

IT'S HOT, HOT, HOT

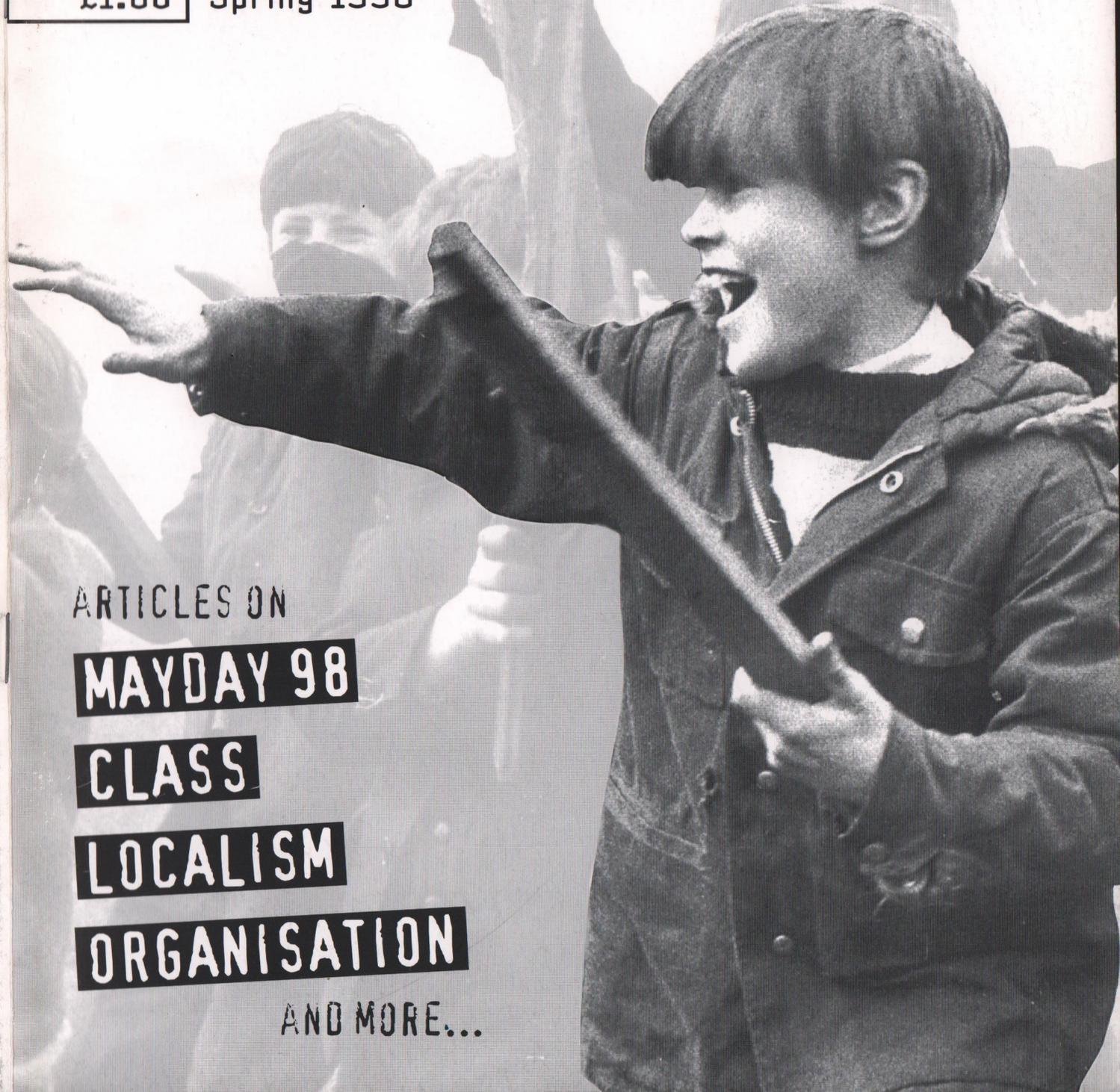
latest issue of 'Smash Hits' brings you plenty to think about -
whole range of articles on.....

- ◆ where's the revolution coming from?
- ◆ organisation
- ◆ future society
- ◆ the meaning of class
- ◆ local groups
- ◆ modern capitalism
- ◆ post-anarchism anarchy
- ◆ letters
- ◆ and much much more!

Smash HITS#2

A DISCUSSION BULLETIN FOR REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

£1.00 Spring 1998



ARTICLES ON

MAYDAY 98

CLASS

LOCALISM

ORGANISATION

AND MORE...

THE STORY SO FAR

Welcome to the second issue of 'Smash Hits'. Again, like last time, there's a range of articles: there's articles on class, some on organisation and others on ideas...like how do we get from here to there and what might happen if we don't! As you can see from the contents, this is an open magazine and we are not seeking to impose any line on the contents. The contents are what has been submitted.

With this magazine, you will also be getting a leaflet for Bradford 98 - the Mayday conference. In issue 73 of 'Class War' (Class War is dead - long live the class war) it was stated that a conference would be organised. This is it - from 1st to 4th May we hope that you will be in Bradford with many other people to discuss ideas and have a good time.

We don't see this conference as an end in itself, we see it very much as part of a process. In the recent past, this process has included the dissolving of the Class War Federation and the production of the open letter to the revolutionary movement in issue 73. CWF dissolved because it had reached the end of its own particular road. As the open letter stated "in short, what passes for a revolutionary movement in this country is pitiful" and we believe that CWF had become an obstacle to that movement achieving more.

PULLING IT TOGETHER

This belief wasn't reached in isolation. Other groups and individuals around the country were coming to similar perspectives: that we needed to look again at our ways of organising and our ideas of resisting. For a number of years there had been calls for a national conference to pull strands together, to attempt to rebuild a revolutionary movement in this country. Issue 73 and now Bradford 98 are our attempt so far to assist in achieving that goal.

And we desperately need to achieve that goal because (stating the obvious) this is a divided society that crushes our human potential. All our lives we are forced to work, all our lives we have

to struggle to survive. Yet at the same time, the rich are getting even richer. Their power is enormous but their power rests upon our submission. And the outlook for us is bleak if we continue to submit to their rule.

So the dissolution of CWF was done in the spirit of moving forwards, of developing better ways to attack the ruling class. After issue 73 came out in June 1997, there were a series of meetings around the country as part of this process. And there was the first issue of Smash Hits in October 1997 - a lot of that was taken up with going over the remains of CWF. The time has now come to move on - and that's Bradford 98.

TAKING AIM

The aims of Bradford are quite simple:

- * breaking down barriers
- * bringing people together
- * having a good time
- * inspiring and empowering us in our struggles against capitalism
- * reviving and strengthening local groups/other groupings in those struggles
- * kickstarting the revolutionary movement

Equally simply, there are no hidden agendas behind this conference. It's not an attempt to recreate Class War mark 2 or whatever. It is a fact that a majority of those attending the first two organising meetings (though not the most recent) have at some point in the past been members of Class War. But we are encouraged by the involvement formally and

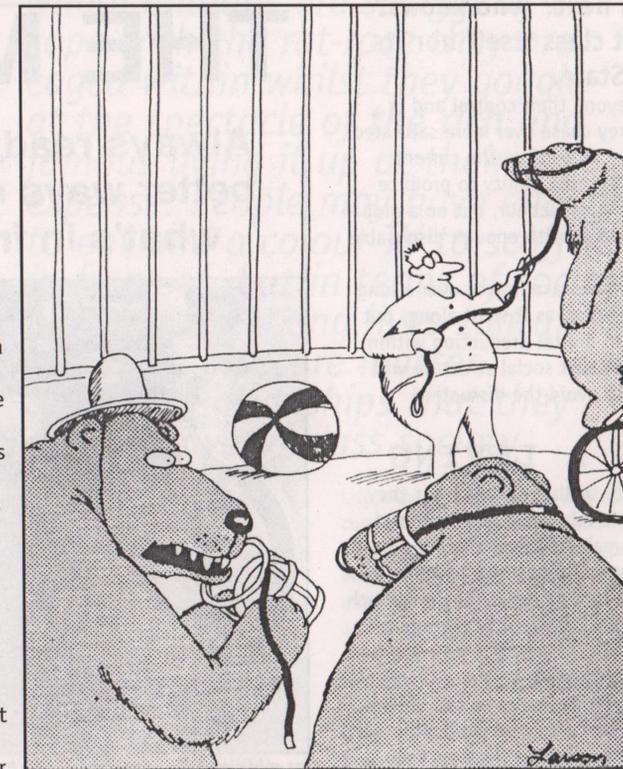
informally of a wide variety of other individuals and groups.

EXCITEMENT!

We want this conference to be an exciting and liberating event that will go some way towards putting revolution back on the map. Because, at the end of the day, that's the score. As New Labour so graphically demonstrate, capitalism has very much not gone away.

It is still a brutal and savage social system that relies upon the exploitation and oppression of the majority, the working class, to produce the profits for the few - the ruling class. It is a system that offers little hope to the majority of us. It is a system that needs to be destroyed and replaced by one which is based upon the interests of the majority.

We hope to see you in Bradford - and we hope that you enjoy this issue of 'Smash Hits'.



"Well, hey . . . These things just snap right off."

**MAYDAY CONFERENCE/
BRADFORD '98
1st - 4th MAY 1998**

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Let's remember comrades that Capitalism, of course, remains its own worst enemy. Just as the profit system had declared itself triumphant around the globe, its most dynamic region, east Asia discovers the contradictions of capitalism and sees its asset/price structure flushed down the bog. What will happen next? Who knows? Certainly not the capitalist class itself nor its bourgeois servants in the State.

The point is that their system is beyond their control and is going in ever-decreasing circles as they chase ever more saturated markets for their ever-more productive industries. The current technological revolution gives Capitalism the ability to produce more and better products with less and less labour, but on a global scale there will be increasingly less people with enough disposable income to buy those products.

Previous technological revolutions have taken place over a long enough time period for the system to adapt as it went along, but now we are moving from mechanical to digital production within the space of a generation and the Capitalist social structure will not be able to adapt quickly enough to avoid the disruptive consequences of this.

JUST EARNING A LIVING

Now, most people like a bit of stability so they can do what they like to do in peace. However, the upheavals, unemployment and conflicts over the next few years will make for anything but a quiet life in the totally capitalised place the world has now become. Most people are too preoccupied with their current reality to think much about where the world is going, and most believe that things will always be pretty much the same.

This, of course, is why they have not flocked to join revolutionary organisations in their millions, and who can blame them. I believe that those millions of ordinary working people, me included, will have to face a total upheaval in our lives as the system comes apart over the next few decades, whether we like it or not.

I am not a revolutionary because I want to be, but because I understand that I may have to be. Personally I would much prefer a walk in the park to a fight on the barricades and so would any sane person.

What motivated me to get involved with Class War was its attempt to bring revolutionary politics out of the ghetto and into the real world of everyday working class life. Out of all the valuable experiences we have debated over recent years, this is surely the most vital issue. Any new revolutionary movement that is built in this country must have many fine qualities which we can argue about at length, but if it does not address itself to the mainstream of our class then there is no point in bothering.

We have seen all types of "revolutionary organisation" in this country, but most have swiftly become limited to a narrow social group and have disappeared up their own niches. Any new movement must start with the working class as a whole, and from where our class really is rather than where comrades may wish it was.

GET A JOB YOU LAZY GIT

First of all let's talk about the actually working class, as in people who have jobs with wages. Revolutions are made by the ordinary people who do the everyday work in society; people who get up in the morning and run the machines, transport, communications, media, shops, schools and hospitals.

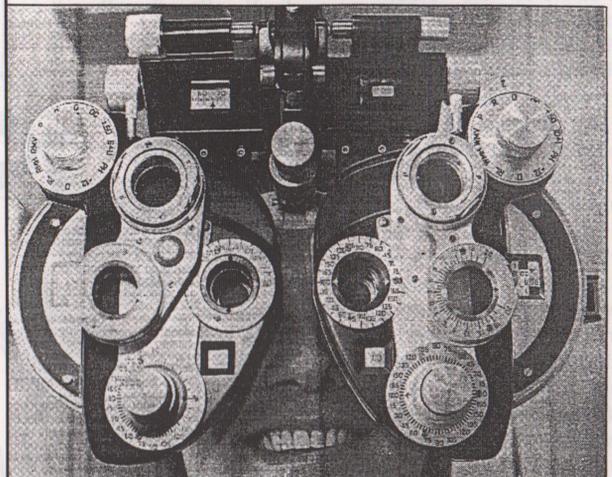
Remember that this is what gives our class its power, the fact

that we do all the real work which makes the world function. With all due respect, revolutions are not made by the unemployed, students or crusty drop-outs. It is always tempting for radical groups to focus on the obvious signs of rebellion from the more marginal end of society, but comrades this is not social revolution.

