

# Red & Black Notes

## The ABCs of Class Struggle

Not with a bang *or* a whimper, but with a press conference. After many months of speculation about how the Ontario labour movement would continue the fight against Tory Premier Mike Harris and his Progressive Conservative government, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) finally announced its fall strategy. Contrary to a resolution passed at its convention last year calling for a general strike to bring down the Harris government, the OFL announced it would do... nothing. Perhaps, not strictly nothing, but the closest thing to doing nothing. It would, ho hum, mount an offensive to defeat the Tory Premier at the ballot box, thus admitting it was unable or unwilling to defeat Harris through other measures. A far cry from the militant rhetoric labour leaders spouted at the eleven "Days of Action" across Ontario over the past two and a half years.

Although, the announcement was greeted with groans of disbelief, few could really have been surprised by the turn of events. Throughout the course of the "Days of Action" the ranks grew fewer and the speeches less angry. At the fourth such rally, in Peterborough in 1996, then-OFL leader Gord Wilson loudly proclaimed that if necessary, everything up to and including a general strike to defeat Harris. In reality this meant everything possible would be done to avoid a general strike. In

the earliest Days of Action, the New Democratic Party, (NDP) the previous Ontario government, which drew the ire of labour and solidarity activists for its decision to break collective agreements with public servants, was banished from the platform. But recently the party had begun to re-appear. Indeed, sections of the labour leadership wanted then there from the beginning.

In St. Catharines on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1998, the NDP was front and centre. Moreover it was now openly acknowledged that the strategy was the ballot box. CUPE leader Sid Ryan, who often uses in radical language, now spoke of the need to defeat Harris at the ballot box. In other words vote NDP. Reportedly the decision not to stage actions in the Fall, was unopposed within the OFL leadership.

But is it really such a surprise? The trade union movement is often criticized by leftists for not being revolutionary. The criticism is misplaced. The OFL and similar bodies do not claim to be revolutionary. Their stated aim is to provide for the well being of their membership. Collective bargaining often involves class struggle tactics, such as strikes and factory occupations but it need not necessarily do so.

A second misconception which must be dealt with is the idea that this leadership is holding back workers and without the labour lieutenants of capital Harris would have been defeated. The fact remains that many Ontario workers support Harris provincially and vote for the Reform Party Federally.

In the months that come it will necessary to re-examine some of the myths that surround the labour movement and the working class in Ontario and elsewhere. Only by facing reality squarely in the face will we be able to move forward.

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# Workers Solidarity Network Manifesto

The Workers Solidarity Network is a diverse network of labour and community activists from across North America who are united by the strong desire to engage in sustained international labour solidarity.

In this era of increasingly globalized capitalism, the Workers Solidarity Network is founded on the premise that there is an urgent need to promote working class solidarity without borders. The Workers Solidarity Network believes this need is conditioned by the radical changes taking place in the way work is being organized and the ever more rapid pace of economic restructuring on a global scale.

The Workers Solidarity Network seeks to unite our efforts with all those who share both our desire to promote international working class solidarity and our firm conviction that the liberation of the working class can only be the deed of the working class itself and not any political party or movement. Some of our supporters are members of other organizations; some not. The issue that draws us together is the vision of overall class solidarity and the recognition of the necessity of working class self-emanicipation.

The Workers Solidarity Network accordingly extends our hands in solidarity to all those in this struggle either on strike or locked-out, carrying out solidarity work, fighting racism, sexism and heterosexism within the workers' movement.

The Workers Solidarity Network's rallying cry is simple and clear: *The World Is Our Picket Line!*

The WSN arose out of solidarity tours around the Liverpool dockers' and Detroit newspaper workers' strikes and various e-mail discussions. The WSN has so far worked on three solidarity tours. The first involved two members of the Liverpool dockers solidarity group Women of the Waterfront. The tour visited four Canadian provinces in November of 1997 and raised over \$40,000. The second saw striking/locked out newspaper workers from Detroit tour both the US and Canada. More recently a worker from the Han Young plant in Mexico has toured the west coast of the United States and Canada. Plans are currently underway for a second more extensive tour featuring Han Young workers. To find out more information about the tour or about the WSN contact the WSN web site at

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5202/wsn.html>



In this issue of Red & Black Notes the usual reviews section has been omitted for reasons of space. The next issue will be largely given over to reviews of various books and periodicals received over the last few months. If you have something you would like reviewed, please send it to the address on the back cover.





