : *The Signal was Spain - the Spanish aid movement in Britain 1936-39* [1986, 344pp] extensive but Stalinist.

parties and to participate in government, breaches of anarchist policies. The dilemma is examined below, in the recommendation of Stuart Christie's book on the FAI. Emma Goldman recounts the debates in her books and there is a short account in a recent biography <sup>99</sup>.

The aftermath of the Hungarian revolt has been described in the text but it bears repeating that the disillusionment with the Russians and support for the insurgents had large and dangerous consequences for the international communist, that is state capitalist, movement. Its effect was inspirational.

France 1968 was to have reverberations around the world, well beyond the world of the labour movement <sup>100</sup>. Students in particular were inspired and the events were a further blow to national communist parties. Its ramifications for other political organisations were also substantial but an account of these have not been found.



<sup>99</sup> Alice Wexler: *Emma Goldman in Exile - from the Russian revolution to the Spanish civil war* [1989 USA, 301pp].

<sup>100</sup> see Chris Harman: *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and after* [1988, 405pp] for a comprehensive but leninist account



Some writers and writings on councils and socialism

A summary of selected writers and the publications is not an adequate substitute for a full theoretical account but is all this volume can muster. Theoretical contributions come from both anarchist and marxist sources and attention is drawn to appendix one regarding the problems of the study of these texts.

They fall into three main periods :

- classical contemporary documents covering the introductory phase of the decade following world war one and up to the second world war. The references here include details of biographies.
- books from the euphoric celebrations on the re-birth after the Hungarian workers revolution of 1956,
- modern literature, again from the two main sources, which is illuminating many previously unknown events, going beyond the usual Trotskyist definitions of " hidden history ".

For other publications see the Book Index at the end of the booklet.

One

Anton Pannekoek : *Tactical Differences in the Workers Movement* [1909 , 34pp] in which the author greeted the new movement more systematically than anyone else This article is reprinted in Serge Bricianer : *Pannekoek and Workers Councils* [1978 USA, 306pp] a major biographical source with a thorough assessment and considerable reproduction of texts.

Herman Gorter : *An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* [1999, 41 pp] early council communist reply to Lenin's attack on Bolshevik opponents in *Left Wing Communism*. Still in print today, and contains the basic council socialist arguments. A brief biography is in D A Smart, : *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism* [1978, 176pp].

Jan Appel : *The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production* [1930, and later 1990 when it was published by AK, 589pp] : Appel aka Max Hempel was a shipyard worker, life long activist in Germany (KAPD) and Holland (GIK) who became a writer. This economic and autobiographical text formed the basis of educational work of Dutch councilists in 1930s. Its re publication was prepared by two stalwarts of the anarchist London Workers group, Joe Thomas and Mike Baker. It is possibly abstract and over detailed relating to economic theory in the main body.

The voluminous Notes and Appendixes however provide an invaluable source for workers' socialists.

Henk Canne Meijer : *The Origins of the Movement for Workers Councils*, [1932? & 1972, 44pp] an introductory historical booklet of the workers council movement, originally written for the Dutch GIC has to serve as a biography in the absence of a dedicated book.

Antonio, Gramsci : *Antonio Gramsci - Selections from Political Writings, 1910-1920* ed Quintin Hoare [ taken from *The New Order* 1919 to 21 and reprinted 1977, 393pp] The New Order group tried to bring marxist revolutionary politics to the Italian shop stewards movement in the two red years , as described by Gwyne A Williams : *Proletarian Order* [1975,370pp] dedicated to a murdered anarchist. Carl Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists* [1999, 272pp] and his *Italian Anarchism* [55pp] an outline history, provides an different view, in David Goodway, editor : *For Anarchism - history, theory, practice* [1989, 278pp].

There is no adequate biography of Gramsci.

J T Murphy : *The Workers' Committee - an outline of its principles and structure* [1917, later 1972, 26pp] and the companion volume to W Gallacher and JR Campbell : *Direct Action - an outline of workshop and social organisation* [1972, 32 pp] , Murphy, from a SLP position, writes up shop steward practice, using syndicalist concepts. At the time this was a revolutionary concept but he later joined Stalinism.

A full biography is in Ralph Darlington : *The Political Trajectory of JT Murphy* [1998, 316pp] a leninist account and predictable selective.

Rosa Luxemburg : *Mass Strike - the political party and the trade unions* [ 1907 later 1986, 90pp] a look at the politics of the Russian strike wave at the turn of the century, and the first Russian revolutionary councils of 1905, with wider implications for revolutionary socialism. The emphasis on spontaneity was deeply critical of leninist theory.

Regarding RL herself, the best short introduction is Tony Cliff : *Rosa Luxemburg*, [1959, 90pp] but drastically altered in '68, to reverse the relative importance of Luxemburg and Lenin and subsequently reprinted in the amended form.

A Y Badayev : *Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma* [1929, reprint 1987, 248pp], A stalinist account aimed primarily against the mensheviks who had by this time been long suppressed but containing useful information about the way the Bolsheviks controlled parliamentary representatives. This

could provide a model for the future. The introduction by Tony Cliff is essential. There appears to be little else of interest in Badayev's life .

Rudolf Rocker : *Anarcho Syndicalism* [1937, reprint 1989, 166pp] is both an excellent introductory history of the labour movement and of the aspects of anarchism that contributed to council communism. An innovation in anarchist books, the re print contains an up dated reading list, but still no index Rocker was active in London pre WW1 and in Berlin after it. Here he directed for some years the work of the International Workingmen's Association after its foundation in 1922. He wrote extensively.

There is no biography but Nicolas Walter's piece in the book, and Rocker's own *The London Years* [2005, 228pp] will have to do.

George Orwell ( Eric Blair) : *Homage to Catalonia* [ 1938,250pp], Orwell saw the treachery of the communists as they deflected the Spanish revolutionary movement in the interests of the Russian regime. He recorded his experiences but the original publication was ignored by academic , the media , reformists and of course the CPGB, many of whom continue to attack books or films repeating the message , like Ken Loach's. Orwell was primarily an independent labour journalist, who later wrote anti communist books like *1984* and *Animal Farm*. His anti totalitarianism resulted in a loose association with anarchist ideas, and possibly organisation, as recorded in George Woodcock : *The Crystal Spirit - a study of George Orwell* [1970, 286pp]

The second period produced :

Anton Pannekoek: *Workers Councils* [ Published 1947 in booklet form, reprinted in full in 2003, 219 pp]. The pioneering role of Anton Pannekoek has already been mentioned above and this is his major book, at last reprinted Pannekoek was the main thinker and writer of council communism from the turn of the century up to his death in 1961. His partner Gorter was the activist. Pannekoek's book, systematically ignored by both leninist and conventional sources, remains the standard text for workers' socialists, despite some substantial omissions<sup>101</sup> .

