

OCTOBER 1979

Huddersfield Anarchist Group, c/o Huddersfield Poly (existence doubtful)
Hull Libertarian Collective, 16 Park Grove, Hull (secretariat; letters to "HLC")
Leeds Anarchist Group, 5 Toronto Place, Leeds LS7 4LJ
Leeds Autonomous Group, c/o Black and Red Soc.
Leeds Black & Red Society, c/o University Union, Leeds 2
Black Jake, c/o 115 Westgate Road, Newcastle NE1 4AG
Sheffield Anarchist Group, c/o 4 Havelock Sq. Sheffield S10
Sheffield Libertarian Society, PO Box 168, Sheffield S11 8SE
York Anarchist Group, c/o Student Union, University of York

plus others in Barnsley, Bradford, Darlington, Stockton & Sunderland,
plus fraternal contacts in Edinburgh, Hastings, London, Manchester, Orkney, France,
Netherlands, and W. Germany.

Reports

Hull Collective: Being a predominantly student group this is clearly an important time for us; the new academic year with first years to contact. We set up a stall at the annual Fresher's Bazaar

inviting people to join and buy literature. Fairly favourable response is now being followed up by meetings, pamphlets etc. Recent print output has included a satirical view of Union politics, four articles on heading issues, an accommodation questionnaire etc.

We have also been working on the Bulletin, which only appears because we have received some feedback. However, this matter should still be discussed at the next conference, along with the question of contacts.

We are presently trying to build up interest in such issues as Blair Peach/Sojthall and Parsons Unknown although information about the trial is hard to come by.

Black Jake: Martin Spence informs us that this group did not receive the last two Bulletins, for some reason, and he is rightly disturbed at the implications.

Sheffield Anarchists: We have held two of our infamous Anarchist Picnics, both of which fulfilled our rather limited objectives of informally cross communications between anarchists and sympathisers in the area and from elsewhere, and to have a good time. The weather was excellent (for a change!) with just sufficient breeze to flutter our black flags.

A couple of comrades attended the Torness Anti-Nuclear demo, and took an active part in the proceedings there.

Four comrades went down to London to the pre-trial meeting held by Parsons Unknown, which was sparsely attended and mostly given up to haranguing by a group of

socialist/communists and a freedom loving dipsomaniac. The subsequent evening social was much better.

A few comrades have got together to contribute to a literature fund, the purpose of which is to ensure a regular supply and distribution of anarchist periodicals and pamphlets, our local left-wing bookshop having been somewhat dilatory in paying out for material already sold. We may also, funds permitting, try to establish a collection of anarchic material for loan.

There has been some talk of once again holding regular meetings, but as yet nothing concrete has transpired.

In conclusion, we are prepared to host the next conference, should nothing more on the subject be heard from York, at the above address (Havelock Square). See end of Bulletin for date...

Bradford: James McCarthy expressed dismay at the thought of NEAF collapsing and offered to organise a (small) conference early in the New Year.

HEM DAY: We are working on a translation of material received from this Italian group.

Anti-EEC Committee: (formerly the Anti-Elections committee) wrote to inform us of a change of address. They conducted a successful anti-EEC election campaign; activities included the burning of voting cards and the issuing of false leaflets (good fakes) announcing the postponement of the elections.

They also produced a bulletin based on an article by Martin Spence. They will continue to campaign against the EEC, especially the European convention against terrorism.

REMINDER

Just a reminder about the questionnaire. It wasn't just our idea; we were delegated. So where are the replies?

DISCUSSION

A reply to Tom and Paul's articles...

Tom wants to jettison what he terms the "traditions" and "dogmas" of anarchism; he thinks "tired old Bakuninist ideas" are redundant. In other words he wants empty anarchism of its content and retain only the name. Why the fascination with the name? If his ideas are so original and up-to-the-minute why doesn't he use an original up-to-the-minute name to describe himself ("helpless radical" perhaps - then he could gather round himself all those "radicals" who utter *cri de coeurs* "when they realise their own helplessness" and leave us anarchists alone).

Tom thinks the ideas of class struggle and revolutionary anarchism are strictly nineteenth century. Instead, he advocates the ultra modern (sic) theory of co-operatives and communes. We had an anarchist co-operative commune in Leeds in the 1900s - they were very much in vogue in the 1890s. Unfortunately it didn't outgrow the state; the state outgrew it. Come to think of it, Marx was criticising those people who saw the idea of setting up small scale versions of the new society as a means of changing the present one, back in 1848 (this is how he describes the utopian socialists: "they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavour by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social gospel, "they" consider themselves far superior to all class antagonisms. They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favoured. Hence, they habitually appeal to society at large, without distinction of class; nay, by preference to the ruling class" (or as Paul might say, "the James Goldsmiths of this world"); sound like anyone you know?). Perhaps Tom's ideas aren't "years ahead" of ours after all.