# Flint Settlements Settle Nothing

UAW President Steve Yokich remarked that he didn't think anybody won in the settlements ending strikes at two GM plants in Flint, Michigan. This was an unusually candid and truthful remark from a union leader accustomed to claiming, as he did at Caterpillar, that every settlement the UAW reaches is a union victory.

The strike settlements at Flint bought the UAW some time before GM facilities slated either for closure or sale will face the axe or the auction block again. The same settlements bought GM what its chief negotiator called "significant productivity improvements." Nonetheless, these "productivity improvements" impressed neither Wall St. nor auto industry analysts who continue to insist that GM must extract much more from the UAW in order to facilitate the elimination of 50,000 jobs in its North American Operations (excluding Mexico where GM employment levels continue to rise).

The fact of the matter is we have just watched history repeat itself. In February 1996 GM endured a crippling seventeen day UAW strike at its operations in Dayton, Ohio and ended up with a settlement it could have achieved at the beginning of that strike. GM has just endured a fifty-three day strike and ended up with a settlement it could have reached early in the dispute. And, once again, the UAW resolved next to nothing other than a few local issues. This is the case because these strikes did next to nothing to halt or even deter GM's drive to outsource and downsize that led to them in the first place. Indeed, GM can be expected to accelerate its North American-wide efforts to outsource and downsize in order to recover the losses it has suffered and still achieve its long term goal of being as lean and competitive as any of its competitors.

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Continued confrontation and conflicts are inevitable unless the UAW is prepared to completely acquiesce and watch its membership base in the auto industry continue to shrink. Continued confrontation and conflict between GM and the UAW are certain for one very compelling reason. The UAW is an industrial union that was born in the context of the emergence of the mass production system created by Henry Ford. The UAW's development, its structure and most importantly, its collective agreements were, accordingly, tailored to the mass production system. But the simple fact of the matter is that the mass production system has become effectively obsolete. It has been completely superseded by the worldwide implementation of the lean system of production and the emergence of even more ominous phenomena like Agile Manufacturing and Ignacio Lopez's "Factory of the Future" where outside contractors locate on the same site where the final assembly of vehicles takes place.

GM has abandoned the mass system of production and is committed to becoming a lean and even an agile corporation. That is why GM incessantly demands more and more operational flexibility and "productivity improvements" from the UAW and expects the lethal contract concessions which make these things possible. And that is why GM's drive to outsource and downsize and dramatically shrink its UAW workforce will not stop. Consequently, the UAW must be prepared to re-invent itself and its approach to corporations like GM by finding innovative and timely ways to inflict real defeats on them within this new context. If the UAW doesn't it will not simply continue to be on the defensive. The UAW will be on a death march. Perhaps it already is.



# The Masses & The Vanguard

This article by originally appeared in **Living Marxism** vol. 4, no. 4 August 1938. Although it appeared unsigned it was written by Paul Mattick. LM was the journal published by the US Groups of Council Communists.