Different political groups represent the interests of different social groups and if we focus on youthful rebellion again, then we will go the same way as Class War did, or the SWP continues to do

THE MEDIA

Always ready with new & better ways of not seeing what's in front of you.



for middle class youth. Many of us started off as youthful rebels and now those of us who have grown up can move on to bigger things.

A revolutionary movement that wants to win must aim to eventually take over the power stations, transport network, the media and food distribution for starters, and then all the other industries which have become essential to our complex world. A revolutionary movement that intends to win must contain the people who do these things otherwise it will not have a clue how anything works.

A revolutionary movement will not attract the serious responsible people who do this work unless it addresses their concerns and represents their interests. Therefore, if we want to build a serious revolutionary movement we have to shift our focus completely away from the style and content of the organisations of the seventies and eighties and bury the old images of trendy leftism for good.

SOD THE LOT OF THEM

The politics of anarchism are about two things; freedom and equality. Freedom based on real grass-roots democracy and equality based on real popular ownership and control of our resources and economy. Unfortunately this simple message has been lost in the maelstrom of recent history. Capitalism has won the ideological battle in this century to the point that political ideas about any alternative social structure have almost completely disappeared.

British political parties now compete solely on the basis of who can administer modern Capitalism most efficiently. This is a good

thing because it means the political battlefield is now cleared of all the nonsense from the state reformist socialist left-wing of Capitalism which is now comprehensively discredited. When we attempt to promote libertarian communist ideas we can now confront Capitalism directly without having to wade through the sticky mess of state socialism which used to protect class society.

So, economically, Capitalism is snookered by saturated markets and phenomenal technological change. Politically it now has nowhere to hide; New Labour is explicitly a "party of business", and quite right too. In this country we have the opportunity to build a new revolutionary movement for a new century. Although most ordinary working people now have scarcely any sense of a real structural alternative, that in itself is a crucial opportunity to start afresh without the redundant baggage of twentieth-century socialism.

POTENTIAL

Anarchism has the potential to exploit this opportunity and offer our class a way forwards, but this will only happen if the ideas are translated into the new conditions of the 21st century and are used to address the issues that confront ordinary working people in the everyday world that we live in.

Our ideas about freedom, control, democracy and equality are highly relevant in this country where millions are struggling to cope with the rat-race they are caged within whilst they goggle at the spectacle of the rich and famous living it up at their expense. People may have enough to eat and a colour TV to scoff it in front of, but in terms of social power our working lives contain the same insecure master-servant relationships that they always have in class society. Despite a century of liberal democracy most of us remain no more than a few wage packets away from destitution, and everybody knows it.

WORKERS OF MONDEO UNITE!

I said above that different political groups represent the interests of different social groups. Throughout the past generation, anarchist groups have represented disaffected youth largely outside of the organised working class. This has led to popular images of anarchism as a cult of yobboes and nutcases, which the recent history of Class War has done little to alter.

A new revolutionary movement has no future if it repeats the same process, and we now have to move onto the real battleground

for politics in this country which is the actual working class of people with real jobs in areas of constructive social activity. By this I mean the social groups C1 and C2 with all due respect to our brothers and sisters in groups D and E. Groups D and E are not in a position to carry through a social revolution and can only support such a process if the C1's and C2's are doing the business.

It is not the job of revolutionaries to be sentimental about disadvantaged groups in society, but to identify the best ways for us all to do away with the causes of those disadvantages. One engineer in a power station is worth a hundred rioting unemployed.

This is the real challenge for a new revolutionary movement. How can we address the only people who have the ability to overthrow Capitalism; the skilled and semi-skilled workers. There they are driving to work in their Sierras and Cavaliers, to their jobs in the food industry, or engineering, or information technology or transport or something, sure they hate the boss and the mortgage and the rest of it, but what's the alternative?

COMFORTS

Life may be a grind but why should our people give up the home comforts that Capitalism allows them at the end of the working day? I am not offering a blueprint for how that might be done because those are tactical issues which come after these strategic aims have been sorted out. One of the biggest problems previous anarchist organisations have had is to become murderously obsessed with everyday tactics and action without having the faintest idea what their strategic aims actually are.

This current period of debate must put the strategy first and then work out the tactics needed to achieve that strategy. The first task is to choose the political target, then we can see what weapons we have.

The final issue of Class War promised that we would produce something far more unpleasant for the ruling class. They will be quite happy if a new movement confines itself to the usual business of giving a voice to the impotent rage of disaffected marginal elements. But if they begin to find that the workers on whom they depend for their wealth and power are challenging their control, then our rulers will know that at last they have a fight on their hands which they may not win.

Frank/Bristol/Dec.97

NOT MORE ORGANISATION!

Where to start? Smash Hits October 1997 contained so much stimulating stuff that I can only incorporate responses to bits and pieces of the various articles into this, my contribution to Smash Hits 2. First of all I should say that it's good that comrades have established a forum for open discussion between elements of

what might be described as the libertarian left. It's amazing how little would-be revolutionaries talk to each other rather than at each other (if they bother to talk at all!).

Cards on the table time. I'm a member of the Anarchist Communist Federation, have been since 1986. I'm also a supporter of the Revolutionary Socialist Network and, on a more local level, have been involved in the Campaign Linking against Wage Slavery.

Prior to my membership of the ACF I was involved with the very early Class War Federation and a few years later I was (briefly) involved with the CW Postal Workers and the Communication Workers Group. So much for my revolutionary credentials. What they might suggest is that I'm in favour of organisation and the experience of the past 15 years hasn't changed that, rather it has reinforced it.

Simultaneously, I'm not of the opinion that revolutionary struggles take place through the medium of one single revolutionary organisation. Rather, revolutionary organisation can and does take various forms such as discussion groups, local action groups, cultural collectives, solidarity centres, industry-wide networks of militants, revolutionary workplace groups, right up to the workers and community councils created in periods of mass struggle.

OPINIONS

However, I have long been of the opinion that revolutionaries need to work together, in a concerted way on an international, national and local level. When revolutionaries work together, on an agreed basis, around a common political project (not just on an ad-hoc basis) it is called a specific organisation, a revolutionary organisation.

I consider such an organisation a vital component in the broader revolutionary movement. The ACF, in our own humble way, aspires to become such an organisation.

To some extent the Class War Federation, as was, aspired to something like that: A majority within CWF, however, felt that a set of agreed politics, in other words, tactical unity, wasn't required, and that various political tendencies could exist within a broad framework. Allied with this was an understandable desire to find an echo within the working class as a whole, which saw the expectations of the organisation go up with the rocket and down with the proverbial stick.

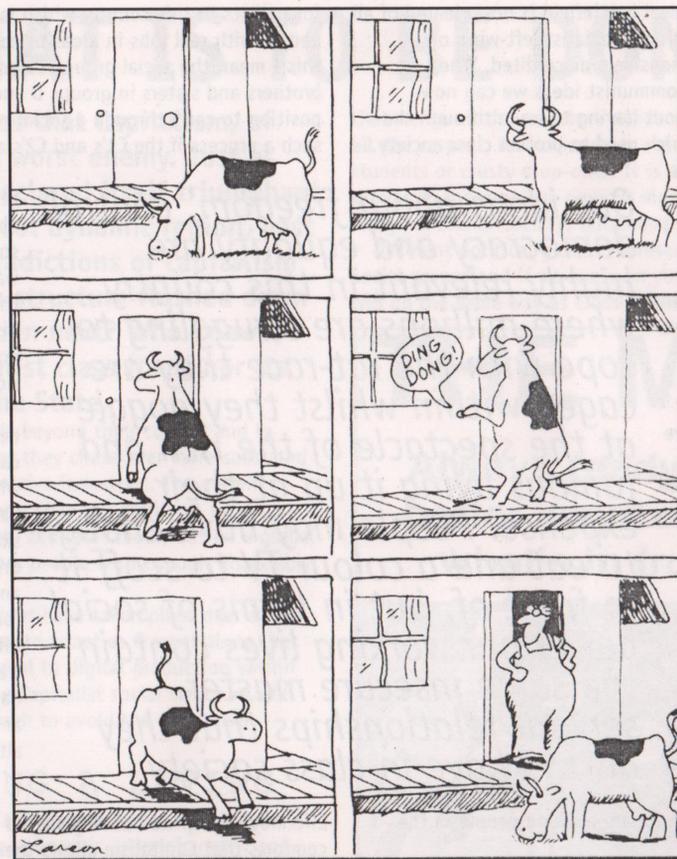
STEP FORWARDS!

Now that the organisation has, effectively, collapsed, there appears to be a tendency to reject political organisation entirely in favour of local and basically localist groups. How is that a step forward comrades? If formal organisation inevitably leads to bureaucratisation, activist cult-like behaviour and leadership cliques then we might as well give up now. The libertarian communist project is dead in the water!

If libertarians cannot organise themselves in a way that is both structured and non-hierarchical then who is going to be convinced by our argument that there is an alternative to bosses and bureaucrats?

One thing that ex-Class War comrades have said is that the revolutionary movement is "under achieving". Given the circumstances we find ourselves in I think this is very true. Considering that there are so many shit-hot organisers, so many committed people and that our politics should offer an alternative when the Leninist left is in such a crisis, we can only come to this conclusion. We can and must do better.

The answer to this does not lie in less organisation. The problem



is not in having too 'exclusive' a politics. We have to be realistic about how many people can be won to revolutionary politics in a period of massive depoliticisation and defeat for the working class. The SWP has a fairly inclusive politics, very sloppy by Leninist standards and has perhaps 4,000 members. Its politics are souped-up social democracy however. If you want a 'mass' organisation snuggle up to reformism. And be organised.

It has always struck me that there were comrades in Class War who really felt that the right presentation of the politics at the right time would see stadium-fulls of working class people pouring into CWF. It's a bit like some Trotskyists who seem to think that as soon as they get their Transitional programme absolutely word-perfect then the working class will ditch their social democratic leadership and put themselves under theirs!

It doesn't work like that!

We're living in fucking dark times and that revolutionary minorities in the class even maintain some sort of organisation without turning into religious sects is a feat in itself.

That doesn't mean we should be satisfied with the situation we have at the moment but it means we have to realise that revolutionary politics at this moment in time do not have that much of a response from the mass of working class people and that this will not change simply by rearranging the packaging.

THE COMMUNIST POSITION

Neither does it mean all we have to do is "defend historical communist positions" and keep ourselves somehow uncontaminated by the world around us. Rather we should be engaging with reality. We need to be visible, arguing our politics, churning out the propaganda, intervening when and where we can. And yes, certainly presenting our politics in a clear coherent, readable way. But we need to be organised. We have to offer an alternative.

At the moment there appears to be a new wave of open-mindedness, a new spirit of questioning, amongst certain parts of the 'left' and this has produced things such as the Revolutionary Socialist Network and the International Socialist Forum.

NEW DOORS

The initiative taken by the majority of Class War Federation to dissolve and to reassess opens up new possibilities. There needs to be critical engagement and a real dialogue between all those comrades who wish to create an alternative to capitalism and state capitalist politics.

But, amongst all this we should not forget that our enemies are organised and that we too, need to be organised on a national and international basis. Comrades, lets talk, lets find new ways to move ahead, together, but most of all, lets move towards a theoretical, tactical, and organisational unity.

D (London)

CRYSTAL BALL GAZING

The following is part of the text of a talk given by Mike and Claire of the Anarchist Communist Federation (Nottingham) at a discussion meeting held between the ACF and Subversion last year. It is an attempt to discuss aspects of the post-revolutionary world (that is, the society we are all trying to bring about through revolution), beyond obvious statements such as "we will all be equal and there will be no government". We think that some of it fitted the themes suggested for the Bradford MayDay '98 conference.