Tom reckons that the "old notion of classes" has become totally useless as an analytical tool". (One only has to open a newspaper to refute that and find that capitalism, classes and class war didn't end with the nineteenth century). Now, he tells us, "anyone can be an agent of social change". Old fashioned anarchists would tend to object that you have to distinguish between those who are likely to change society and those who are likely to resist that change (after all, the wealthy, the powerful and the privileged benefit from the present social set-up; they don't want to see it changed and they will use the utmost

violence to prevent it being changed) and among the former we have to distinguish between those who can change society (the working class) and those who can only help. Tom's idea that "anyone can be an agent of social change" is thoroughly unrealistic and completely unworkable in practice (do we take our propaganda for an end to private property and privilege into the homes of the rich? Do we take our propaganda for an end to government into the antechambers of power? I think those who seriously want to understand and change society will stick to class analysis.

Tom then suggests (and here he contradicts himself) we look to the disaffected middle class and especially...students" as the saviours of society. Students are not in a position to change society. What can they do? Occupy the universities? Transform the syllabus? Student riots may spark off a general rebellion (given the congruence of certain factors) but by themselves students cannot fundamentally change society (an obvious fact that student leaders in France in '68 were well aware of: see the interview with Cohn-Bendit in "The Student Revolt: the activists speak": Q. So you ^{want} ~~hope~~ to destroy the capitalist system. How do you hope to succeed? A. We shan't succeed on our own; we cannot make a revolution ourselves", p70 "For us, the first step in the establishment of a classless society must be worker's control" p71 etc etc). The "disaffected middle class" are generally considered to be the social base of fascism but I think Tom is simply referring to student drop-outs in which case I have to point out that you cannot fundamentally change society by taking over the DHSS offices either.

The working class can change society (not because it is a "paragon of virtues" - though it may display the virtues of solidarity and mutual aid) but because of its position at the point of production. The social and economic power of the capitalist class rests on its ownership of the means of production and distribution. If the working class takes over the latter by means of the expropriation of a general strike (also known as the "general lock-out of the boss-class") the capitalist class is made redundant. The state is then to prevent this happening by armed might if necessary; that is why it has to be overthrown. (Some anarchists argue that a technocratic bureaucratic class is supplanting the capitalist class and that its power derives from ~~the~~ its control of the means of production and distribution; needless to say, workers control destroys the power base of this class as well).

Tom seems to think that once the working class has taken over industry the workers will remain 'cogs' in an anarcho-syndicalist "production machine". But the whole point of taking over, of establishing worker's self-management, is to end the alienation of work. What's the point of being in control of industry if you're still doing boring or dangerous or irrelevant work.

There are more things to be said on this subject but I'm trying to write a letter, not a book (you could have fooled me -The Typist). So let me finish by dealing with Paul's offensive and provocative article. He tells us that an anarchist society "will have to include everyone" (even the bourgeoisie and the rich and powerful). On the contrary, one of the things that defines an anarchist society is the absence of such categories of people. Some members of the ruling class will be killed during the violent phase of the revolution (this is, as Bakunin pointed out, neither ethical, nor desirable, simply inevitable); those who survive that period will be integrated into the working class which will expand to include the whole of humanity, destroy the division between manual and mental labour, city and country, and thereby introduce the classless society.

Paul reckons that his ideas would appeal more to the "James Goldsmiths of this world" than to those he terms "the lumpen proles". The reverse applies to anarchism, therefore, I deduce that Paul is not an anarchist. He believes that anarchism is a product of "middle class minds". Let me quote Kropotkin: "Not out of the universities therefore does anarchism come... anarchism was born among the people, and it will continue to be full of life and creative power only as long as it remains a thing of the people"; "anarchism, like all other revolutionary movements was born among the people in the struggles of real life and not in the philosopher's studio."

Obviously those who through privilege (or privation) have gained a higher standard of education can contribute a great deal to the elaboration of ideas of social emancipation, and the generous spirits among this category will turn to the working class whose labour allowed them the ~~privilege~~ time to study and reflect. Those who put on airs and graces and boast of how they rose through "education and aspiration" to the giddy heights of the middle class are beneath contempt - pathetic, tragi-comic figures.

I'm sorry if this sounds bitter, especially

as I asked for this debate to be carried on without acrimony but I didn't realise then that I was dealing with people who professed a full-blown ideology of middle-class elitism.