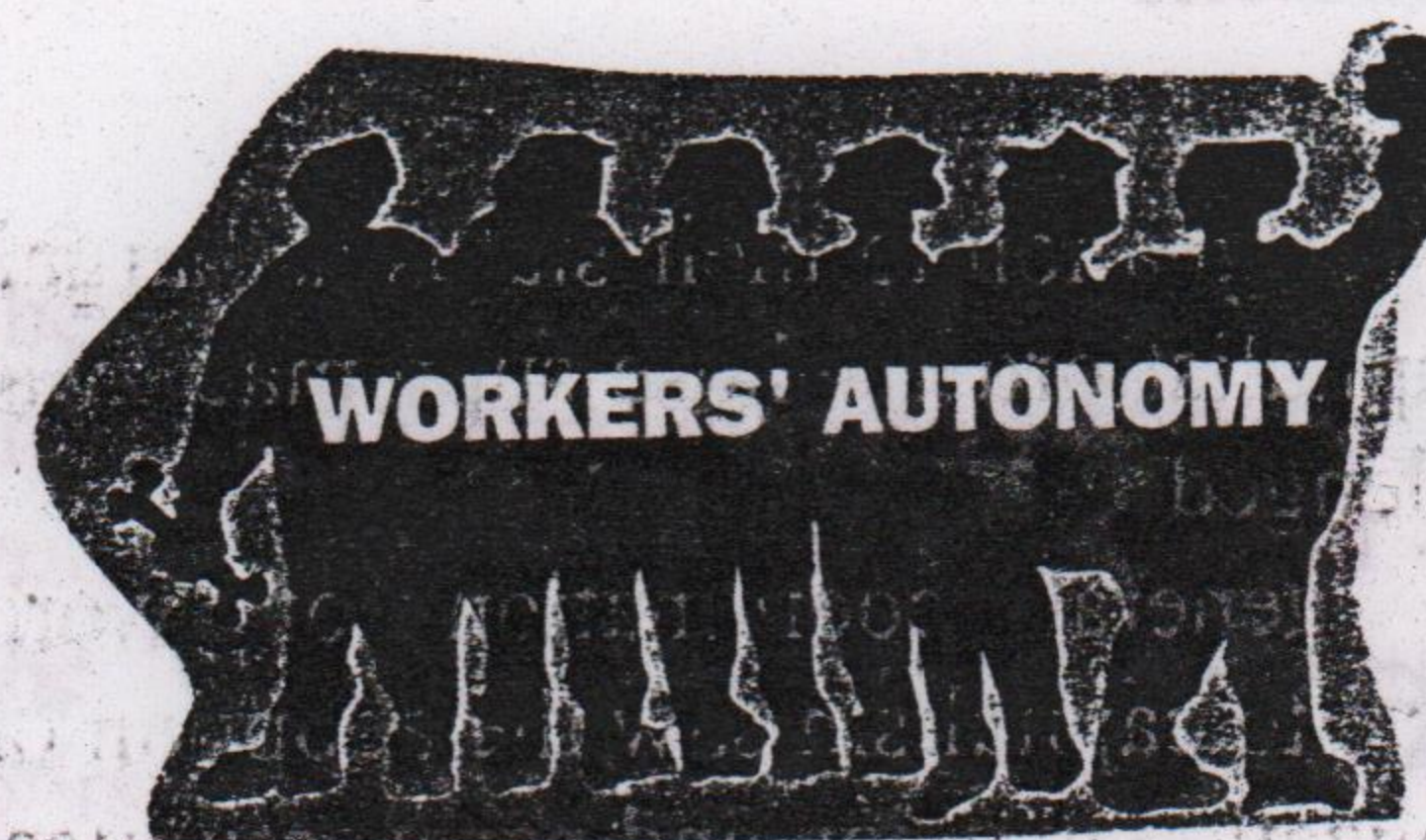
Economic and political changes proceed with bewildering rapidity since the close of the world war. The old conceptions in the labour movement have become faulty and inadequate and the working class organizations present a scene of indecision and confusion.

In view of the changing economic and political situation it seems that thorough reappraisal of the task of the working class becomes necessary in order to find the forms of struggle and organization most needful and effective.

The relation of "the party," "organization" or "vanguard" to the masses plays a large part in contemporary working class discussion. That the importance and indispensability of the vanguard or party is overemphasized in working class circles is not surprising, since the whole history and tradition of the movement tends in that direction.

The labour movement today is the fruit of economic and political developments that found first expression in the Chartist movement in England (1838-1848), the subsequent development of trade unions from the fifties onward, and in the Lasallean movement in Germany in the sixties. Corresponding to the degree of capitalist development trade unions and political parties developed in the other countries of Europe and America.

The overthrow of feudalism and the needs of capitalist industry in themselves necessitated the marshaling of the proletariat and the granting of certain democratic privileges by the capitalists. The



latter had been reorganizing society in line with their needs. The political structure of feudalism was replaced by capitalist parliamentarianism. The capitalist state, the instrument for administering the joint affairs of the capitalist class, was established and adjusted to the needs of the new class.

The bothersome proletariat whose assistance against the feudal forces had been necessary now had to be reckoned with. Once called into action it could not be entirely eliminated as a political factor. But it could be coordinated. And this was done - partly consciously with cunning and partly by the very dynamics of capitalist economy - as the working class adjusted itself and submitted to the new order. It organized unions whose limited objectives (better wages and conditions) could be realized in an expanding capitalist economy. It played the game of capitalist politics within the capitalist state (the practices and forms of which were determined primarily by capitalist needs) and within these limitations, achieved apparent successes.

But thereby the proletariat adopted capitalist forms of organization and capitalist ideologies. The parties of the workers, like those of the capitalists became limited corporations, the elemental needs of the class were subordinated to political expediency. Revolutionary objectives were displaced by horse-trading and manipulations for political positions. The party became all-important, its immediate objectives superseded those of the class. Where revolutionary situations set into motion the class, whose tendency is to fight for the realization of the revolutionary objective, the parties of the workers "represented" the working class and were themselves "represented" by parliamentarians whose very position in parliament



constituted resignation to their status as bargainers within a capitalist order whose supremacy was no longer challenged.