There is nothing inevitable about revolution. This is why the revolution must be built through revolutionary organisation and culture. And there is nothing inevitable about how post-revolutionary human society will organise itself.

No natural laws govern this. Just as we don't believe that human beings are 'naturally' selfish, nor that the 'law of the jungle' will prevail unless that state is there to protect the weak, neither do we believe in a 'natural' human impulse for co-operation amongst equals which has been stifled by the state and the bosses. Human society has been hierarchical, unequal, oppressive, homophobic and patriarchal where the state and money never existed.

We believe that the exact nature of the post-revolutionary society will be chosen and shaped by the deliberate and conscious will of those building it. It will not 'evolve' nor be subject to any other 'natural law', pseudo-biological or -sociological. It will be consciously chosen. When the revolution is won, if we vent our destructive and constructive anger in the demolition of the concrete grey architectural edifices until we weary of the debris, it will be because we choose to, not because it is our destiny.

GOING GLOBAL

From there we must choose to rebuild a world fit to live in, for ourselves and the rest of nature so vulnerable to our whims. Finally, and most importantly, we must envisage and then choose to create a liberated global society beyond the obvious essentials on which all revolutionaries agree 'no government' and 'no money', 'no homophobia, sexism or racist bigotry', also realising what this implies in positive and optimistic terms; this is to say 'creative', 'exciting', 'fulfilling', both 'communal' and 'individual'.

It is surely almost impossible to visualise not only how we will live but what we will be like as people; we are not 'ourselves' under capitalism, because it fucks up every human interaction and relationship, creating and intensifying insecurity, greed, jealousy, the desire to dominate and the fear of the unknown as though these were 'natural' conditions and emotions for us 'animal' creatures to live with.

A different society would produce a different type of humanity from the minute of birth. Today we can only try and visualise ourselves without the environmental and sociological features which fuck us up....

Most anarchists and some left-communists are really fetishistic about the need for open and non-parliamentary/non-representative-democratic decision-making. This stems from the

correct analysis that the state is largely responsible for our alienation from the decision-making process i.e. our disempowerment.

However, anarchists who try to claim 'direct democracy', 'accountable delegates' or more vaguely 'real democracy' for the post-revolutionary society badly miss the point. What matters in the future society is not the form of decision-making but the content.

PROCESSES AS REVOLUTION

Those who want proper democracy "revere the moment of decision, and class the revolution as the creation of a new decision-making processThey do not understand the revolution as a process of

creating new forms of activity" (quoted from a Workers Playtime article "What is Wildcat" - copies available from Subversion). Revolutionaries are sometimes keen to resolve perceived 'conflict' in a 'fair' way through the community instead of resorting to the state.

This implies that 'fairness' is more than an abstract concept which exists in context only under the mediation of the state, even though we understand this to be the case about 'rights'. But 'conflict' and its 'resolution' exists in an entirely different context once the concept of property, profit and scarcity are removed.

On this question of property then. We have in our political vocabulary the phrase 'common ownership', but ownership of any kind implies property. 'To own' something only makes sense if you have it and someone else is denied it. Under communism we will be a global community and, until Martians come to take over the Earth and dispossess humanity, it makes no sense

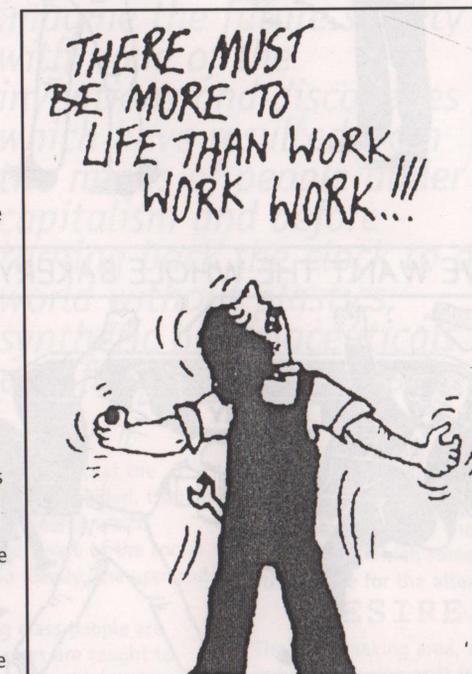
to speak of 'ownership' of any kind. This is not just semantics, it indicates a weakness in much revolutionary rhetoric, showing that we are subconsciously still expressing ourselves in terms of bourgeois property rights.

POTTERY FOR BEGINNERS

This was illustrated in a recent informal debate which we had in the ACF. Someone suggested that if she made something, say a pot, that, as she had created it, then it was hers to dispose of and not her community's, even though the clay was perhaps common 'property'. In a sense, she 'owned' it. No one argued against it and at the time it was a convincing argument that in a sense, after the revolution there would be some kind of ownership, by individuals and communities.

It did not occur to us that the debate missed the point entirely. It only made sense if someone would want to take the pot off her; either because they 'lacked' one themselves or because hers was more 'attractive', and therefore more 'valuable', than one that they had.

We were still assuming a society of scarcity and acquisitiveness as an expression of wealth or affluence. The concept of property implies that someone would want, or need, to dispossess you after the revolution. What our debate lacked was the psychological understanding of life without these motives. Even if we had the intuitive ability to understand what the communist psychology will



feel like, we still lack the necessary language to express our relationship to the world.

NEW WORLD, NEW WORDS

The new global language of the post revolutionary society will lack words which can be translated as 'owning', 'losing', 'keeping' and 'needing' as we currently understand those words. Just as people will not be owned in legal or social relationships, neither will objects; they will either be being used or enjoyed by us, or by someone else with whom we have a common interest.

Back to democracy - once we remove the concept of 'property', the concept of 'conflict' looks radically different. Differences of opinion, of need, and of desire, look exciting areas to explore and to attempt to satisfy, not to set up machinery for arbitration and accountability.

To quote from the same article: "democracy has nothing to do with the communist revolution - it is a form of political mediation in a society fractured by capitalist social relations where people are alienated from their productive activity, from themselves and one another, from life itself. The communist revolution is precisely the suppression of these social relations and of politics as a separate 'privileged sphere'".

Once we remove or minimise the emotional and physical insecurity of life and attempt to challenge the fearful mentality that those things gave us, other things will also change. The need for the family will surely also disappear. The nurturing of new individuals will surely be the job of the community.

The parent who conceived and gave birth should not have rights of control over a child. When born, able or disabled, planned or unexpected, a child will be a member of the community, and the community will educate it in what it needs and what it wants to learn until it has learnt enough to take adult decisions for itself.

WE ARE FAMILY

The community can do this better than the nuclear family or even the extended family (the virtue of which is a myth in any case because the parents or patriarch usually still have the most control and the child is a family resource allocated as wanted or needed).

This doesn't mean that children will not be close to adults and know them only as teachers. Nor that babies will be raised in dormitories. It means that a child will, from an early age, form bonds of its choosing aside from those with its mother who gave it life, who will not pursue it when it makes these choices because she will not be being rejected nor feel rejected.

We can choose not to be driven by biological urges - to reproduce, to control and protect our 'produce' - especially as security and happiness will give us other options in life than reproducing idealised images of ourselves. If we are good at making children happy and teaching them interesting things, they will flock to us. If we aren't interested, they will have other

'parents'. At present the way we live is dictated by the way capitalist society is organised. The technologies which are available to us, whether they are the car, the internet or the microwave, have been developed to suit the existing order. Many people are forced, whether they want to or not, to drive to work, use electronic mail, or cook food as quickly as possible.

Whether we actually enjoy driving, talking on the net or eating microwave porridge is irrelevant.

It is the options which are not available to us that should concern us. In the future society our imaginations won't be constrained by the work-ethic-ridden, stress-laden, or competitive mentalities of capitalism. Boring work will be reduced to a minimum as we'll aim to do these as quickly and with as little effort as possible, so we'll have more time to do interesting things in a variety of different ways, some which may take longer but be more satisfying, some which we'll want to do more efficiently than capitalism will allow. To do this, we'll want to have the appropriate technologies.

We cannot seriously imagine the future society with none of the inventions and discoveries which have resulted from the minds of people under capitalism and before - turning back the clock to a world without plastics, synthetic pharmaceuticals and fabrics, electronics?.

Obviously what is so offensive about technology is the extent to which it has been used for useless, harmful and degrading purposes. Much of the technology we have today is a direct result of a search for profits. A process which produces something more quickly, calculates faster, washes whiter is there to sell more, faster, not to improve our lives - technology produced without regard for the

effect on the environment or on the people that have to implement it and use it.

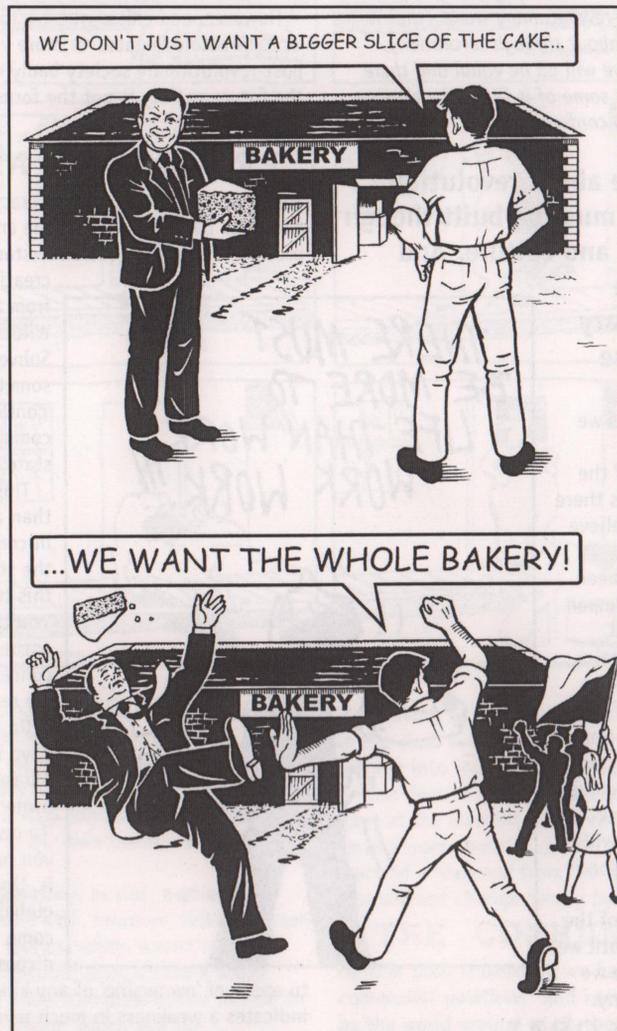
How different it will be when we have destroyed capitalism. Then the use value of technology together with its effect on society and the environment will be all important. The electronics industry is a good example of the way capitalist innovation has helped people, yet enslaves us.

We have pacemakers and hearing aids, telephones and recorded music, food mixers and escalators, air traffic control and radar-aided sea rescue. None of these would exist without electronics or generation of electricity.

FISH 'N' CHIPS

In this case decisions will have to be made, for example, on whether we can have computer chips made using toxic production chemicals, or powered by fossil fuels. Do we decide we do need computers so we find an environmentally acceptable method, or can we find an alternative to electronics and computers in our future lives?

Much of this may be answered in a world where the pace of life and technological progress is slower. So many of the products we



volume, and to compete with a similar product from another company. Future technology will be based on need, and there will be more time to come up with a good solution to a problem. It will be acceptable to create things to help one individual or many, not just for a mass consumer market and not because an individual is rich enough afford it.

MAD SCIENTISTS

Another problem with today's technology is how it is kept mystified or hidden, which suits the individual scientist seeking to preserve an elitist position, or a company wanting to keep knowledge and profits to itself. We need to find technologies which are accessible and more understandable by as many people as possible.

In this way we will not be in awe of their creators/discoverers. Bakunin argues that political liberty depends on preventing domination by academies of "the most illustrious representatives of science", that even the most well-meaning of geniuses will be corrupted by the privilege that person gains by membership of an academy. Although he is talking about science and legislation over the organisation of society, the same applies to technology.

Once technology starts to sit in the hands of a few experts, it is difficult to see how society does not begin to be led by their desires, however well-intentioned. This is not to say that every individual will have to be trained in the minutest detail of every technology, as this is an impossibility, but we will need to identify which technologies have the most impact on how society is run and organised.