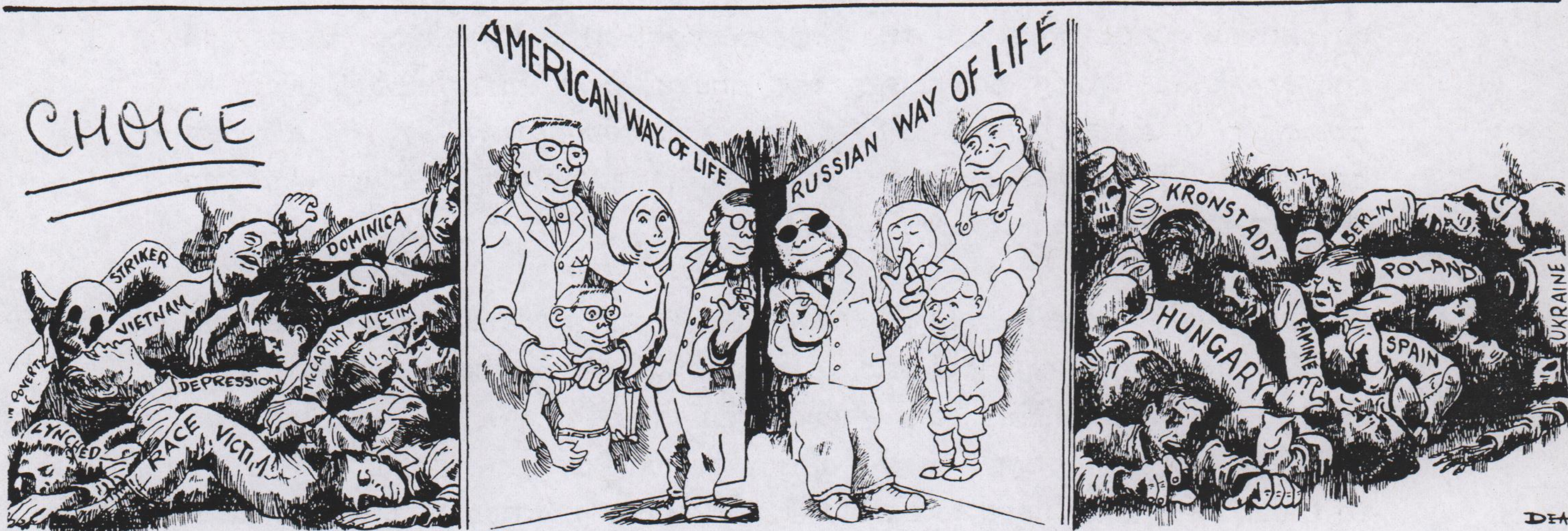
Grace C Lee, Pierre Chaulieu ( Cornelius Castoriadis) and JR Johnson (CLR James) : *Facing Reality : the new society, where to look for it , how to*

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<sup>101</sup> Alan Woodward, review of Pannekoek, Anton : *Workers Councils* [2002, 219pp] in *Freedom* 64/11 ?

*bring it closer* [1958 USA, 174pp] James had moved to the left from orthodox Trotskyism over some years and the revolt of the Hungarian workers councils was to inspire this general book on worker socialism. His colleague Cornelius Castoriadis was active in the French Socialisme ou Barbarie and his writings were to become a mainstay of the British Solidarity. The book was the first publication in English on the subject but James did not it up follow up. Further organisational splits were to follow.

Andy Anderson: *Hungary '56* [1964, 120p] this extraordinary book is preferred to other texts because despite its length it is comprehensive, accurate and politically incisive. It remains in print, being read widely since 1964. It bears repeating that the Hungarian events did enormous damage to world wide communism, inspired further revolts in east Europe and marked the rebirth of workers' socialism.



Maurice Brinton (Chris Pallis): *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-21* [1970, 86pp] A key publication in the new movement, Brinton's careful and fully documented account destroyed any remaining illusions in the nature of Lenin's creation. His account has not been answered by the leninists despite feeble attempts by Harman and Goodey, see *International Socialism* old series no's 49 & 52. The booklet is reprinted in David Goodway, editor: *For Workers' Power - the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379pp] which includes useful accounts of the debate over the original publication,

Victor Serge ( Victor Kibalchich) : *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941* [ 1967, 401pp] His own history - anarchist, bolshevik , trotskyist then independent socialist - was an explicit record of the path taken by unnamed millions. Recording events with a startling honesty, even his mistakes like supporting the Bolsheviks over the Kronstadt suppression, Serge has written perhaps the most important account of the period, supplemented by the best political novels in the library. His other publications include *Year One of the Russian Revolution* [1992, 456pp] : *Revolution in Danger* [1997, 125pp]: *From Lenin to Stalin* [1980, 160pp]: *Destiny of a revolution* [1937, 287pp]; *Birth of Our Power* {1970, 290pp}: *Midnight in the Century* [1982, 250pp]: *Men in Prison* [1977, 257pp]: *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* 1968, 363pp].

Truly , a man for all seasons.

E H Carr : *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917 - 23, Book 1* [1966 , 448pp] the first of three volumes under this heading. Carr wrote reasonably objectively about Russia in the first decade - the 14 volume *History of Soviet Russia* which comprises the above, *The Interregnum 1923-4*, *Socialism in One Country 1924-6*, and *the Foundations of the Planned Economy 1926-9*. A summary of these is in the single volume *Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin 1917- 29*

Gaston Leval (Pierre Robert Piller) : *Collectives in the Spanish revolution*, [1975, 368pp] an encyclopaedic account of some of the collectives with much details unavailable elsewhere even today. Leval was a veteran anarchist reporting back on the authoritarian Russian structure in 1921 to the CNT who refused to affiliate. The brief political analysis repeats the orthodox anarchism of the time with no mention of the sharp dissent in the movement, but his book is irreplaceable regardless.

Finally, a selection of modern literature :

Richard Gombin: *The Radical Tradition - a study in modern revolutionary thought* [1978, 153pp] This looks extensively at the historical roots of workers socialism using both anarchist and marxist sources He does neglect the practical contributions of the former but is admirably international in scope.

Daniel Guerin editor ; *No Gods, no Masters - an anthology of anarchism*, 2 volumes, [1998, 294pp and 276pp] gives historical and documentary evidence of the role of anarchism and anarcho syndicalism . The author

developed over a life through reformism, anti imperialism and Trotskyism to reach libertarian socialism. His main publications are on the rise of the NAZIs , the great French revolution and the best ever introduction to *Anarchism - from theory to practice* [1970, USA, 166pp]. A full biography is eagerly awaited.