The general coordination of workers' organizations to capitalism saw the adoption of the same specialization in union and party activities that challenged the hierarchy of industries. Managers, superintendent and foremen saw their counterparts in presidents, organizers and secretaries of labour organizations. Boards of directors, executive committees, etc. The mass of organized workers like the mass of wage slaves in industry left the work of direction and control to their betters.

This emasculation of worker's initiatives proceeded rapidly as capitalism extended its sway. Until the world war put an end to further peaceful and "orderly" capitalist expansion.

The risings in Russia, Hungary and Germany found a resurgence of mass action and initiative. The social necessities compelled action by the masses. But the traditions of the old labour movement in western Europe and the economic backwardness of eastern Europe frustrated fulfillment of labour's historic mission. Western Europe saw the masses defeated and the rise of fascism a la Mussolini and Hitler, while Russia's backward economy developed the "communism" in which the differentiation between class and vanguard, the specialization of functions and the regimentation of labour reached its highest point.

The leadership principle, the idea of the vanguard that must assume responsibility for the proletarian revolution is based on the pre-war conception of the labour movement, is unsound. The tasks of the revolutionary and the communist reorganization of society cannot be realized without the widest and fullest action of the masses themselves. Theirs is the task and the solution thereof.

The decline of capitalist economy, the progressive paralysis, the instability, the mass unemployment, the wage cuts and intensive pauperization of the workers - all of these compel action, in spite of fascism a la Hitler or the disguised fascism of the AF of L.

The old organizations are either destroyed or voluntarily reduced to impotence. Real action now is possible only outside the old organizations. In Italy, Germany and Russia the White and Red fascisms have already destroyed all old organizations and placed the workers directly before the problem of finding the new forms of struggle. In England, France and America the old organizations still maintain a degree of illusion among workers, but their successive surrender to the forces of reaction is undermining them rapidly.

The principles of independent struggle, solidarity and communism are being forced upon them in the actual class struggle. With this powerful trend toward mass consolidation and mass action the theory of regrouping and realigning the militant organizations seems to be outdated. True regroupment is essential, but it cannot be a mere merger of the existing organizations. In the new conditions a revision of fighting forms is necessary. "First clarity - then unity." Even small groups recognizing and urging the principles of independent mass movement are far more significant than large groups that deprecate the power of the masses.

There are groups that perceive the defects and weaknesses of parties. They often furnish sound criticism of the popular front combination and the unions. But their criticism is limited. They lack a comprehensive understanding of the new society. The tasks of the proletariat are not completed with seizure of the means of production and the abolition of private property. The questions of social reorganization must be put and answered. Shall state socialism be rejected? What shall be the basis of a society without wage slavery? What shall determine the economic relations between factories? What shall determine the relations between producers and their total product?

These questions and their answers are essential for an understanding of the forms of struggle and organization today. Here the conflict between the leadership principle and the principle of independent mass action becomes apparent. For, a thorough understanding of these questions leads



to the realization that the widest, all-embracing, direct activity of the proletariat as a class is necessary to realize communism.

Of first importance is the abolition of the wage system. The will and good wishes of men are not potent enough to retain this system after revolution (as in Russia) without eventually surrendering to the dynamics engendered by it. It is not enough to seize the means of production and abolish private property. It is necessary to abolish the basic condition of modern exploitation, wage slavery, and that act brings on the succeeding measures of reorganization that would never be invoked without the first step. Groups that do not put these questions, no matter how sound their criticism otherwise, lack the most important elements in the formation of sound revolutionary policy. The abolition of the wages system must be carefully investigated in its relation to politics and economics. We will here take up some of the political implications [ to be continued]

### REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS

He lost his hand in a bright new  
automated punch press.

Five digits now none  
Taken by a digital computer

Witch  
Lo and behold  
Makes mistakes just like human beans

Humanized computer  
Computerized human  
Its all the same  
But it can't hold hands.



Neither can he.  
He took his other five digits  
and melted them down into a  
Fist.

Mr. Toad

From the Bewick Editions pamphlet "Be  
his payment high or low". The American  
working class of the sixties by Martin  
Glberman (see Echanges No. 65, p. 18)

## A Quiz for Would-Be Vanguards

*An old joke, but a good one*

Just imagine being a respected and beloved fatherly leader under whose wise guidance the revolutionary masses will forge ahead daily with the fiery zeal of a "speed up" campaign!

Over the past few years, Party Builders Associates has aided countless individuals and groups to form vanguard parties intelligently tailored to their own needs. These people are now leading creative, happy lives fighting one another. What we've done for others, we can do for you. A few minutes filling out the following questionnaire may be the best investment you'll ever make. Your answers will enable Party Builders Associates, preserving strict confidentiality, to work out a party program that is JUST RIGHT for you and your friends. And now, here's the questionnaire. We advise using a pencil, since these are by no means easy questions, and your party will not be able to alter the positions taken here without seriously damaging your credibility among the workers.