This inevitably means a broad understanding of the organisation of fuel production, communication etc. by everybody. Kropotkin argues that the division of 'brain work' and 'manual work' must be avoided. Users of technology must be aware of the theory and research which underpins it. Inventors of technology must be aware of the social impact of putting their idea into practice. So ideally, the user and the innovator are one and the same.

Kropotkin went on to explain how working class people are deprived of creativity, whereas the upper classes are taught to despise manual labour (and the people doing it), which is true to this day. He also points out the division of the scientist from the engineer into the pure and applied fields. Though these ideas are hardly groundbreaking nowadays, he also explains how the divisions actually stifle creativity.

WHERE'S THE ART?

How can a design be improved if most people haven't the faintest idea how the existing one works? Also mentioned is the problem of how most school work seems irrelevant, and how it is quickly forgotten once people start mind-numbing exclusively non-creative work, or how most people are not given the time or resources to think about and apply creative ideas, how theory feeds off application as well as vice-versa, how the division of art from science is to the detriment of both.

We must have a program of basic education which includes the teaching of numeracy and literacy to all, explanation of the organisation of society and its technologies from an early age. The vision we have of the new society can only work if we redefine both education and work.

Education would benefit if it entailed producing something visibly useful, entertaining or interesting to society, and would give children a sense of being part of society, not just in the process of learning how to be part of society. They'd be useful to that society and valued by it. They would contribute to society from the start of their lives and thereby learn to have opinions and

new ideas about that society.

But not only for children. Free leisure time from necessary community labour can be used resting or doing nothing, but equally to pursue interesting avenues of art or science, alone or with others, whether playing of or some foreseen practical purpose. This can only be to the benefit to both the individual and society.

How will we produce and process necessary resources in the new society? There will undoubtedly be geographical areas where certain widely-needed resources are processed, but not in others, for logistic reasons. Take steel production, which is at present often carried out near coal mines as this is the fuel required for producing steel from iron ore.

Assuming that we decide we need steel and there is no other way of producing it but from coal and iron ore, how would the future society do it? No one should consider it sensible for the future society to produce steel in every locality (the disastrous

Maoist experiment of an iron smelter in every village springs to mind here...). But does this mean that the communities living close to a natural resource have to be responsible for it? Will they become the unwitting experts of steel production just because of where they happen to live?

Far from it - instead it would be the responsibility of some individuals from other areas to work in that industry for a small part of their lives. The implications of this is that the process will have to be made as simple to learn and to use as possible - it should be highly automated thanks to technological innovation, enabling it to be carried out with as little skill as possible.

This is in contrast to the present,

where certain work has often been maintained as a skill to protect workers interest and wages, seeing automation (quite reasonably) as a threat to livelihoods. The idea of de-skilling of industrial tasks may help to counter the problem of the mystification of technology, which some primitivists would probably argue is a strong case for the alternative de-technologising of society.

DESIRE BEFORE PROFIT

The steel-making area, rather than being a grim and isolated industrial region as it is now, could deliberately become a thriving cultural centre, by virtue of the many different people visiting and working in it from different regions.

Neither will people be making steel all day long as we won't be working the stupidly long hours we do at the moment, and will have lots of time to do other things. This will help offset the uncreative nature of the work itself.

How might we produce and develop a technology in the future? At present, most what we might consider to be socially useful research and development is still done either done by companies, or in universities where the money needed to do the research has to be bid for from a government body or charity and funds are often limited and short term.

It is not in their interests to divulge the details of a design before it is finished or at least until results have been published, as all are in competition for markets, or funding. This means collaboration is limited. A technology might be used just because it is available as a spin-off from the military, or in mass-produced consumer goods, like computer games.

Now, let us assume a particular device would be useful in the future society. How would all this be done differently? Well for a start, needs would come first, and we wouldn't be wasting resources developing weapons technology.

The original problem would be made widely known then individuals with an interest in participating in finding a solution would get together. This would of course include people with the

need that the technology is being developed for. Participation could be local or global, depending on the level of communication possible in the future society, and on the difficulty of the task. The solution would not necessarily depend on existing technology which could be designed specifically for the task in hand. Results would be more readily available at all stages.

For this example, and others like it, some questions still remain. How do people find out about problems? At the moment, it is often left up to the scientist to identify a problem, and pose a solution. In other cases, interest groups have to compete to put their needs forward e.g. charities fighting for media attention. Would we have a list of unsolved tasks and how would these be prioritised if at all?

What if there is no one interested in carried out a task which would be beneficial to one group but which that group is not able to do themselves? Could society deem such a task to be necessary and compel people with the knowledge to do it anyway? What if there is the interest, but those people are doing other things, or a group does not have all the expertise necessary? Can our education program be flexible enough to respond to these situations?

Related to the above are other questions I have not addressed

here. What about less obviously 'useful' research? Should it be the case that a person is free to pursue whatever interest takes their fancy, or does the future society need an ethical committee of some sort? What if someone thinks that the way to find a cure for a disease involves wiring up a monkey?; or that they want to produce genetically engineered blue tomatoes for fun? Why not?

Who governs what is 'ethical'? Do we have 'ethics' in a communist society? If we only innovate in 'acceptable' directions, will the new society be too short-sighted? If industrial work is organised like that described above, some people will need to be involved in the tasks of keeping track of who is where, doing what etc.

Also, there is still the problem of shifting the expert base from the 'skilled' worker to the 'technologist' - someone has to design and maintain an automated system of production! This poses some problems for libertarians as we need to avoid power being concentrated in anyone's hands, so these aspects need to be discussed further.

If you want the full text (about 10 pages) send an sae to: ACF (Nottingham), c/o 84b Whitechapel High St, London, E1 7QX. We welcome any feedback.

HOW TO GET FROM HERE...

Much of the class struggle anarchist movement concentrates on campaigns: trying to mobilise people to force the government and the upper class to grant some sort of concession, by demonstrations etc.

Anarcho-syndicalism, on the other hand, concentrates on industrial organisation. This article is based on the idea that neither strategy is doing as well as it could, and discusses a different approach. What if we concentrated on projects which gave working class people an immediate benefit - for example, housing advice, food distribution, community centres etc.?

BENEFITS

Anarcho-syndicalism aims to offer people this kind of practical benefit. The idea is that working class people will put a lot more energy into unions than any other kind of political activity. Unions are at least potentially run by and for working class people, able to win on a regular basis, etc. As far as it goes, this is undeniable.

Look at the average demonstration in your city. Is it workers or is it university students? Is it democratic or is it run by (self-elected) stewards? Does the government give in? Does anyone even think it's going to achieve anything, or are they just making

LOOTING



Photo: L.A. Riots 1992 - "Every one a winner!" P&P Bash St. Kids

SAYS MORE ABOUT YOU THAN CASH EVER CAN

Watts Riots, L.A., 1965: Governor Hughes expresses horror at the "holiday atmosphere" he finds among looters.

themselves feel better? Even if it did win, would it have an obvious benefit for the average working class person? And even then, who would take credit - politicians, Trotskyists, the self-appointed leaders? Is there any point to it at all, except to give the Trotskyists a new crop of recruits?

Can you imagine anyone with a job, a family, not enough time and too many worries giving any time at all to the average campaign? Even with the union movement in its present sorry state, anyone can see that unionism is much more attractive than traditional campaigning to any worker in their right mind.

EAT THEORY

However, anarcho-syndicalist groups are supposed to offer real benefits, not just theory. But unionism needs a lot of people to work. Anarcho-syndicalist groups, at least in the English-speaking world, are all pretty small: too small to start a meaningful union or to change the direction of an

existing union. So they can't do anything until they get bigger. So they offer theory not real benefits!

Food Not Bombs distributes free vegan food to homeless people. A lot of FNB groups at least involve local anarchists. Unlike unions,

an FNB group doesn't need many people. FNB groups are totally independent, but there are some overall problems. As the name would suggest, FNB concentrates on pacifism. The original aim seems to be to overcome the violence within. This implies blaming ordinary people - if only working class people were pacifists, there'd be no nuclear weapons. The second problem is one of charity. There's a definite divide between the people who dole out the food and the people who take it. There doesn't seem to be an emphasis on self-organisation. I think we can combine the best of both streams: the anarcho-syndicalists' emphasis on benefiting working class people, and the aim of eventually forming unions for revolution. And FNB's emphasis on projects which are public, immediately beneficial, and can be carried out by small groups (not that small-scale projects are better. It's just that most local groups would be too small for anything else).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

Some arguments against this approach are:

1. We need bigger groups. It's a bit much to expect a group of three people to start a food distribution project. However, there's no need for that. For example, one idea is to gather all the information you can on housing, unemployment rights etc., and distribute it through existing anarchist publications. Where I live, there are heaps of places which give this information out for free. However, they mostly don't get to all the people that can use it. So there are projects which don't need many people.

2. You can't involve the whole community and be specifically anarchist - so you have to be either a charity, a non-anarchist group, or a front group. This seems to be common sense. But I think there's a way out. My idea is for anarchist groups to start openly anarchist projects. However, we also help local communities set up their own projects - provided they're democratic, not a charity, not a Trotskyist front etc.

A few people will probably want to join us, but most won't (for a few years anyway). If Trotskyists or Christians try and take these groups over, we give the locals advice on how to spot this and stop them. If we're encouraging self-organisation, and the other lot are just trying to wreck it (I don't think this is too cynical given their record), it's obvious that our ideas will be listened to and theirs won't. So, we can keep groups specifically anarchist and spread our ideas, and yet involve the maximum number of people in a genuinely democratic way

3. Campaigns can achieve more. It's true that a successful campaign will achieve more than a single piece of mutual aid. But it isn't a fair comparison. For example, Melbourne Food Not Bombs has five events per week. How many groups can run five successful campaigns even in a year? And guarantee that they'll be successful, and that no one will steal the credit, and that their gains won't be legislated away when they publicity dies down? None. Even very successful campaigns, like the Poll Tax campaign in Britain, don't seem to have really helped the anarchist movement in the long run.

4. You'd be abandoning class struggle. If a mutual aid project was fairly successful (and FNB shows that this is quite plausible), three things might happen. The government might ignore it, in which case we can spread our ideas as well as build up respect. Or the government might shut it down. The government can break up a demonstration and claim the demonstrators were 'violent', 'out of control' etc. If they did that to a child-minding service, do you think people would believe them? Or, they could try and shut it down and fail - the best of both worlds. Successful mutual aid projects could generate campaigns - campaigns where people would have an obvious stake in the anarchists winning.

TAKING OVER

5. You'd be giving governments an excuse to cut services. The government isn't going to let the anarchists take over providing services. They'd save a bit, but they'd send a message that communities can survive without governments, that anarchists care about ordinary people, and that governments don't. They're evil, not stupid.

I'd love to lose this debate. I'd like someone to say 'mutual aid might be better than what we have now, but such-and-such is much better'. However, it seems a lot better than no change. Isn't 100 years long enough to test a theory? The conditions are right for anarchism - Leninism's collapsed, capitalism can't deliver, and we have groups all over the world that are small, but big enough to put these ideas into practice. We can cash in on this, or we can wait another century.

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(email me for information about the new practical anarchism email list).

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The following article, come from Chapter 14 of the book 'Anarchy In Action', by Colin Ward, first published in 1973. Whilst one may not agree exactly, or at all, with Colin Ward's views, the article does reflect on a number of pertinent issues that need to be discussed at the Bradford '98 Conference (and elsewhere). The article is not surprisingly dated in some parts, but this should not deflect the reader from the important points raised.

The important question is, therefore, not whether anarchy is possible or not, but whether we can so enlarge the scope and influence of libertarian methods that they become the normal way in which human beings organise their society. Is an anarchist society possible?

We can only say, from the evidence of human history, that no kind of society is impossible. If you are powerful enough and ruthless enough you can impose almost any kind of social organisation on people - for a while. But you can only do so by methods which, however natural and appropriate they may be for

any other kind of 'ism' acting on the well-known principle that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, are repugnant to anarchists, unless they see themselves as yet another of those revolutionary elites 'leading the people' to the promised land. You can impose authority but you cannot impose freedom. An anarchist society is improbable, not because anarchy is unfeasible, or unfashionable, or unpopular, but because human society is not like that, because, as Malatesta put it "we are, in any case, only one of the forces acting in society."