Murray Bookchin: *Anarchism, Marxism and the future of the Left - interviews and essays 1993-1998* [1999, 352pp] Passing through the CPUSA and the large trotskyist movement in that country, Bookchin wrote about the environment decades before modern awareness. Latterly his path has followed that of many aging anarchist towards a moderation and liberalism but among his many publications is a study of revolutions in the modern era, in the three volumes, and the recommended text. This includes an analysis of the recent history of the American left before digressing into communalism, and the start of the anti capitalist movement .

Stuart Christie : *We, the Anarchists - a study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927-1937* [2000, 127pp]. One of many recent publications on the Spanish revolution, this well written book examines the role of the political party, FAI, in the anarcho syndicalism movement comprising the labour union of the CNT. For all its shrewdness, it fails to tackle the central contradiction in anarchist theory, so dramatically exposed in 1936, that it does not examine the position where the libertarian movement is too small to organise revolution on its own. In the modern world there is unlikely to be a single movement strong enough to dispense with other groups, so a form of working unity is a priority. Movement chauvinism is itself an obstacle to revolution and like the marxists, the anarchists need some re thinking . The Friends of Durruti showed the way, see above.

Sam Dolgoff editor : *The Spanish Collectives - workers management in the Spanish Revolution 1936-39* [1990 Canada , 194pp]. The veteran anarchist compiled a brilliant outline account of the collectives organisation in town and country based on the effective but not national control, of much of the country. The volume is less comprehensive than Leval above. Despite its theoretical weakness, as in Christie, its detailed description of collectivism in practice answers all the questions from the doubters about how workers' socialism would work. It did happen, in spite of the objections and proved to be a humanitarian , productive and

increasingly equalitarian society, really democratic beyond phoney parliamentary systems. A model for the future.

Colin Barker: *Revolutionary Rehearsals* [1987, 270pp]. There is little material on workers councils and/or socialism but this book provides short accounts, albeit leninist, of their appearance in France, Chile, Poland, Iran, and Portugal. Other books covering episodes in single countries, are :

George Lipsitz: *Rainbow at Midnight* [1994, USA, 359pp] (America) -

Conor Kostick: *Revolution in Ireland* [1996, 239pp]

Phil Mailer: *Portugal, the impossible revolution*, [1977, 399pp]

Ian Clegg : *Workers Self Management in Algeria* [1971, 249pp],

Jean Chesneaux: *The Chinese Labour Movement 1919-27* [1968, 574 pp],

Assef Bayat: *Workers and Revolution in Iran* [1987, 227pp]

Jacques Danos and Marcel Gibelin : *June '36* [1986, 272pp] (France),

Jacques Pesquet : *Soviets at Saclay ?* [1976, 71pp] (France 68)

John Jordan and Jennifer Whitney : *Argentina's Popular Uprising - an eye witness account of the financial meltdown and ongoing grassroots rebellion* [2004, 58pp].

There is a brief account of Iraq councils in the WS bulletin *Declaration 5* [2004].





## Conclusions

A political economy based on collective action by workers own form of control appears only irregularly in history. Academic and orthodox sources tend to ignore it. The three main schools of the labour movement - labourism, marxism and anarchism - have clear political differences but do much the same. The category "hidden from history" could have been coined for workers' socialism.

A diligent and observant student can nevertheless identify the continuing occurrence of workers councils in Argentina , Iraq and Venezuela in this century alone . Development of councils into a realised form somewhere in the world can only a matter of time - a worker managed economy can be predicted for the future.

The fight remains for workers socialists, where ever they are to, keep on keeping on, in what ever area of struggle occurs within the system, as the paragraphs on the back cover outline.



## Appendix one

### Different words, same meaning

Those pursuing this issue will find workers councils referred to by a number of different names in different countries. The expressions workers committees, workers self management, or workers democracy are often used. Confusingly there are two terms which approximate to the idea of workers control in Russian - one for a form of supervision or participation in management and the other for actual management. This led to both linguistic and political disorder, exploited by Bolsheviks in their efforts to abolish independent workers organisation, ( see the section above on 1917.)

Councils in Russia were termed factory or shop committees. The German terms were either arbeiterrate - workers council or betriebsrate - workplace council for the obleute, or shop stewards. In France the expression sometimes used is commune, as in 1871, or later committees of action. These grew from the sections or area committees from earlier revolutionary crises. In 1968 we had action committees and Worker-Student Action Committees.

Spain had many expressions. Collectives and co-operatives were widespread, usually run by comites or workers control commissions if they remained in private hands. Councils were called Enterprise Councils under the government Decree Associated groups that were the result of socialisation were syndicates, or General Industrial Councils. Workers Alliance were united front bodies for anarchists and socialists

In Algeria, there were the conseil de travailleurs for autogestion, or management committees - comites de gestion. In Italy in 1921 the word was internal commissions, or committees of union representatives, then movement of workshop delegates or factory councils. In Ireland in 1921 most revolutionary initiatives were incorrectly called soviets, instead of work ins,

The main book on the Chinese labour movement just describes them as unions, a bit like the old British expression for local activity. The extent of formation beyond this is unknown but the influence of anarcho syndicalists like Shifu was still strong.

In Iran and Iraq, they were shoras. In Chile, the cordón industriale, covering industrial estates, made their power felt. Yugoslavia had BOALs, basic organisations of associated labour, as the basis of the state run, token, pseudo councils

Co-ops and associated councils

A specific form of council is the co-operative, like the kibbutzim in early Palestine/Israeli, before degeneration. The division between councils as councils and collectives was held to more crucial in current Argentina, 2002 and onward.

Neighbourhood committees

Supporting the workplace committees, area bodies based on working class estates have a secondary role, but have emerged more prominently in recent years. Of course historically they go back to the 48 sections in Paris in 1789, which re-occurred in 1848 and 1871. They featured in the KAPD councils in the 1920s in Germany, in France in 1968 and most prominently in the Portuguese events of 1974 as neighborhood councils.

The Iranian workers had their komitehs in the quarters. In Argentina, in the very recent past, the interbarrials far outnumbered the workplace bodies, and local, citywide, regional and national structures were operative. Unemployed piqueteros are active in them.

Associated industrial bases

Many councils began as strike committees, occupations, sit ins, work ins or "Polish/Italian strikes" but this phenomena, in periods of relative stability like modern Britain, does not always go onto the full council. Shop stewards joint committees and combine bodies have been models as in the Lucas Aerospace Joint SSC. In North America rank and file committees and independent associations began a process that remains unfinished. The potent general strike wave against CPUSA run unions, government and employers in 1945-6. little known even at the time was apparently run by union branches or locals <sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> Lipsitz, George : *Rainbow at Midnight* [1994, USA, 359pp]

## Appendix two

### The Gazetteer

We now turn to an outline of the specific subsequent history of workers councils in various countries. The order is alphabetical, not chronological. An overview follows.