1) The Russian Revolution turned away from socialism in:

- (a) 1917
- (b) 1927
- (c) 1953
- (d) 1957
- (e) It hasn't yet, but my group will be the first to denounce it when it does

2) Black people are:

- (a) A nation
- (b) A nation of a new type
- (c) A super-exploited sector of the working class
- (d) Petit-bourgeois
- (e) A colony



- (f) Please send me more information about this controversial group
- 3) The main danger facing the workers' vanguard in the present epoch is:
- (a) Right opportunism
- (b) "Left" sectarianism
- (c) Right opportunism masking as "left" sectarianism
- (d) My parents
- (e) Other (please specify)
- 4) Rather than focus on narrow economic issues, my party will offer a cultural critique of life in advanced capitalist countries. The following are signs of capitalist decadence:
- (a) Feminism
- (b) Trotskyism
- (c) Pornographic movies
- (d) Recent price increases in pornographic movies
- (e) Other (please give exact details)
- 5) I would like to include the following in the title of my party:
- (a) Labor
- (b) Workers
- (c) Revolutionary
- (d) Socialist
- (e) Communist
- (f) Vanguard
- (g) Progressive
- (h) October(November)
- (i) United
- (j) International
- (k) World
- (l) Movement
- (m) M
- (n) L
- (o) All of the above

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This issue of **Red & Black Notes** is dedicated to **A. For What might have been.**

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# Review: No Gods No Masters

AN ANTHOLOGY OF ANARCHISM

Daniel Guerin,

AK Press, two volumes, US\$16.95 each

Although quite active as an activist and writer before moving to the far, far left, Daniel Guerin is undoubtedly best known in our political sector as the author of the classic little introduction, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (Monthly Review Press). Now, one of his seminal works, a monumental anthology of anarchist texts, complete with his introduction and notes, has been published in English for the first time. In it, Guerin includes *only* those figures that he deemed central to the development of anarchism--in particular, collectivist/communist anarchism and syndicalism--as a ideological force. An astonishing collection of extracts and brief pieces, as well as some longer material, many of these writings are ones previously unavailable in English, and they present perhaps the most compelling picture of the anarchist tradition and project, in theory and practice, currently available in English.

There are few surprises in terms of selections here: the books include big chunks of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Proudhon, Spanish and Russian anarchists, Malatesta, Durruti, etc. Also, major debates--such as that in the First International between Marx and Bakunin--and reportage of anarchist activity in those periods where it actually played a major historical role (Russian in 1917 and Spain in the 30s) get serious coverage. If only he'd have included France in May/June 1968....

In short, *No Gods No Masters* provides a brilliantly nuanced and convincing argument for a inherent anarchist/libertarian communist political project, effectively shattering the shallow misunderstandings regarding anarchism that currently predominate both on the left and in



mainstream discourse.

One criticism that might be seriously made is that Guerin doesn't cover many of the major issues of our time--environmentalism, feminism/women's liberation, the question of racial oppression, etc. But, in the end, this argument holds little water, as it becomes quickly clear that Guerin, himself an indefatigable gay liberation activist, was *only* choosing what he figured were foundational texts, and historical ones to boot. His goal was to provide a program, with illustrations as to how it might be carried out, a program that paved the way for a society in which every individual would be able to fully develop his or her individual human potentials within the communal context--nothing more, nothing less.

With that understood, **No Gods No Masters** provides a marvelous foundation upon which to build a radically liberatory project. Adding such work as Carol Ehrlich or Peggy Kornegger on anarcha-feminism, Graham Purchase or Murray Bookchin on ecology, or Chomsky on the media, is an act of filling in the gaps, as would the inclusion of such broader anthologies as those of George Woodcock or Howard Ehrlich. And, of course, as Guerin himself would undoubtedly argue, those gaps are even better filled in when one pulls from other traditions as well, from DeLeon to Landauer, from radical feminism to radical pacifism to liberation theology.

As Kropotkin wrote, "One socialist faction argues that [communism] cannot be achieved without sacrifice of freedom upon the altar of the State. Another faction, to which we belong, argues instead that only through abolition of the State, through achievement of wholesale freedom of the individual, through free agreement, utterly free association and federation, can we arrive a communism, common ownership of our inheritance and common production of all wealth."

This is strong, heady, and convincing stuff. Essential reading, and a welcome companion in the struggle for universal liberation and the establishment of free communism.

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