Tony Kearney

Afterthought: co-operatives and communes may have a role to play in overthrowing capitalism (the IWW organizes co-operatives into the union as union shops) but as an alternative to the class struggle they are a dead-end.

A criticism of Tom and Paul's articles:

Tom starts off by saying that DAM's aims and principles are 19th century; surely what matters is how relevant the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism are today. He also says that anarchists do not need tradition, but we need to know the mistakes and achievements of anarchists in the past so that we can learn from them. Tom asks "What is the working class?" - the working class is made up of people who work and have no control over that work, they are at the bottom of a whole pyramid of bosses from the foreman or chief clerk upwards. It is a question of money and power - the more of each a person has, the more he is dependant on the police and courts to protect him and his property. So as anarchists we have clear enemies, both the repressive institutions such as prisons and the people who depend upon them for their power and privilege.

As for the workers of Britain being the capitalists of the world "relying on the slavery of South American and Third World inhabitants for their continuing prosperity" this is rubbish. Those who exploit the third world are the ruling classes in those countries, and the multinational companies. At the time of the British empire most of the British people were starving and living in slums - it was the rulers and capitalists who benefitted from imperialism.

Tom dismisses the greater part of society - the working class - because they are chasing after consumer goods, but so is the rest of society. The greatest hope for anarchism lies among those who are expected to work for 50 or 60 years at jobs which do not interest them. Tom places his hopes on students and the disaffected middle class. Certainly students have initiated social upheavals - France 68 for example, but they failed because the students failed to gain working class support. Only in countries such as Spain where masses of workers and peasants formed the anarchist movement was anything really achieved, even if only for some three years.

Tom says the workers should not take over the means of production because a lot of goods are produced which are not needed -

The point is the production is taken over and then the people as a whole decide what is necessary and unnecessary. Tom also says that what is needed is groups ~~not~~ aiming to outgrow rather than overthrow the State. Apparently he thinks, like Lenin, that the State will, "with away" by some magical process while all ~~the~~ these so-called anarchists sit around twiddling their thumbs. The State keeps growing stronger and could destroy us all by nuclear war or other means unless we destroy it first. It will not go away if we turn our backs to it. Communes and co-operatives are steps on the way to a free society, so is the general strike, occupation of workplaces and armed struggle.

As for Paul's article "sometimes I'm afraid that it will be harder to bring the lumpenproles to our way of thinking than the James Goldsmiths of this world". For his information it is the "lumpenproles" who have done the fighting for anarchism. His idea that the middle class have produced most of the informed thought, writing and action (?) for anarchism, and will do so in the future, is rather like the Marxist idea of the Vanguard Party. Certainly sons of the rich, even Princes (Kropotkin) have fought for anarchism, but it would not have harmed the anarchist movement much if they had never existed, what was and is important is the support of thousands of working people willing to fight, in all senses of the word, for an anarchist society.

Dave Brown (DAM member)

A counter blast from Tom:

I am sorry that Tony assumed that the vitriolic replies to his last letter were aimed at him personally, I thought he would realise that they were written primarily to provoke the "slumbering majority" of NEAF into responding. This largely failed, though we were pleased to hear from Dave. I would like to de-escalate the debate to a more civilized level, and hope that where provocation failed encouragement may succeed.

The correspondence so far has brought out clearly our differences, and has presented an illusion of total disagreement. However, our points of agreement are far more important; we all believe that the capitalist system is rotten to the core, and can only be maintained by increasingly authoritarian techniques. We all believe that revolution is inevitable, sooner or later, and we all believe that unless the people seize power for themselves, rather than allowing an elite "temporary" powers, we are going to be back

in the same boat before you can say Kronstadt.

Our differences lie in the question of strategy. Tony and Dave are obviously convinced that propagandising the workers is the correct and most important strategy at present. I agree that without the workers, revolution is impossible; they are the largest class, and produce the goods and services necessary to the whole community. But, I reiterate, this does not make them all automatically the good guys, and the middle class automatically the bad guys. "There is one thing worse than the desire to command, and that is the will to obey." The majority of the working classes is quite happy with the present system and doesn't have either the courage, the training or the knowledge to kick against it; in fact, far from displaying the virtues of solidarity and mutual aid, many of them are willing to stab their comrades in the back by fighting to maintain pay differentials, or refusing to strike in sympathy. In short, at present, the political awareness and motivation of the workers is very low.

This criticism of the workers is in no way a defense of the present system, it is merely a recognition of our current limitations. There is no point in expecting a sudden radicalising of the workers unless something major occurs to precipitate this; the decision to bite the hand that seems to have been feeding you is not lightly taken. Thus, propaganda in the factories and work places is bound to have a low impact for the time being; whilst essential, it is not necessarily the most important activity just now.