### Algeria

The former French North African colony was the scene of a bitter and bloody anti imperialist war, and the new regime under socialist Ben Bella allowed workers to take over deserted workplaces. The workers councils were based on the German supervisory councils model and inspired by the official Yugoslav state run councils. They flourished only briefly in 1962-66 within a state capitalist society, before the Army repressed them and their patron. See Ian Clegg.

### Argentina

Financial collapse under ruinous international interest charges prompted popular revolt in 2001. Working class organisations, veterans in the fight against authoritarian regimes, were supplemented by more prosperous citizens as banks froze personal accounts. Street demonstrations and neighbourhood councils soon grew to national status in the cities. A small wave of worker run institutions, including co-ops, aided by unemployed piqueteros and their blockades, have made up the resistance since then, but in declining dimensions. See Jordan,

### Austria

At the end of world war one in 1918, German workers resistance, aided by a more militant section of the labour party, SDP, prompted the establishment of workers, soldiers and peasants councils. There was little progress towards alternative politics and the councils were gradually incorporated, unlike the more violence fate of their German equivalents. See Gedye.

### Bavaria

Another German province saw the late development of a Workers Republic based on workplace councils, and some peasant committees in 1919. Both marxist and anarchist members were involved. The regime did not last the month. German mercenary troops, directed by an alliance of SDP and the ruling class, broke the Republic and massacred thousands to establish traditional law and order. See Carsten 1972.

Britain

Syndicalist inspired shop stewards, plus an imaginative marxist Socialist Labour Party, built a movement opposing the government's war policies during world war one. It prevaricated over the war itself, which was supported by the official trade unions and labour party. The end of hostilities saw the employers and State revenge, watched passively by official union leaders. Victimization and unemployment broke the Shop Stewards and Workers Committee movement in 1919 and the rump joined the communist party and ran the organisations of the unemployed until 1940. War created full employment and a revival of workplace organisation that lasted for decades. See Challinor 1977 and CLR James (1958)

Chile

Capitalist economics created a crisis leading to the election of the reformist President Allende in 1972. Worker committees soon formed in the industrial areas of cities, and in the neighbourhoods. US interests conspired with the military, and a coup by Pinochet killed the timid Allende but also thousands of workers after 1974. See Gonzales in Barker (1987)

China

Nationalist, anarchist and communist forces combined to oppose the traditional war lord leaders in the 1920s. Workers took control of cities when a liberationary army invaded from the south. Nationalists then turned on the communists and massacred them and the workers council leaders in 1927. Stalin, fighting Trotsky, manipulated the situation, sacrificing more workers in a further hopeless insurrection, but promoting Trotsky's defeat in Russia. The communists retired into internal exile and under Mao Tse Tung fought a long guerrilla war until military victory resulted in a state capitalist regime in 1949. This has repeatedly crushed opposition, most notably at Tianamen Square in 1990. See Chesneaux.

Czechoslovakia

East European workers resisting Stalin's military occupation, rebelled under the liberal President Alexander Dubcek and quickly established workplace councils in factories in 1968. Dubcek was deposed and the councils disbanded by Russian troops comparatively easily. See Fisera (1978).

France

Three major episodes of workers insurrection occurred in 1871, 1936 and 1968 respectively. The first was centred on the Commune in Paris, opposing German troops but massacred by French soldiers. A parliamentary regime, underpinned by the revolutionary National Guard, went down. Secondly a massive general strike and widespread occupation of the factories in 1936 resulted in a communist party led government that progressively sold away all the gains and refused to help revolutionary Spain. The entirely unexpected worker and student revolt in the late 1960s suffered much the same fate due to communist treachery but provoked a revival in the revolutionary movement around the world. Periodic smaller revolts have followed. French union organisation has inspired syndicalism during the century, to become the third section of the workers movement, beside labourism and communism, on an international scale. See Edwards, Danos and Cohn Bendit.

Germany

Military defeat in November 1918. resulted in a colossal wave of workers, soldiers and peasants councils that effectively controlled the country. Sadly the small revolutionary movement was overwhelmed and the reformist labour party, SPD, was allowed to form a political alliance that organised military repression of workers. Communists members split, some organising revolt but others following Lenin's growing conservatism. Half formed the German Workers Communist Party in 1921 based on workers councils while the minority adopted orthodox strategies. Both wings were smashed by Hitler in 1933, who was aided by the party chauvinism of both communists and labour party. Council communist ideas survived and form the core of modern workers' socialism - an industrial council base supported by a non dominant revolutionary party. See Carsten (1972).

Hungary

The most significant revolt by Russian occupied workers in 1956 was characterised by a re birth of workers councils, and liberatory socialism. Organised military resistance held the Russian soldiers for days before the tank warfare led to the disbandment of the councils. The aftermath split the world communist movement and it never fully recovered. Modern revolutionary movements date from 1956, promoted initially by writers like CLR James. See Anderson.

Iran

The ruling Shah, corrupt and controlled by the USA, was overthrown by workers shoras and neighbourhood committees. Sadly the revolution was hijacked by muslim fundamentalists who massacred and repressed in the old style. Saddam Hussein fought an internationally backed war from Iraq against the new regime anyway, when he was the darling of USA and Britain despite the killings. There are still occasional shora revolts.

See Payanonnis in Barker (1987 )

Ireland

Workers revolutionary syndicalism was a strong component in the nationalist forces that defeated the British troops 1920-22. Industrial action proved as powerful as armed revolt, with over 100 workplaces occupied. Once again, the new regime in the south and the old one in the north used violence and religious ideology to disperse the movement. See Kostick.

Italy

A strong syndicalist movement, aided by Antonio Gramsci's marxist group, pushed reformist union leaders into extensive factory occupations, firstly in Turin and later nationally. Labour party action, both within the revolt and in parliament, diverted the struggle, isolating the shop stewards in 1921. The labour party subsequently split, many going into the communists. Fascism was adopted by the ruling class, and all the left was crushed. Italian workers have exploded into street revolts and action committees after 1945 and 1969 but the legacy of communism precluded united action. See Levy (1999.)