CHOOSE A DISHWASHER

The degree of social cohesion implied in the idea of 'an anarchist society' could only occur in a society so embedded in the cake of custom that the idea of choice among alternative patterns of social behaviour simply did not occur to people. I cannot imagine that degree of unanimity and I would dislike it if I could, because the idea of choice is crucial to any philosophy of freedom and spontaneity. So we don't have to worry about the boredom of utopia: we shan't get there. But what results from this conclusion? One response would be to stress anarchism as an ideal of personal liberation, ceasing to think of changing society, except by

example. Another would be to conclude that because no roads lead to utopia no road leads anywhere, an attitude which, in the end, is identical with the utopian one because it asserts that there are no partial, piecemeal, compromise or temporary solutions, only one attainable or an-attainable final solution.

But, as Alexander Herten put it over a century ago: "A goal which is infinitely remote is not a goal at all, it is a deception. A goal must be closer - at the very least the labourer's wage or pleasure in the work performed. Each epoch, each generation, each life has had, and has, its own experience, and the end of each generation must be itself."

The choice between libertarian and authoritarian solutions is not a once-and-for-all cataclysmic struggle. It is a series of running engagements, most of them never concluded, which occur, and have occurred, throughout history. Every human society, except the most totalitarian of utopias or anti-utopias, is a plural society with large areas which are not in conformity with the officially imposed or declared value.

An example of this can be seen in the alleged division of the world into capitalist and communist blocks: there are vast areas of capitalist societies which are not governed by capitalist principles, and there are many aspects of the socialist societies which cannot be described as socialist.

I WILL SURVIVE!

You might even say that the only thing that makes life livable in the capitalist world is the unacknowledged non-capitalist element within it, and the only thing that makes survival possible in the communist world is the unacknowledged capitalist element in it. This is why a controlled market is a left-wing demand in a capitalist economy - along with state control, while a free market is a left-wing demand in a communist society - along with workers' control. In both cases, the demands are for whittling away power from the centre, whether it is the power of the state or capitalism, or state-capitalism.

So what are the prospect for increasing the anarchist content of the real world? From one point of view the outlook is bleak: centralised power, whether that of governments or super-governments, or of private capitalism or the super-capitalism of giant international corporations, has never been greater. The prophecies of nineteenth-century anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin about the power of the state over the citizen have a relevance today which must have seemed unlikely for their contemporaries.

From another standpoint the outlook is infinitely promising. The very growth of the state and its bureaucracy, the giant corporation and its privileged hierarchy, are exposing their vulnerability to non-co-operation, to sabotage, and to the exploitation of their weaknesses by the weak. They are also giving rise to parallel organisations, counter organisations, alternative organisations, which exemplify the anarchist method.

Industrial mergers and rationalisation have bred the revival of the demand for workers' control, first as a slogan or a tactic like the work-in, ultimately as a destination. The development of the school and the university as broiler-houses for a place in the occupational pecking-order have given rise to the de-schooling movement and the idea of the anti-university. The use of medicine and psychiatry as agents of conformity has led to the idea of the anti-hospital and the self-help therapeutic group.

SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS

The failure of Western society to house its citizens has prompted the growth of squatter movements and tenants' co-operatives. The triumph of the supermarket in the United States has begun a mushrooming of food cooperatives. The deliberate pauperisation of those who cannot work has led to the recovery of self-respect through Claimants' Unions.

Community organisations of every conceivable kind, community newspapers, movements for child welfare, communal households have resulted from the new consciousness that local as well as

central government exploit the poor and are unresponsive to those who are unable to exert effective pressure for themselves. The 'rationalisation' of local administration in Britain into 'larger and more effective units' is evoking a response in the demand for neighbourhood councils.

A new self-confidence and assertion of their right to exist on their own terms has sprung up among the victims of particular kinds of discrimination - black liberation, women's liberation, homosexual liberation, prisoners' liberation, children's liberation: the list is almost endless and is certainly going to get longer as more and more people become more and more conscious that society is organised in ways which deny them a place in the sun. In the age of mass politics and mass conformity, this is a magnificent re-assertion of individual values and of human dignity.

None of these movements is yet a threat to the power structure, and this is scarcely surprising since hardly any of them existed before the late 1960s. None of them fits into the framework of



Two stationary targets

conventional politics. In fact, they don't speak the same language as the political parties. They talk the language of anarchism and they insist on anarchist principles of organisation, which they have learned not from political theory but from their own experience.

AS TIME GOES BY

They organise in loosely associated groups which are voluntary, functional, temporary and small. They depend, not on membership cards, votes, a special leadership and a herd of inactive followers but on small, functional groups which ebb and flow, group and regroup, according to the task in hand. They are networks, not pyramids.

At the very time when the 'irresistible trends of modern society' seemed to be leading us to a mass society of enslaved consumers they are reminding us of the truth that the irresistible is simply that which is not resisted. But obviously a whole series of partial and incomplete victories, of concessions won from the holders of power, will not lead to an anarchist society.

But it will widen the scope of free action and the potentiality for freedom in the society we have. But such compromises of anarchist notions would have to be made, such authoritarian bedfellows chosen, for a frontal attack on the power structure, that the anarchist answer to cries for revolutionary unity is likely to be 'Whose noose are you inviting me to put round my neck this time?'

CRITIQUE OF THE FINAL ISSUE OF CLASS WAR

Our main aim in making this critique is to show that 'new ways of organising' which stand a chance of at last moving us positively towards 'the emancipation of the working class' depend on a substantial majority of the people in whatever organisation is formed, first fully agreeing to the following:

(a) that the main enemy of the working class is not the non-existent hence never-defined 'Ruling Class' (or Boss Class, or Capitalist Class) but is the middle class - not individuals of it, or a section of it, but the middle class as a whole.

(b) that Capitalism is nothing more than an economic system originated and developed by middle class people to ensure and extend their power and domination over us. It is a system that will be ended when we expropriate the middle class.

GOOD IN PARTS

We read the title of the Final issue of Class War with considerable misgiving about the usefulness of what was to follow. Those who decided on the title 'LONG LIVE THE CLASS WAR' must have done so while looking for some loose marbles. We do not wish long life to the class war. We want the working class to win as quickly as

possible - the sooner the better. So we want a 'short life' to the class war. However, some of what followed was better than this gaff led us to expect, but not a lot.

Class War have faced up to the only too obvious fact that despite many decades of struggle and suffering through thousands of strikes, campaigns and demonstrations, as well as the continual daily grind and conflict whether in work or out, the working class is still a dominated class no nearer to real emancipation, to freedom, than ever were - that therefore they and the so-called 'revolutionaries' have failed.

So it's appropriate that (page 2) they call for "new ways of organising that can appeal to the whole working class, young and old, men and women, black and white". There are certainly a number of good bits in the Final Issue - for example, the useful and objective discussion about use of violence; their honesty about not knowing why Class War appealed to very few women and no blacks, and admitting they have no clear ideas how to reverse this (page 5); their discussion about revolution not being on the agenda at the present time is unquestionable - up to the point where they cite Capitalism as the reason why (page 6).

SERIOUS CRITICISMS

However, over the years we have published serious criticisms of Class War and all the other 'revolutionaries'. Class War have never replied. So when we heard about the wind-up, and the Final Issue that would be an honest attempt to explain where they went wrong, we thought such honesty would compel them to at last answer these criticisms. But no - not a whisper.

Some of those involved in the production may not be aware of the criticisms. But others certainly are and their continued silence does not give us full confidence in claims such as on page 3 "our intention is to be open and very honest".

No doubt this is true in parts. But there are parts where it is not, and the bottom of page 6 is one. It's some time since we've seen anything quite so muddled, falsified, and contradictory as this attack on the pamphlet 'educating who about what?' published in 1996 - things like the accusation that it was published anonymously, when in every issue of Class War all articles were anonymous. It is typical sectarian slugging while at the same time claiming (page 4) "we always steer clear of sectarian slugging."

It's not that we ourselves have no criticisms of the pamphlet - and it's useful to mention one here because of its relevance to our critique of Class War. Whereas the pamphlet hits the nail squarely on the head with the statement that "The anarchist approach to politics is absolutely flawed, irrelevant, outdated, invalid, and of no value to most working class people's lives", this is contradicted in other places where it refers to "anarchists wonderful ideas" and says "We believe anarchism is valid and desirable".

This leads to our main criticism that the pamphlet has an underlying theme that if the working class are to at last free themselves, we need "real, genuine anarchism" (unexplained), and not the "bastard, phony kind propagated by all those who call themselves anarchists".

MEANINGS

We are opposed to use of the words Anarchist/Anarchism, and our reasons are, briefly, that for sometime now 'Anarchism' has not had any specific and clearly understood meaning - it's even questionable whether it ever had. There has not been, nor is there today, a single body of ideas and theories called 'anarchism'. So it's understandable that groups calling themselves 'anarchist' rarely, if ever, define what it is.

Understandable too that, although the words Anarchist/Anarchism appear 21

times in the Final Issue, it is never defined. Partly as a result of this, we find contradictions like where on page 7 they say "as we enter the 21st century, there could be more support for Anarchist ideas than any of us have ever dreamed of," then a bit later (page 9) they fully agree with the American writer, Bob Black, when he says that "Anarchism as it is now, rather than being an attempt to change the world, is a highly specialised form of accommodation to it."

Perhaps one of the most powerful arguments for discontinuing use of these words is the fact that most working class people (even the more politically-minded and militant among them) are deterred and turned off by the term 'Anarchist' which, for them, has either no meaning, or just a distorted one. Nevertheless, 'educating who about what?' is the most accurate description of the moribund and politically sick state of those calling themselves 'Anarchist revolutionaries' since we first drew attention to the same malaise over ten years ago in our book 'Know Your Enemy'.

In the preamble to their attack on it, Class War know who are working class and who are middle class because they say "middle

class people are involved" in Class War. What is particularly shocking is that they go on to clearly imply their belief in what we, years ago, condemned the Solidarity group for when they stated "There can be no victorious revolution without a union between working class and middle class activists".

So if this really is their position, why don't they come out and openly say so instead of asking silly questions like 'how do you know who's working class and who's middle class?' and 'Do you have a class-based means test?'

SHOCKING!

And why do they later accuse the pamphlet's author of 'making no attempt to define middle class or working class'? They obviously do know the difference, otherwise they wouldn't ask "How does Class War relate to middle class people who are committed and have proved themselves?"

Leaving aside the big questions of what 'committed' and 'proved themselves' mean, we must draw attention to what they go on to say: "This problem has become an obsession with some people. . ." (Actually, as obsessions go, this might not be such a bad one to have). However, they admit "it is a red herring we get tired of having to deal with." To dismiss the discussion of who the class enemy really is as an 'obsession' and a 'red herring' is bad enough, but it's also a discussion they've never seriously dealt with, and one which should have been given the greatest prominence in the Final Issue.

A statement on page 7 suggested they were getting near to agreeing with us: "Millions of working class people have just voted for Blair and his cronies but how many really believe in them? How can you believe in something which is in effect an upwardly mobile bunch of middle class people who think themselves eminently qualified to run our lives for us?" We don't know how this bit managed to get past the censors, but it certainly supports what we've been saying for years - that, one way and another, the middle class run our lives.

However, our jubilation was short-lived, for in the rest of the Final issue they still say that the main enemy of the working class is a trinity of Capitalism, The Ruling Class, and The State. We put them in this order because Capitalism would appear to be the one they consider the most satanic - it is referred to as our enemy 39 times (The Ruling Class: 6 times - The State: 5 times). Examples are:

Page 4: "Our goal - a working class revolution that sweeps away Capitalism."

Page 8: "Our task is still one of getting rid of Capitalism."

Page 9: "Our goal is to bring an end to the global domination of Capitalism."

ECONOMIC SYSTEM

It's ridiculous, almost unbelievable, that we find ourselves again having to point out that Capitalism is not some kind of humanoid, or some devil incarnate, whom we should first religiously expend most energy trying to destroy.

Surely they must know the unequivocal fact that Capitalism is nothing more than an economic system originated and developed by middle class people to enrich mainly themselves and extend their power and dominance. Obviously, this system will end when we expropriate the middle class.