What kind of major event would radicalise the workers? Here we must be careful not to commit the mistakes of the Trots, and run around trying to precipitate ~~upon~~ 'The Crisis' by any means possible. Capitalism has developed methods of dealing with many traditional means of protest - strikes over pay are a temporary annoyance to the system, not a blow to the heart. We must analyse the power structure in more detail to find out where action will be most effective. My own view is that the nuclear power issue is the vital one at present. If capitalism is allowed to expand the nuclear programme, this will allow it to continue functioning relatively smoothly. To prevent this would cause a radical change in direction of the industrialising process - it must be more decentralised and autonomous which can only work in our favour. Also, highlighting the dangers of nuclear power will show people just what the system is willing to do to ensure its continuation. The endless series of accidents serves as a constant reminder to the people just how much the system cares for them as

individuals. So the struggle against nuclear power is not just a 'radical chic' side issue, it is central to the larger struggle.

Regarding the revolution, Tony seems to see the workers as being automatically in favour of anarchism, and all others as being automatically against it. I cannot see this happening; many workers are going to want a new centralist power structure to replace the old one, as will many members of the bourgeoisie. We must fight both equally - it is a classless, free society we are trying to create, not a workers' state. Anyone who is willing to fight for this objective ought to be welcomed, irrespective of the occupation of their parents, i.e. their 'class'.

Finally, regarding dropping out, I admit that as a direct contribution to the revolutionary struggle, it is not too helpful. It does serve other purposes, though. First of all, it shows by example, (rather than theory) that alternative ~~points-of-view~~ ways of living to the nuclear family, 9-5 work, Screw-you Jack are possible, and are more fulfilling to the individuals involved. After all, one of the attractions of anarchism is the promise it holds out to people as individuals rather than as members of a workforce, parts of a hierarchy or numbers on a punchcard. It also offers the possibility (as yet largely unexploited) of setting up an alternative production and distribution network such as the syndicalists advocate, but one which is not bound by the undesirable aspects of the capitalist system.

I think that a synthesis of Tony's historical awareness and my own Utopianism is both possible and necessary; I hope this article goes some way towards creating it.

Tom, Hull group.

Paul's turn:

As Tony points out, my lauding of the middle class was provocative, deliberately so. Nevertheless, I stand by most of the content, even tho' I'd gladly forget the pompous tone.

Tony quotes Bakunin at me, but the wrong sort of Bakuninist thought. The man who, according to James Joll, had a passion for "establishing largely imaginary secret societies...on the basis of a 'strict hierarchy and unconditional obedience'", is not my kind of anarchist. That's crypto-Bolshevism. I haven't turned my back on the hierarchy of middle management to have ANY other kind imposed on me, even in the name of the Revolution.

I would have appreciated something from the visionary Bakunin, from the man who saw further than Marx and predicted the

embourgeoisement of the industrial working class. Murray Bookchin has pointed out that Bakunin saw the most revolutionary classes to be the uprooted peasantry and urban declassés "the transitional and lumpenized classes of society today (such as blacks, drop-out youth people like students, intellectuals and artists who are not rooted in the factory system, and young workers whose allegiance to the work ethic has been shaken by cultural factors) are the most radical elements in the world today." Post-Scarcity Anarchism p 227.

Both Tony and Dave are kidding themselves if they imagine that anarchism appeals to today's materialist worker. And I'd particularly like to point out to Dave that those who gain in any measure from the exploitation of others are themselves exploiters. It is irrefutable that even today we operate a system of buying cheap - thereby enslaving workers in the Third World - and selling dear or unnecessary goods (in the latter category both weapons, and dried milk for babies, figure prominently). Surely it is morally more wrong for workers to so exploit than for capitalists since the former know what it is like to be on the receiving end?

Now I'm dropping out of this debate since, tho' I believe we should think for ourselves, it is clear that I have a lot of background reading still to do; future contributions won't necessarily be improved with lots of quotes, but ^{no} ~~ea~~ one is going to have reason to call me a tragicomic figure, or, worse, a Marxist! I would also like to explore further the possibility of both long and short term gains through understanding and ~~and~~ (to whatever extent possible) controlling the media while waiting for the Revolution. Suggestions anyone?

EVENTS:

NEAF Conference... 3rd November... 11.00am. Sheffield, 4 Havelock Sq. (see map).

Crashing space available for those staying overnight.

Newcastle... "Anarchism" (WEA org.) 24th Oct. ... "syndicalism" (Tyneside Socialist Centre) 7th Nov.

Manchester... Torness Alliance Meeting 27-8 Oct. It is rumoured that the organisation of a, properly delegated, national movement will be the main topic of discussion. No further details available.