Israel

For a brief period around 1935, workers co-ops, or kibbutzim, coalesced around a form of collective socialism. Nationalism quickly dominated the anti imperialist struggle and began its own form of oppression of the native Arabs, despite the lessons of the Holocaust. The rest is history, with Zionism triumphant, favoured by US aid, legitimising authoritarian Arab rulers and separately victimising Arab people. Nothing socialist remains, beyond courageous individuals against a terror State. See Orr in Solidarity 7/2

Poland

With a long history of Jewish anarchism and workers' revolt, the Polish labour movement was prominent against Russian occupation from 1956. By

1980, workplace organisation, aided by crude religious ideology, launched a big move against the Red Army, a puppet Polish government, and phoney workers councils. Solidarnosc, or Solidarity, set up their own structures but political organisation did not measure up to its industrial counterpart. The repression delayed retribution by less than a decade, but any hope of workers' socialism has been smothered by burgeoning capitalism and the EC. See Barker (1986)

#### Portugal

A quite unexpected rebellion by Army conscripts against a corrupt semi fascist regime in 1974 was used by workers to liberate their workplaces, estates and neighbourhoods. Despite some rapid independent growth, the dominant communist politics was eventually replaced by a predictable labour party and curiously non violent counter revolution. Indigenous syndicalism was encouraged by the liberation, but reformisms won. See Mailer.

#### Russia

Three revolutions - in 1905, 1917 and 1921 - had different results. The first, also the birth of mass workers power, was crudely repressed. The second, initially victorious, was instantly hijacked by the Party Communism of Lenin and Trotsky, etc. Capitalist military intervention subsequently weakened the political resources and consolidated opposition. Anarchist resistance remained. By 1921, continued war communism polarised opinion and industrial unrest around the demand for 'soviets without bolsheviks' was widespread. General strikes, peasant uprisings and the Kronstadt insurrection among revolutionary sailors, was reflected by internal Party opposition. Lenin, Trotsky, and later Stalin, trampled on them all as revolutionary socialism was replaced by state capitalism. Trotsky's belated left opposition joined the victims during midnight in the century. Russia joined the repressors of liberty, where it suited their national interest, around the world. See Anweiler, Steven A Smith (1983) and Aves.

#### Spain

The traditional rulers, threatened by popular revolt, were rescued by a fascist military mutiny which was immediately suppressed by a workers insurrection in half the country in July 1936. Anarcho syndicalists faced a choice of joining other groups (reformists) or running their own social revolution, which was not within their ideological framework. At ground level, anarchist organisation plus more moderate socialist workers

formed collectives to run industrial and rural workplaces, within a socialised economic and political structure. Welfare services were also transformed in this longest and most extensive revolution on record. The chosen parliamentary leadership + nominal anarchists was gradually subverted by the reformist communists, boosted by Russian arms. The social revolution was abandoned but the fascists with German and Italian militaries finally won in 1939. The Spanish revolution pre figured the second world war, brought disaster to anarchism but remains as a shining example of working class ability to run their society for some years. See Christie (2000) and Dolgoff (1990).

### Yugoslavia

Tito's communist partisans fought off the German NAZIs but quickly fell out with Stalin's grand plans for a Russian empire, post 1945. The resulting boycott was met with plans for a revival of workers councils, run officially, both to boost production and consolidate nationalism. Even so this experiment provided useful information, institutions and inspiration internationally for all but card carrying communists. It was the first defeat for Stalinism. Over three decades, the institutes for worker participation were absorbed piecemeal into the regime's market socialism, before post Tito nationalism destroyed the hard won unity. The resulting war was as disastrous as any. See Singleton in Coates, Topham, & Brown.

### Overview of the experience

A summary of these histories promotes certain conclusions. Councils have been associated not only with defensive opposition to capitalism and imperialism, fascism and military rule, but also to social democratic and Stalinist governments. Councils owe their emergence to a number of situations, singly or in combination. One of these is as an anti war body - classically Russia in 1917. A second element could be as a defence mechanism against declining or low material living standards - Russia 1917, Germany and Austria, 1918, Italy 1919, and possibly France 1968.

Thirdly councils were set up as a move against the fascists or right wing military rule - Spain 1936, France 1936, Portugal 1974, Chile 1973, Iran 1979 and Argentina in 2002. Councils have been part of national liberation struggle - Ireland 1919, China 1927, Algeria 1962, and Iran 1979.



A series of councils were set up by workers against oppression by Stalinism in East European states - Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1969 and Poland 1981. Interestingly Communist governments have established puppet councils as part of their conflict with the Russian Communist regime - by Yugoslavian Communist leader Tito in 1950, and the Poles in 1956 also against Stalinism. There were elements of this in the Czech councils in 1969<sup>103</sup>.

### Repression

Councils have appeared in numerous countries and in numerous forms but of course many go unrecorded. Capitalism strenuously opposes councils even on a modest scale and has an ongoing strategy for them. One tactic is to isolate them from other workers, and/or reduce them to consultative committees by legal or management action.

A second is to have them, or their leaders politically incorporated into the reformist structures of the trade unions, "Communist" or Labour parties. In the special case of Iran, the incorporation was into the Fundamental Islamic State.

Thirdly, comes the use of unemployment as a weapon to victimise active shop stewards, or to reduce their negotiating power, while retaining their outward form. Perhaps the final option is physical dissolution, arrests, imprisonment, etc., with China 1926/7 as paramount. Combinations can be found in the history of councils and the class struggle in the twentieth century.

### Causes and consequences

To date, councils have not for a variety of reasons been able to develop their organisation to a position of strength and have been defeated by repression by capitalism West and East. This has been by a variety of institutions.

Even the briefest survey of political councils shows that they have been established by workers but beaten by reformist or Labour governments - Germany and Austria in 1918, Portugal 1975, Algeria 1962. Military force has been liberally used - Germany and Bavaria 1919, Italy 1920, Ireland 1921, China 1927, Germany 1923, Spain 1936 to 39, Hungary 1956,