The second member of the trinity, The Ruling Class, is referred to far less than is usual for Class War. One such is the slogan "Death to The Ruling Class" (page 16). The term 'Ruling Class' is a Marxist one, though, paradoxically, not because Marx used it. One of the ways it came into the parlance of the 'revolutionaries' was through the often-quoted statement taken from the Communist Manifesto written by Marx and Engels in 1848 - in German of course.

"Die herrschenden Ideen einer Zeit waren stets nur die Ideen der herrschende Klasse."

The translators of the Manifesto for reproduction in English were always middle class, and always translated the word 'herrschend' as 'ruling'. Thus, the statement has always appeared as:



"And now there go the Wilsons! . . . Seems like everyone's evolving except us!"

"The ruling ideas of an age were always the ideas of the ruling class." But the correct translation for the word 'herrschend' is 'dominant'. So when correctly translated, the statement reads: "The dominant ideas of an age were always the ideas of the dominant class."

MISTRANSLATION

The dominant class was, and still is, the middle class. Therefore, by mistranslation, they were/are able to imply that their class were/are not the main enemy of the working class, but that it is a third, separate class of people - The Ruling Class - over whom they have no control.

This term to describe our enemy was taken up with some enthusiasm by the Left, including the so-called revolutionaries. Why? Part of the reason is similar to that of the translators: the middle class people among them (who, incidentally, dominated these organisations, and still do today) seized upon the misnomer, Ruling Class, because it enabled them, not just to alleviate their feelings of guilt, but to avoid naming their class as the main enemy of the working class.

Another part of the reason is that a number of them habitually use the term; it has become jargon - a kind of left-wing vernacular. It doesn't seem even to occur to them that they should define this Ruling Class and say who they are. On the rare occasions when Class War felt pressed to a bit of defining, they've come up with nonsense - like page 3 of the Final Issue, the Ruling Class is described as "those such as James Goldsmith, Anita Roddick, Richard Branson and Cedric Brown".

NUCLEAR POWERED RULERS!

Talking recently with a member of the SWP, he kept rabbiting on about The Ruling Class, so we asked him who the Ruling Class are in, for example, the nuclear power industry. He blanked out. Eventually, looking a bit glassy-eyed, he said he didn't know about the nuclear power industry, but they are people like James Goldsmith, Richard Branson and Cedric Brown....had he been

reading Class War? Or did he get it from the Socialist Worker?

Correctly denouncing the Trotskyists for their destructive influence on the working class struggle, they say (page 7) "Maybe we can snatch Marx back from these worthless Leninist usurpers to make what use of him we can." We obviously agree, having done a bit with the Communist Manifesto.

But we are certainly not any kind of Marxists - for KM said a number of things that are crap. However, some of what he said could be used by working class revolutionaries. For example, in the Communist Manifesto, he refers many times to the middle class being the dominant class; that the working class must, through revolution, dispossess the middle class, expropriate their power and property. We certainly agree with that. But Class War doesn't.

In the Final Issue they refer to the middle class 28 times - but not once as our main enemy. In fact, very few of these references could be called even mildly critical. There's something seriously wrong here.

THE STATE

The third member of their trinity is 'The State'. Like in all previous issues of Class War, they still call on us to "Smash The State" (page 16), yet without any explanation of what The State is, what it comprises, what its true role is, and how you go about smashing it.

So not surprising they get it wrong with statements like that on page 3: "We've had 18 years of increasing attacks on the interests of working class by the State". It is not by the State! It is by the middle class! By them through their State.

The State is different from the other two members of the trinity in that it does have substance - several substances, in fact. It comprises, for example, the armed forces, police, prisons, the judiciary (judges, magistrates, courts, etc.) and the civil service. The State does not just appear from nowhere. In every country of the world, it is created.

And it is always created and built up by the dominant class - the middle class. It is managed, controlled, and continually being maintained and strengthened by them for very specific reasons: to run things in a way that they believe ensures their continued dominant position in society.

True, the forces of The State have to be defeated. But that is something that will be synchronous with the fight to expropriate the middle class. That is to say, we shall not have to 'smash/defeat' The State first, then turn to settling the hash of the middle class. For whenever they feel themselves to be under attack from our class, they use one or more sections of The State against us.

So when we do seriously threaten their power, their dominant position, when we begin actions that can lead to our freedom - revolutionary actions - the middle class will use all sections of The State against us, probably quite ruthlessly.

WOMEN'S PAGES

Some bits of this piece are OK, but it is marred by the kid-gloved way it deals with middle class people's rule in the so-called feminist movement. Hence, the blame for the plight of working class women (the only ones that matter!) is laid on an abstract - the economic System, Capitalism.

"Capitalism's motto is: if you want to shell out less money and make more profits, employ women - they're worth less."

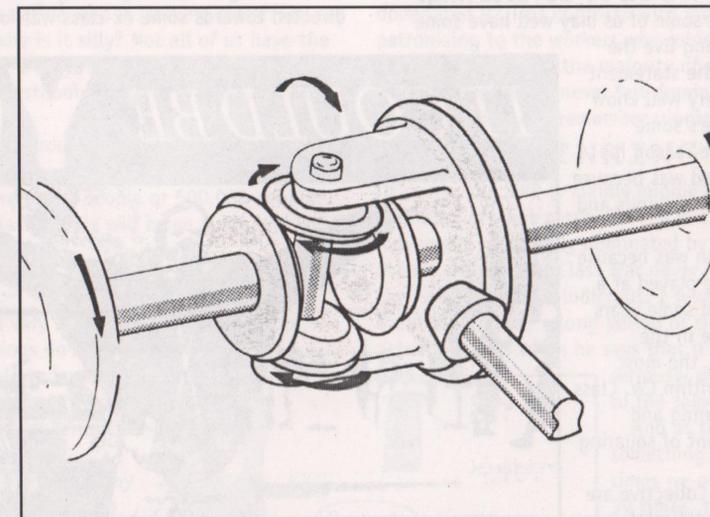
"Capitalism still pretends that women's wages are 'pin money'."

"One of Capitalism's strategies for reducing wages is to take what has traditionally been 'man's work' - manufacturing etc - automate the plant and then bring in unskilled women at a lower rate of pay."

The statements only make sense if the word 'Capitalism' is replaced by 'the middle class'. The fight against male dominance is as important as the fight against middle class dominance. They

must both be fought against with equal ferocity. Yet on pages 13-14 there is no sign of this being understood.

In conclusion, we must emphasise some of the points already made. The big boast on page 16 is that, despite what is said in the Final Issue, their politics have not changed. Yet if "new ways of organising that can appeal to all working class people" is to have a chance of beginning a positive move forward on the road to freedom, a crucial change in politics is essential to put an end to the hitherto debilitating confusion that has brought our struggle to this impasse. It's this: at



It's the motor of history (with no apologies to Marx)

last to recognise and clearly name our true enemy.

How can we organise, in any way, to defeat an abstract - an economic system? How can we organise to defeat a non-existent class - the Ruling Class? The middle class is the enemy, their domination of every activity in this society affects all of us.

OUR TASK

Our task is to curb and eventually end this domination. We do have some ideas about how - including "new ways of organising". But it would be a total waste of time discussing them with people whom Class War accuse (page 16) of "spouting the same tired old shit", and who are not prepared to make this crucial change in politics.

We all need to discover who is prepared to make this change. To this end, we put forward three statements and urge all to agree with them.

But it is important that individuals and/or groups who do not agree with them, do what they've hitherto avoided: send in detailed counter-arguments. All of these can then be reproduced and circulated to all on the mailing list before the first full conference initiated by ex-members of Class War. At this conference, these three statements should be the first items on the agenda for discussion.

(1) The main enemy of the working class is not the non-existent hence never-defined Ruling Class (or Boss Class, or Capitalist Class), but is the middle class - not individuals of it, or Sections of it, but the middle class as a whole.

(2) Capitalism is nothing more than an economic system originated and developed by middle class people for their material benefit, and to ensure and extend their power and dominance. It is a system that will be ended when we expropriate the middle class.

(3) We must cease (a) calling ourselves Anarchists, and (b) all references to Anarchism. To continue to do so will ensure continued isolation from the very working class people we need to involve to at last begin a positive move towards freeing ourselves from the domination of the middle class.

SPLAT Collective PO Box 3241, Saltley, Birmingham, B8 3D

SOME SHARP WORDS

Once again, complaints from the Andy Anderson camp that nobody within CW deals with his works of genius, the implication being that we can't/couldn't because it's all so devastating.

Not discounting the fact that some of us may well have some loose marbles, when we said "long live the class war", we didn't mean for the statement to be taken literally, and you very well know this, so don't be pedantic. There's some history going on here, partly the reason his self-important ideas were ignored was because we believed them to be absurd, ridiculous and barely worth answering.

But the more important reason was because of the divisive and nasty role he played at a Class War conference in Bradford some years back. It still leaves a nasty taste in the mouth, and was, for some of us, the most depressing experience we had within CW. Class warriors were physically threatening and attacking each other, to the point of squaring up to each other with bottles.

Andy Anderson and the Splat Collective are saying things that some people definitely want to hear. At a time when we are seeking a reconciliation in the movement, we would rather not be sidetracked by pointless destructive arguments like this but nonetheless we felt that it needed answering.

MARGINALISATION

We feel that the arguments contained in the previous article will only lead to continued marginalisation. This is not to say that we are arguing for more middle class people to get involved, far from it. We see the working class as the revolutionary class, not some stereotypical, one-dimensional version of it, but something that is alive, dynamic and ever-changing - and revolutionary politics must be dominated by the working class in its many facets. We have all been pissed off by the middle class types who come along, be involved for five minutes and then fuck off - but not everyone who's around has done that.

Sometimes the arguments we have must seem to a working class observer like the arguments of medieval priests about how angels can sit on a pin.

The arguments at that Class War conference revolved around this idea that the middle class are the main enemy, so therefore anybody middle class within CW had to be kicked out. Andy Anderson sat in silence throughout this conference, refusing to engage in any arguments, even under provocation, he sat in silence while we literally tore ourselves to shreds.

Of course he stirred it all up prior to the conference and he has been stirring it all up ever since. It is because of these memories that some of us feel less than inclined to give his ideas the kind of acclaim he feels they so richly deserve.

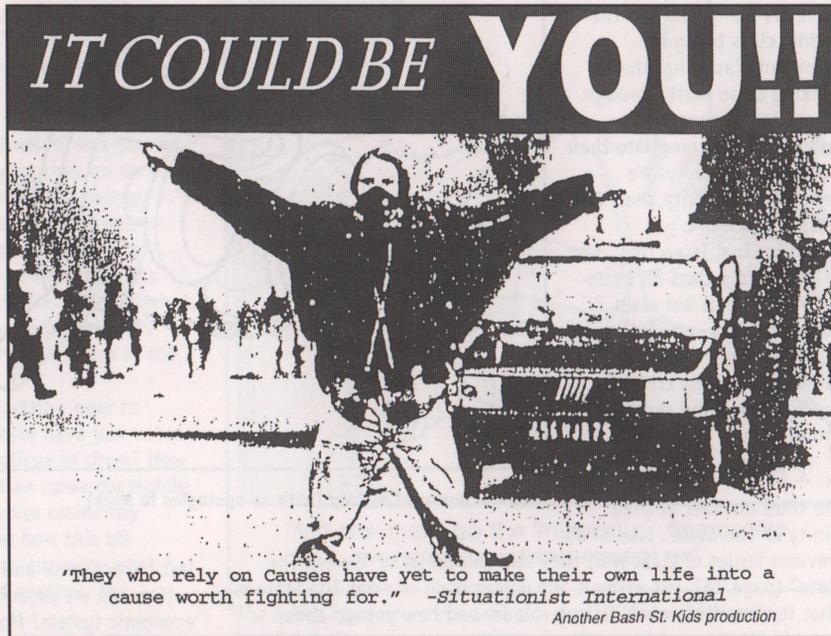
SPITE

Maybe one of the reasons working class people don't wish to involve themselves with "anarchists" is because of the nasty, spiteful way we often treat each other. Some past experiences within CW come to mind as do some more recent ones. The pamphlet 'Educating Who About What' is a good example of this kind of attitude.