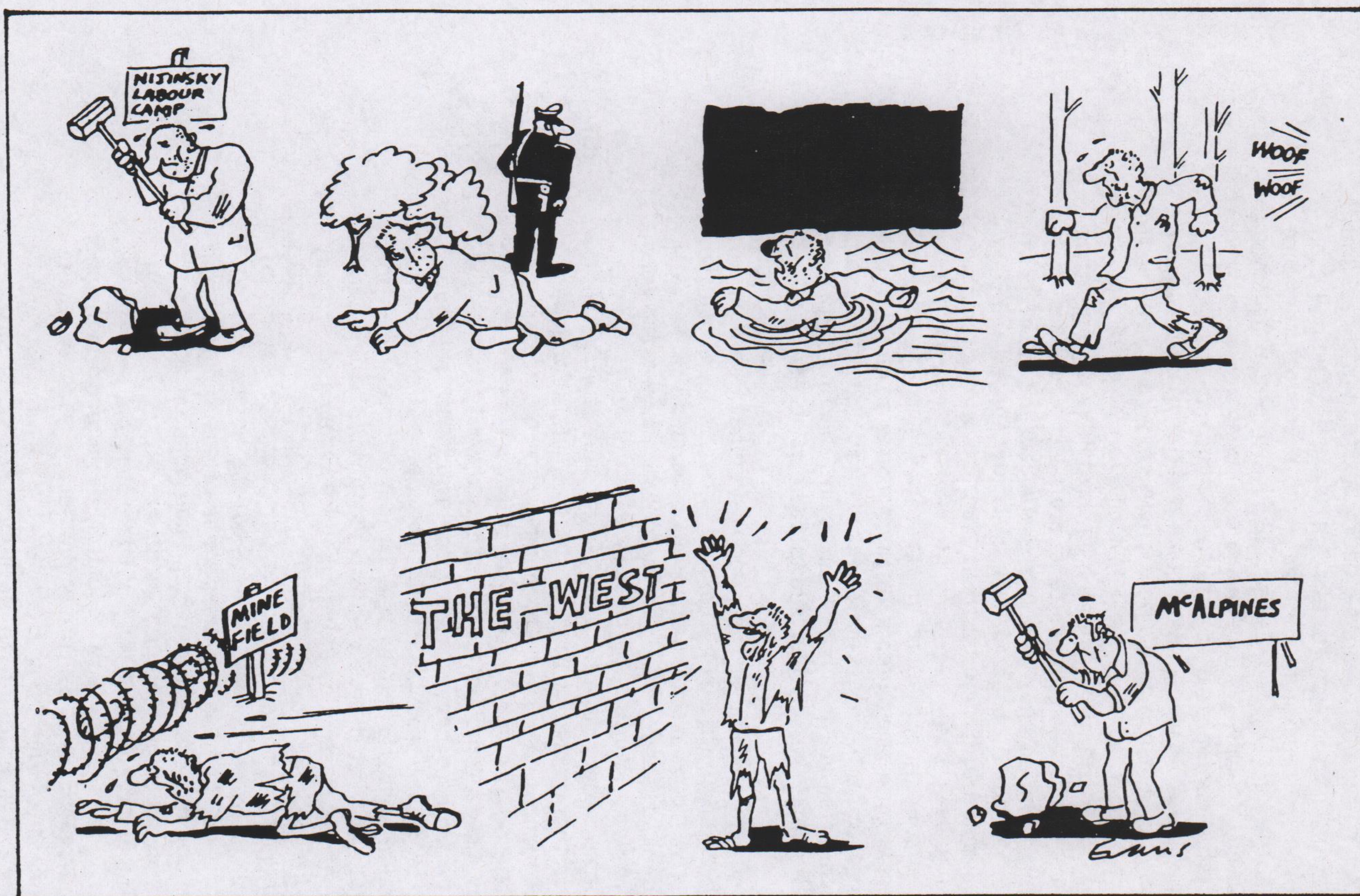
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<sup>103</sup> for reading references on individual movements of workers councils, see Alan Woodward, : *Readers Guide to Workers' socialism* [2003, 30pp].

Portugal 1975, Algeria 1964, Chile 1973, Iran 1979, Poland 1982, and so on. The workers in the National Guard, a key element in the Paris Commune in 1871 with their soldiers councils were similarly slaughtered in the thousands.

Those who have proclaimed themselves as "Communists" have either defused councils - France 1936 and 68, and formally repressed them by government action - Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1969 and Poland 1982. Stalinism was also actively opposed to the Spanish councils from 1936 to 1938.

Whatever the quarrel with Lenin, it was of course in quite a different dimension to the gross repressions of the later Stalinist regimes. Workers councils have foundered on the politics of the so called Communist Party, with its treacherous double role as leader but betrayer of the movement for workers power. Its adoption of reformist politics, driven by the search for defence of the USSR, has been fatal to several generations of rebellion, and possibly revolution.



## Appendix Three Workers control in practice

Extracts from a life long engineering worker writing about the organisation in some factories which are typical of the element of workplace control. Reg Wright's article "*The Gang System in Coventry*" appeared in *Anarchy 2* in 1961, predicting a new society.

THE GANG SYSTEM AS OPERATED IN COVENTRY is modern and yet traditional. Its roots lie among the bloody-minded craftsmen who, centuries ago, sent the King to hell—and paid for it afterwards. They worked in *groups*—guilds. Later on in Coventry there was a prosperous ribbon-weaving industry. Semi-domestic *groups* by the thousand sent beautiful silk ribbons, flags and banners all over the world. My grandmother started work at 6 years of age, winding silk for the weavers. She told me: "We didn't look upon it as 'work'—we enjoyed it." She also carried tea (an expensive luxury) to the weavers. Ribbons were followed by watch manufacture. Again highly specialised family and neighbour *groups* made the various parts of the watches which were assembled by the master-watchmakers—who also worked in *groups*. It was all very informal and satisfying. The watchmakers always had a 'Saint Monday'—boozing all day, taking Tuesday to get over it, and working Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Saturday morning they "cleaned up the shop". They grew most of their own food, kept pigs and fowl, grazed horses and cows on the commons (which were never enclosed—only built on in recent years), and nearly always married young—not because they had to, but because they liked it. Watchmaking died out from lack of standardisation—undersold by machine-made watches. The making of parts was highly specialised, but to make a cheap product an elaborate system of standards and gauging was necessary, as in engineering today. (Peter Kropotkin described a similar set-up among the Swiss watch-case makers of Jura—how they sat around and worked and talked and were natural anarchists).

Next came the manufacture of sewing machines, and then bicycles. Inventions by the thousands, mostly by unknown men, made bicycle-making into a precision manufacture, one of the bases of production engineering as we now know it. Again men formed groups around the job. Mechanics came from all over England and they learned that group work paid. As employers became capitalistic, groups were

broken up, but they always re-formed, and re-demonstrated their virtues. And so it has continued to the present day: right through the making of cycles, motor-cycles, cars, aeroplanes and machine tools, there has been a continuous warfare between the group idea and the individualistic-minded employer and his officials. Those firms today which have the knack of the gang system have a huge advantage over the others. Wages are higher (which attracts better workers), they turn out a good product, make larger profits and are very adaptable. Technical methods and tools used are the same in the American type mass-production plant, *but* the human aspect is vastly different. Each worker contributes an effort, and idea, a pooling of knowledge and experience that is not readily forthcoming in the autocratically managed plant. Work is easier and people are happier. This is *not* a eulogy of capitalism—there are rows—fierce disputes that break the monotony of regular work. Disputes are often due to the clash of opposite mentalities—middle-class individualism in management *versus* working-class collectivism. Domestic disputes between gang members are settled on the spot—purely private scraps! Idle people are very severely dealt with by their mates—*never* from above. There is no 'idealistic' talk about these things, but the benefits are obvious. Rough talk and aggressive attitudes are usually poses—the real man underneath is usually quite reasonable. People rarely leave and the labour turnover is very small indeed. There are no secrets about earnings or wage rates—everybody knows all about everyone else. The facts of output required and achieved are common knowledge. A car model will be in production for five years or more, a tractor for ten. Regular work, year in year out is thus essential—which can be horribly monotonous for certain temperaments.

One of the compensations can be the company of other people. In addition to the firm's own social club activities, most gangs organise their own, some of them surprising. The firm's official sick-club *reduces* the amount of benefit paid to members as an illness is extended. To counter this each gang pays an increasing amount to the person as the period grows longer, on the basis that "the longer he is away from work the more his need grows". In another firm a man has been away in a mental hospital for over five years—he is still a gang member, recognised by the management and the trade union. The latter grants his wife periodic sums from surplus funds—the firm can provide for his rehabilitation should he be cured. He still *belongs*.

In another works, sheet metal workers were making car wings by hand (for high-class sports cars) and one man spoiled fifty—a week's work—through misreading a drawing. The gang had a meeting, took the foreman out to a pub, fifty men made one wing apiece, the scrap ones were 'lost' and no-one was any the wiser. The middle-class works manager would have had a baby had he known, but the gang saved him the inconvenience. There are thousands of such stories that could be told daily. This is the natural cohesion of workers when they are not stampeded by clever and cunning people. They don't profess to

be good—just ordinary. Girls and boys enjoy ganging-up and so do men and women. And in Coventry the gang system has been *forced upon* employers who, at first reluctant, now concede it. But each new generation of clever young managers has to relearn the same old lessons. They start off determined to “put the men in their place” and end by accepting the gang system—even boasting about it as though it were their own creation.

Gangs are self-recruiting, nearly all new members being “recommended” to a trade union for the formalities. ‘Green’ labour (*i.e.* people with no special skill) is put on simple repetitive jobs and when the stage of boredom is reached are moved to increasingly complex operations. In effect the man or woman serves an apprenticeship of sorts while earning full pay as a gang member. No distinction is made between them *as people*. They are all paid the same regardless of skill. The clever man will do the clever job—because he can, and because he likes it. The not-so-clever (or even stupid) man will do the job that is within his powers. It has been proved long ago, that distinctions cause much more trouble than they are worth. Both management and men are agreed on this. Such agreement is tacit. These things I describe are not even mentioned—they have become social custom, commonplaces. Melman in his work continually refers to the excellence of the gang system but the fundamentals of it, the human sense of it seems to be beyond him.

The whole method has evolved directly *from the work*, from the human and technical need for co-operation. The tough men who have given their whole lives to it have seized on every significant thing or event and turned it to their purpose, *our* purpose. Bit by bit a new form of industrial society is being built. However bad it may still be, it is far better than most autocratic systems and it teaches people better ways by practice and not by exhortation. When the gang system has worked out and stabilised a new step forward, then the local trade union officials come in and register the facts in an official agreement with the firm. One such man (known to me personally as a very clever negotiator) stepped in and formalised the entire scheme at the Standard works. It was a major achievement, and would have been, at the highest professional level. This man was self-taught, in workshop and trade union. There are *some* trade union leaders who try to claim credit for themselves for all that is done—they don’t deceive *us* but the newspapers lap it up. *They* think and write of trade unions as the *leaders*, whereas in reality the achievements are those of the members and their ideas.

Technically the gang system is a method of payment for piecework—a form of collective contract. In *practice* it follows the natural tendency of men to group up around the job. Gangs can be of any size from three to three thousand—the latter being the approximate size of the Ferguson tractor team. Half-a-million tractors were turned out in ten years with practically no supervision—one gang for the entire works and yet there was still the piecework urge—still the initiative from

below, in addition to the technical progress from above. This is the essential difference between the Midlands attitude to the job and the uniform and fixed wage system elsewhere, especially in the south of England. In the Midlands the *men* have the initiative and are the driving force—the rest of the staff have to keep pace, to provide for and assist the production team. Everything is done to make the job easier, every hint and suggestion from whatever source is heeded and used if possible—especially if it takes the strain from the job.

Thus men’s energies are conserved for other things than work. But it is still work! Automation is a misnomer—there is just continuous production, some automatic, some semi-automatic, and much of it by hand. Greed is abolished because any increase in wages or betterment of conditions is due, and is *known* to be due, to the men’s own effort and creative ideas. The result of continuous struggle and creative effort is *seen* in the finished product and enjoyed *via* the pay packet. People of lethargic temperament may loathe and dread the very idea of all this, but the workers concerned “don’t die on the job”. Neither do they worry or conjure up images of destruction. They are vigorous and healthy and are busy home-making and rearing families.

In other factories *small* gangs may be grouped around a machine that is being built, or an aeroplane component. In a car factory it will be a production line, or a group of machines. When the product is very complex and costly and is produced in small numbers the gangs will be very clever in adapting their skills to a variety of jobs. Individual skill of a very high order will be applied to a prototype and to the first few production ‘jobs’. The individual will be guaranteed his money by the gang while he undertakes exploratory work—others will follow him, each taking a portion of the work and becoming specialists in it, while others will improvise special tools and gadgets to make it into a “production job”. The variety of work and gangs is infinite.

The gang system sets men’s minds free from many worries and enables them to concentrate completely on the job. It provides a natural frame of security, it gives confidence, shares money equally, uses all degrees of skill without distinction and enables jobs to be allocated to the man or woman best suited to them, the allocation frequently being made by the workers themselves. Change of job to avoid monotony is an easy matter. The “gaffer” is abolished and foremen are now technicians called in to advise, or to act in a breakdown or other emergency. In some firms a *ganger* will run, not the men, but the *job*. He will be paid out of gang earnings, and will work himself on a small gang. On a larger gang he will be fully occupied with organisation and supply of parts and materials. A larger gang may have a deputy ganger as a second string and also a *gang-steward* who, being a keen trade unionist or workers’ man, will act as a corrective should the gangers try to favour management unduly or interfere with the individual in undesirable ways. Gang meetings are called, as necessary, by the latter and all members of the gang are kept informed and

may (and do) criticise everything and everybody. All three are subject to recall. Constructive ideas on the other hand are usually the result of one or two people thinking out and trying out new things—this is taking place continuously—to the general advantage of the whole gang.