The individual responsible for this pamphlet, Brandon, has an ad at the back of Andy Anderson's up and coming book, where various

(named and middle class) individuals come in for a brief but vicious slugging. Of course not all these individuals are even middle class ironically. But it's a good example of the sheer nastiness that sometimes pervades the "movement".

Something is seriously wrong when more hatred and bile is directed towards some ex-class warriors than towards any number



of other targets, James Goldsmith, the police, the Duchess of fucking Argyle, etc. Bear in mind that we are trying to create a world in which we are nice to each other? and don't treat each other like shit.

Speaking again of this up and coming Andy Anderson book, of course hatred of the middle class doesn't extend so far as refusing to accept middle class money to print the fucking thing. And why do you always get this kind of attitude "the middle class are all cunts" except so and so of course who's your mate and thus exempt.

We seem to remember Brandon physically threatening people who were badmouthing his middle class mate not so long ago. So some individuals set themselves up as the arbiters as to who fits into this or that class. If the middle class are the enemy as some people say, then the rupture has to be total. You can't have it both ways. It's either about politics or about personalities - so often so much of this stuff comes down to who is liked and who is disliked.

CRUSADER FOR CLARITY

Andy Anderson has attacked anarchists before for not writing in a clear way or defining their terms. Fair enough - he wants to dump the word anarchist (OK with us) because it has an unclear meaning amongst the working class. And yet this crusader for political clarity comes out with this twaddle about there being only two classes, the working class and the middle class, the middle class being by definition well...in the middle, of course. The middle of what? This is all crystal clear and guaranteed to end any confusion. Maybe you should dump this word middle, it seems contentious to me, time to think of a new one?

And as for this ludicrous notion that the reason for the failure of the revolutionary movement is its domination by the middle class - dream on. This is politics from the madhouse. The failure of the revolutionary movement is down to a multitude of factors - as can

clearly be demonstrated by your own utter failure with your supposedly "pure" working class group. Ten years on and still no more than five people in the Splat Collective, two of whom are the sons of Mr. Anderson. And as regards that 'Working Class Times', it's not as easy to produce a CW-type newspaper as you thought, is it? You're not going anyway fast either.

Andy Anderson is very strong on other people's lack of definitions, but what exactly is his definition of working class/middle class? You talk about it a lot but there's precious little definition. Exactly how do you define who is working class? You say that it is a silly question but why is it silly? Not all of us have the benefit of the class based radar that you have in your head! Or maybe you are saying that understanding who is in what class is innate, intuitive?

It seems like you have a small group mentality, it's easy to suss out someone's class background when they are only five of you. How would you do it if there were 500 people or 500,000 people? Bearing in mind that middle class people will come along and will want to be involved.

IT'S ALL STATIC TO ME

It seems to us that you have a very black and white concept of class, a static one in which things do not change. It's a complicated world, is it possible to lay down a definite line on something as complicated as class divisions in late 20th century Britain? What about all those grey areas and anomalies? You seem to have nothing to say about them. What class does Gazza fit into now to give a good example or what about Terry Venables for that matter.

There was a report out recently that said that the 300 richest men in the world owned more wealth combined together than the poorest third of the world's population. The logical implication of Andy Anderson's argument is that there is no class difference between these men and some teacher down the local comprehensive earning say £20,000 - they are all middle class, all equally the enemy. You would like it that simple but clearly it isn't.

We never meet the ruling class, there's no point of contact between them and us, but we meet the middle class every day of our lives like the teacher for instance who always slaps you around the head when you refuse to call him sir.

Money brings power, lots of money brings lots of power, some teacher with the power to slap you around the head when you were a kid, how does this power compare with the real power in the hands of someone like James Goldsmith? No comparison. James Goldsmith was far more powerful than any teacher and yet they are both supposedly middle class. (Fortunately, the fucker's dead now).

Is the material interest of a teacher the same as James Goldsmith? Of course it isn't. Is the material interest of a small shopkeeper the same as the owner of Tesco's? Again, of course it isn't. In a world of divided interests, the interests of a teacher or a small shopkeeper are nearer to those of say an engineering worker for instance than they are to somebody at the commanding heights of a multi-national company.

FIGUREHEADS

You mention with your usual dose of low-level sarcasm that we almost saw the light in the final issue with the statement about "Blair...an upwardly bunch of middle class people". It's almost like you think that Blair is running the country rather than the fact that he is just an active figurehead for the ruling class. If it wasn't Blair, then it would be someone else and real power would be where it has always been: with a small number of people who own most of the wealth in this society. Where's your revolutionary analysis gone, Mr Anderson?

You agree when we say we can make use of Marx, but wasn't

Marx middle class, after all he had servants and Engels owned a factory for god's sake! So you are in favour of using middle class Marx's ideas? He of the dominant class who formulated ideas about the dominant class to which he belonged. It's all so clear isn't it. We'll have to throw out Kropotkin and Bakunin and many others as well, where will it all end?

The fact is that middle class people have always played a part in revolutionary politics and probably will in the future. Apparently there was always a problem with them within CW, they always dominated it? This conflicts with my memories and is also patronising to the workers who joined Class War. Personally I can only ever remember the majority of people within CW being working class and I never felt dominated by anybody. The majority of the people I can remember running the show were all workers.

SHRINKING VIOLETS

Of course the SWP is mainly middle class, as is the Labour Party and most of what passes for the left. But is the anarchist movement completely dominated by the middle classes? Of course it isn't. To say that Class War never had a discussion that dealt with the issue of class is ludicrous. I seem to remember discussing it at great length over a long period of time. What Andy Anderson actually means when he says that it is an issue that Class War never seriously dealt with is that we didn't come to the same conclusions as he did.

And as to this idea that you can read something politically into how many times we use a given word (ie capitalism 39 times, the state 5 times, etc), isn't this a bit trainspotterish? Is it really a reliable way to evaluate an article? Andy Anderson says that we are still into anarchism which is a bad thing? and yet we only refer to the state 5 times. Not much of a record for supposed anarchists. And to prove a point: working class, working class, working class, working class, working class, working class, working class. Happy?

What you are saying of course is that us "anarchist workers" for want of a better word are such a pathetic bunch of shrinking violets and stupid idiots that we are incapable of keeping a hold on our own movement because all these nasty middle class types are inevitably going to boss us around. A demeaning view of things I think. Do you think that we are all that stupid and weak? What does this say about Andy Anderson, maybe he thinks that workers are thick after all?

You say that we talk about the ruling class a lot, and never define it but this simply isn't true. Class War went to great lengths to define the ruling class in its book 'Unfinished Business'. You may not like the definition, it may well be wrong but define it we did.

YOU GOT TO LAUGH

The feelings of bitterness and resentment almost seep off the page when you read anything by Andy Anderson. It always amazes me that for somebody so seemingly desperate to get his ideas across, he always puts them across in such a way that is almost guaranteed to put people's backs up and therefore switch off.

In the forthcoming reprint of his ideas, he refers to the "middle class ACF". Now I'm sure that there are middle class members of the ACF but a middle class organisation? Of course all the workers in the ACF are going to be receptive to his ideas after reading that aren't they? It's all a bit sad really. I must apologise for the general tone of this article, it contains a certain amount of sarcasm and pistaking which I must say is warranted. Mr Anderson and company are arrogant and patronising and have been an irritant and an annoyance for some time. If you throw shit around, you're likely to get some of it back.

P (London)

THORNY QUESTION OF CLASS

This article was partly written in response to a newspaper called 'Working Class Times' and a subsequent document 'A critique of the final issue of Class War' by the Splat! Collective.

It is also an attempt to put down my own thoughts on the thorny question of class based on arguments I have had and observations I have made, mainly through my involvement in Haringey Solidarity Group, a mixed group of libertarian socialists and anarchists in north London.

Somewhere in the 'Critique.' the Splat! Collective write "There has not been, nor is there today, a single body of ideas and theories called 'Anarchism'. So it is understandable that groups calling themselves 'Anarchist' rarely, if ever, define what it is". However they write a whole newspaper littered with the terms 'working class' and 'middle class' without ever seeming to see any problems with these terms. Compared to trying to define 'working class' and 'middle class', 'Anarchism' is a tight consistent body of ideas!

TEACHERS

In large parts 'Working Class Times' is unexceptional. It reads like any Leftist paper except for their rather strange notion that the ruling class, or bourgeoisie, does not exist, and that they are "all middle class". This seems to be so they can lump teachers in with the bosses as part of the system. (Which of course they are, though perhaps not as simply as this suggests). Their obsession with unions for example is typical Leftist fare and would probably be a reasonable picture of working class organisation, circa 1979.

Unfortunately things have moved on since then, and not always for the better.

It was once said that all sociology was "an argument with the ghost of Marx". These days all arguments about class, especially if you take a Marxist framework as a starting off point tend to be an argument with the "ghosts of sociology". Having looked at a recent sociological book on the subject I realised the problems that I thought were problems were just the tip of the iceberg. Time to put down the book! (1) Suffice it to say that this is a quick bus ride around the subject.

Nevertheless it's worth pointing out that all theories of class are intellectual constructions of reality rather than the reality itself. To a large extent, the model you use produces the picture that the model suggests. Most sociological writing on class and all official statistics are based on bourgeois social models, following on from Weber, aimed at proving the diversity yet fundamental cohesion of society rather than its polarity and splitting into antagonistic classes.

This bourgeois sociology is repeated in a more persuasive form in the media, so that on the few occasions we see discussion of the working class we are presented with a stereotype male, cloth cap

on head, whippet in the yard and pigeons down at the allotment. Not surprisingly this can safely be relegated to the past along with trade union 'dinosaurs' and the penny farthing. We are "all middle class now" in the adman's world and the increasingly undifferentiable programmes in between.

Part of the problem with class is that we use the term in a number of different ways that overlap one with the other. In everyday discussion 'class' commonly means either (a) social origin; (b) customs and habits; (c) status; (d) income; (e) function; (f) class consciousness.

To cut rather a lot of discussion short it is clear that all of these uses create problems with clearcut definitions of class. Just to ask a few questions from my own experience will suffice to show this. Is someone born working class who is now a lawyer middle class? Is an examiner who is now a self employed painter & decorator petit-bourgeois? Is a train driver who earns more than a teacher middle class? Is a foreman middle class?

A lot of Leftist writing seems to see being working class as if it was a brand people were given in the womb with no power to change. After a lifetime of limited chances you will die in a paupers grave, seems to be the picture. That there are limitations on working class life is obvious, the extent to which people transcend these limitations is also of interest.

The extent to which working people want to escape from their role can explain why Tory policies such as council house sales could be popular, whereas Left support for the bureaucracy of the welfare state has little popular resonance. This desire to transcend limitations should give us optimism.

The large scale refusal of work and the social unrest that went with it in the 1960's and 70's provoked a ruling class response from the imposition of the IMF loan in 1976, under the last Labour

government, onwards. From the defeat of the Tory government by the miners in 1974 the Conservatives planned a series of attacks on unions backed by the creation of mass unemployment as Capital relocated to other countries. This strategy nearly came undone on many occasions - the steelworkers strike of 1980 and the miners strike of 1984-5 being notable examples. Without the aid of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy this restructuring could never have succeeded.

DECLINE OF THE CLASS?

Today the number of workers in trade unions has fallen dramatically and they tend to be concentrated in what remains of manufacturing and the public sector. Large sectors such as retailing and catering have expanded with a largely part time, largely female and generally union free workforce. Wages in these sectors are considerably lower than in unionised sectors. This has led some observers to talk about 'the decline of the working class'. (2)

To some extent we could talk about a division within the working class between highly paid unionised workers and non-unionised casual workers. Some industries, such as the building trade have

been almost entirely casualised. However there are factors working against this picture, such as the attack by employers on all workers conditions. Even some quite middle class groups of workers, such as teachers, have found themselves under increasing attack.

We have also seen some strikes recently amongst casualised and mainly immigrant workers aimed at unionising and improving conditions as at JJ Fast Foods and Arnouti bakery in north London. Although both these strikes were largely unsuccessful they may be a pointer to future struggles. Neither should we equate trade unions with class struggle - in France, where there are far fewer workers in trade unions, there are is also a higher level of class struggle.