The fact of taking responsibility in any of these capacities is educative in every sense, and I have often been amused to see someone who is a notorious "gaffer's man" being persuaded into taking the gang steward position which will bring him into contact with other stewards whose ideas he will unconsciously absorb. He will attend meetings with management representatives at all levels and usually completely changes his ideas. Experienced stewards, with grim humour call this "educating the so-and-so's!" Some stewards have been known to use variants of this method in educating management representatives.

Similarly in car factories. A gang of 100 or more will have a *charge-hand* paid by the management. He will stand out from the gang, only working in the event of difficulty arising—any hold-up or breakdown. The *gang-steward* will stand out with him and settle with him all points of difference on the gang's behalf. He also will work as necessary. Sometimes they are idle (educating each other!) and at other times they will work like fiends, to keep the flow of work going.

Gang stewards form a reservoir from which *senior* stewards are recruited. There are thousands of such men and they are quite often engineering experts, usually holding their own with any rate-fixer, cost expert or other managerial type. Occasionally fools are appointed—the blustering wordy windbag—the 'rebel' who just fights—and the exponent of an ideology. Some ideologists are first-rate stewards but do not realise that their actions may be the reverse of their ideological aims.

There are many local variants of the scheme—some good, some indifferent. As in any other aspect of life, much depends on the quality of the people concerned, and on their experience. Ideas (that is, theories or ideological or political standpoints) do not enter into any of it—a person can think what he likes, say what he likes, *except* that he does not *do* anything against the gang or the trade union. He is expected to be a trade union member—even if only as an outward and visible sign of toughness. In terms of the old working-class motto, "he is either with us or against us". There is no half-way. Incentives are three: to get as high a rate of pay as possible (depending on output), having achieved a certain stability in that, there is a general urge to speed up production gradually so that hours of work can be reduced. The final aim (a continuously successful process) is to make the job itself, and the surroundings, as good as possible.

All these urges are *everyone's* concern. In such a production set-up it is natural that people in full health and vigour are needed, and sickly people are strongly advised not to take a job there. In a temporary indisposition it is usual for the person to be given some help, or if that is not possible; a transfer to a light job that is not urgent.

Most of this has been forced upon employers, but one must give

credit to those managers who have genuinely tried to help the urge to better conditions. On the other hand one frequently finds amongst managers a tendency to "swing to the right". This may be the result of a new director or manager coming in from the outside, usually from firms with American ideas; occasionally he will have a strong political (Conservative) urge. Sooner or later he shows his hand—forthright and dictatorial. From that moment the "worker decision-making" apparatus works against him. His "education" commences. Once I finalised the process by warning the particular manager "You must always remember that a thousand men will wear *you* out quicker than you can wear *them* out". It worked. The moment something actually happens or is pending, there is a ferment right through the plant and the decision-making is carried out at shop-floor level, even to the point, if necessary, of contradicting or disowning the stewards' proposals.

It is difficult to convey in writing a whole way of industrial life, a subtle, yet obvious, development of capitalism, a different and better way of running large-scale industry. It is better—a vast improvement—a continuance of an age-old method in a modern setting. *It has all those elements that could develop into a successor to capitalism.* I can imagine some clever people dismissing all this as nonsense, mere sentimental drivel, etc., and going on to *prove* that it is only a temporary thing that could be wiped out when required, by a powerful managerial capitalist class, etc., or that when "the slump" comes and the workers are thrown out on the streets, etc. (all of which is outmoded thought). My answer is that if "disaster" comes to capitalism, we have at least done some preliminary rehearsing for the new play we may be called upon to produce. If capitalism goes on for a long time without disaster, we shall have tried to make life as good as we can for as many people as we can. If there is some day a general desire to push capitalism over, we shall do our share. I think we are quite as clever as the "intellectuals", only we have applied ourselves to the daily task instead of to theoretical disputation. As engineers we have changed the world, as social engineers we have improved our part of it as much as we can. We feel that we are reasonably well-equipped to go very much further, and if we do we shall need the co-operation of all those technicians and organisers who are at present on "the other side", and we know that *some* of them are already with us.

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## Workers' Socialism : As We See It

### One - Build the working class

The primary role of socialists who want to promote worker socialism is to work for the

- formation,
- development,
- unity, and
- co-ordination of working class resistance to capitalism on a day to day basis. Throughout the world, the vast majority have no control over their lives and merely sell their labour power while others, who own or control, accumulate wealth and use the State to perpetuate and reinforce their privileged position.

Two - In practice this means in the first instance building rank and file committees in all structures especially the workplace. The traditional programme of rank and file at the workplace, as developed over many years of struggle, and involving membership control of all full time union officials and their structure, is often the starting point of this process.

Three - Resistance will result in the achievement of reforms in economic, social and political systems and these will, conversely, add to greater levels of social control. Though our aims are for the revolutionary transformation of existing society by collectivity forms, the embryo of the new society is to be found in the working class organisation of today.

### Four - The political struggle

It is essential to the advancement of socialism that political organisation and co-ordination is practised at every level and in every field. The contest is political but organisation, comprising the most active and committed comrades, should be soundly rooted in the basic structures of the class.

Five - The agenda is that of encouraging meaningful activity, that is, whatever increases confidence, autonomy, initiative, control, and self activity. Negative action is that which re-inforces passivity, apathy, cynicism, alienation, differentiation and reliance on others to do things.

Six - A revolutionary party which is separately structured and based on a Party interests alone, will only weaken and split the workers movement at the most critical times.

Seven - The effectiveness of a revolutionary party is more important than its size and that means a programme of education, co-ordination and study is an integral part of its existence. The role is to guide, advise, co-ordinate, organise the group's work.

Eight - This approach rejects the politics of Leninist parties which emphasis exclusively the building of the dominant leadership revolutionary party, and also the politics of those forms of anarchism which reject the idea of collectively controlled and directly accountable organisers.

### Nine - Things to do

Socialists are most able to promote their aims by being active and unionised members of a workplace, and standing as delegates in that capacity. This is a primary agitational function, even for those who chose to become politically active, and one that cannot be neglected in favour of "politics".

Ten - Outside this, workers socialists may be active in -

- organisations fighting racism and including discrimination against asylum seekers,
- the defence of the welfare state against closure, cuts and privatisation,
- anti-war campaigns, and other fields including possible electoral work at some stage.

The promotion of socialists ideas, perspectives and literature, is an integral part of the this activity.

Eleven - Activity in such bodies assumes the positive acceptance of organisational responsibility rather than the blatant use of "interventions" in public meetings to recruit membership. People will become politically active members on the basis of the practice and ideas of existing socialists, rather than lectures or speeches.

Twelve - The revolutionary party needs its own meetings, organisation and literature. Flexibility, initiative and imagination, within the boundaries of workers movement, are the obvious assets. A bulletin "Declaration" will be published quarterly.