LIVES OF THE RICH

The Splat! Collective claim that the ruling class does not exist, and from everyday experience one could be forgiven for thinking so, since we rarely visit their schools, their clubs or their social events. In fact the rich live a life quite apart from the vast majority of the population - this doesn't however mean they don't exist! The Splat! Collective ask rhetorically 'where is the ruling class in the nuclear power industry?' - but if you look at this industry, or any other, you can clearly see a set of people who are in control and are able to set their own remuneration either in the form of 'salary' or dividends.

That some parts of industry are supposedly owned by 'the public' should not blind us to their essentially capitalist organisation, generally so that costs to industry can be laid at the door of the tax-payer. Increasingly a small number of transnational companies are dominating world trade. The people who control these companies are not middle class, they are ruling class. As Earth First! have said 'the people who are raping the planet have names and home addresses'.

COMMUNITY CONFEDERATIONS

We are all aware that this is a time of extraordinary opportunity for left-libertarian ideas. The corruption and incompetence of all forms of hierarchical institutions in our society has been clearly demonstrated in recent years even to those who have little or no idea about the constructive alternatives to the authority principle.

In particular the change of government in Britain has dramatically highlighted in the space of only a few months that politicians simply have no meaningful answers to the problems we all face. Indeed, it is central to the rhetoric of modern politicians that we are all prisoners of the market, of conditions beyond our control or of paralysing pragmatism~.

The challenge to Anarchists is now, more than ever, to contribute something positive to what remains of civil society. Angry condemnation of capitalism and hatred of the state are very cheap indeed; the culture of protest is debased.

IN THE PIT

It is not merely that protests are monotonously defeated, they are defeatist. In order to create the new society we must present positive alternatives to people who have no desire to join us in the pit of despair!

The conditions are right for a different kind of movement built on foundations of confidence, an Anarchism of hope and construction. The state will always win on battlefields of its own choosing - confrontation with the marginalised in the streets - but it cannot and will not stand against a vibrant alternative to its destruction of society.

It's important to see any meaning we attach to the word class is socially constructed rather than a given. It's fairly obvious that a lot of white collar workers differ little in their lack of control of the workplace, their conditions of work or their wages from manual workers.

This doesn't mean that a bank clerk is the same as a miner - they may have completely different experiences of life. Of course they don't have the respect that miners do in the labour movement - but maybe if they held their boss hostage as bank clerks have done during disputes in France they might start to gain it.

It is also true that there is a middle class, who by their function have either a managerial or ideological role in the reproduction of capital. Members of this class may find themselves in conflict with the system if their professional status is threatened. Whilst we should always be wary of attempts to defend privilege, we should make common cause where we have common interests.

The creation of class identity is a continuous activity which competes with other self definitions. Vastly more workers have lived and died for the cause of nationalism in the twentieth century than have for any sort of socialism.

It is also about the creation of alliances for instance between bank clerks and miners or workers of different countries that can change things towards a society without capital and classes. If 'class' is going to mean anything progressive then ideas, including the broad ideas of 'anarchism', are going to have to be fought for amongst working people.

References: (1) Stephen Edgell 'Class' (1993); (2) Eric Hopkins 'The rise and decline of the English working classes' (1991).

S



The ruling class - people we've never heard of (in this particular case, Alan Spall and Charles Miller Smith, finance director and chief executive of ICI)

need. In detail this might mean Anarchists throwing themselves into community gardening, into the establishment of community access workshops (I mean the kind with tools that make things, not hippy talking shops), and into a range of activities organised through an inclusive direct democracy with the eventual aim of establishing neighbourhood assemblies.

These activities will of course require Anarchists to raise money and gather resources as we have never done before, but the models for making this sustainable already exist. If the lessons of community supported agriculture are learned for example, then perhaps people we have never reached in the past might realise that involvement in such grassroots projects is not only fulfilling but materially beneficial.

THE COLOUR OF HONEY

Through subscription systems people might one day support local food production, crafts, building and maintenance, school-free education, co-operative transport arrangements (rural mini-buses for example), and even community-based medical provision. It is true that cash will probably remain the medium through which these schemes are established for quite some time, but in the long-term local development and democratic confederation could suddenly remove the need for the money-system altogether.

The organisation which may begin this process could resemble a union for the community, reaching across the generational, gender, ethnic and cultural barriers we now face, and dissolving the class

divisions which plague us.

This is not to say that there will not be conflict, of course all that we know about the aggressive nature of the state and the bourgeoisie remains in play, but at least concerted constructive activism could build a coalition consisting of the vast majority of people, and a social movement ready to fight and win against the forces of reaction by that stage fallen upon their last and oldest methods of coercion.

We may not be afraid of ruins as Durruti famously asserted, but when the ruin comes let us at least be prepared with a viable alternative to slaughtering each other over that last can of dogfood. As Anarchists we all claim to want a free society, but now the challenge is to prove that we are not all too comfortable in our ghetto of rage and counter-cultural rebellion.

We all know that we cannot be free without general liberty, and we must talk to everyone not just to ourselves. There are people in this country, like the residents of the Pendleton estate in Salford, who have furthered the cause of Anarchism more with one shared garden than all of those angry Special Brew drinkers, rioters, and ideologues put together have ever done.

Successful revolutionaries cannot and will not stand out in the crowd: our success will be that we are like everyone else and that they start, in the way a free people will, to create the means of life and libertarian communism.

Anon

POST ANARCHISM ANARCHY

The Association for Ontological Anarchism gathers in conclave, black turbans & shimmering robes, sprawled on shirazicarpets sipping bitter coffee, smoking long chibouk & sibi.

Question: what's our position on all these recent defections & desertions from anarchism (esp. in California-Land): condemn or condone? Purge them or hail them as advance-guard? Gnostic elite... or traitors?

Actually, we have a lot of sympathy for the deserters & their various critiques of anarchISM. Like Sinbad & the Horrible Old Man, anarchism staggers around with the corpse of a Martyr magically stuck to its shoulders - haunted by the legacy of failure & revolutionary masochism - stagnant backwater of lost history.

Between tragic Past & impossible Future, anarchism seems to lack a Present - as if afraid to ask itself, here & now, WHAT ARE MY TRUE DESIRES? - & what can I DO before it's too late?... Yes, imagine yourself confronted by a sorcerer who stares you down balefully & demands, "What is your True Desire?" Do you hem & haw, stammer, take refuge in ideological platitudes? Do you possess both Imagination & Will, can you both dream & dare - or are you the dupe of an impotent fantasy?

Look in the mirror & try it.. (for one of your masks is the face of a sorcerer)...

THIS IS THE REALITY

The anarchist "movement" today contains virtually no Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans or children... even though theory such as genuinely oppressed groups stand to gain the most from any anti-authoritarian revolt. Might it be that anarchISM offers no concrete program whereby the truly deprived might fulfil (or at least struggle realistically to fulfil) real needs & desires?

If so, then this failure would explain not only anarchism's lack of appeal to the poor & marginal, but also the disaffection & desertions from within its own ranks. Demos, picket-lines & reprints of 19th century classics don't add up to a vital, daring



Woman with gun, ready to fire

conspiracy of self-liberation. If the movement is to grow rather than shrink, a lot of deadwood will have to be jettisoned & some risky ideas embraced. The potential exists. Any day now, vast numbers of Americans are going to realise they're being force-fed a load of reactionary boring hysterical artificially-flavoured crap. Vast

chorus of groans, puking & retching.. angry mobs roaming the malls, smashing & looting.. etc.

The Black Banner could provide a focus for the outrage & channel it into an insurrection of the Imagination. We could pick up the struggle where it was dropped by Situationism in '68 & Autonomia in the seventies, & carry it to the next stage. We could have revolt in our times - & in the process, we could realise many of our True Desires, even if only for a season, a brief Pirate Utopia, a warped free-zone in the old Space/Time continuum.

CAUSES

If the A.O.A. retains its affiliation with the "movement", we do so not merely out of a romantic predilection for lost causes - or not entirely. Of all "political systems" anarchism (despite its flaws, & precisely because it is neither political nor a system) comes closest to our understanding of reality, ontology, the nature of being. As for the deserters.. we agree with their critiques, but note that they seem to offer no new powerful alternatives. So for the time being we prefer to concentrate on changing anarchism from within. Here's our program, comrades.

1. Work on the realisation that psychic racism has replaced overt discrimination as one of the most disgusting aspects of our society. Imaginative participation in other cultures, esp. those we live with.
2. Abandon all ideological purity. Embrace "Type-3" anarchism (to use Bob Black's pro-tem slogan): neither collectivist nor individualist. Cleanse the temple of vайдols, get rid of the Horrible Old Men, the relics & martyrologies.
3. Anti-work or "Zero work" movement extremely important, including a radical & perhaps violent attack on Education & the serfdom of children.

PORN AS PROPAGANDA?

4. Develop american samizdat network, replace outdated publishing/propaganda tactics. Pornography & popular entertainment as vehicles for radical re-education.
5. In music the hegemony of the 2/4 & 4/4 beat must be overthrown. We need a new music, totally insane but life-affirming, rhythmically subtle yet powerful, & we need it NOW.
6. Anarchism must wean itself away from evangelical materialism



& banal 2-dimensional 19th century scientism. "Higher states of consciousness" are not mere SPOOKS invented by evil priests. The orient, the occult, the tribal cultures possess techniques which can be "appropriated" in true anarchist fashion. Without "higher states of consciousness," anarchism ends & dries itself up into a form of misery, a whining complaint. We need a practical kind of "mystical anarchism" devoid of all New Age shit-&-shinola, & inexorably heretical & anti-clerical; avid for all new technologies of consciousness & metanoia - a democratisation of shamanism, intoxicated & serene.

SEXUALITY

7. Sexuality is under assault, obviously from the Right, more subtly from the avant-pseud "post-sexuality" movement, & even more subtly by Spectacular Recuperation in media & advertising. Time for a major step forward in SexPolawareness, an explosive reaffirmation of the polymorphic - (even & especially in the face of plague & gloom) - aliteral glorification of the senses, a doctrine of delight. Abandon all world-hatred & shame.

8. Experiment with new tactics to replace the outdated baggage of Leftism. Emphasise practical, material &

personal benefits of radical networking. The times do not appear propitious for violence or militancy, but surely a bit of sabotage & imaginative disruption is never out of place. Plot & conspire, don't bitch & moan. The Art World in particular deserves a dose of "Poetic Terrorism."

9. The despatialization of post-Industrial society provides some benefits (e.g. computer networking) but can also manifest as a form of oppression (homelessness, gentrification, architectural depersonalization, the erasure of Nature, etc.).

The communes of the sixties tried to circumvent these forces but failed. The question of land refuses to go away. How can we separate the concept of space from the mechanisms of control? The territorial gangsters, the Nation/States, have hogged the entire map. Who can invent for us a cartography of autonomy, who can draw a map that includes our desires?

AnarchISM ultimately implies anarchy - & anarchy is chaos. Chaos is the principle of continual creation... & Chaos never died.

IT MAY SEEM QUIET...BUT THINGS CAN MOVE VERY FAST

Modern industrial, capitalist, state-run civilisation is rotten to the core: money, power, hunger, exploitation, patriarchy, propaganda, violence, destruction, mass 'culture' and isolation, war, obedience, industrialisation, ecological disaster and brutality towards animals...

Despite being a comparatively recent and temporary phenomenon in human history (over the last few thousand years overall, the worst aspects being only in the last couple of centuries), a world wide system has been established by the use of force and manipulation.

Our talents and potential, our feelings, solidarity and creativity are continuously undermined and frustrated, as is human fun, co-operation and adventure. Coupled with the fact that the present course of civilisation is ecological suicide, and that no powerful institution has ever given up an inch of its power voluntarily and without a struggle, reforms are mostly pie-in-the-sky and change nothing fundamentally. Illusions can lead to disillusionment.

REFORM THE CISTERN?

The struggle for 'reforms' can be useful in developing people's self-organisation and confidence - but the necessity for social and ecological revolution is urgent. Previous large-scale struggles and experiences have shown that transforming our society is possible. Whether it is likely, no-one can say - it is certainly worth striving for, and it is our responsibility...for ourselves, our planet and for future generations.

People's ideas change, sometimes quickly, through experience and struggle, but generally not through 'propaganda'. There can be no 'blueprints' which people must accept or fit into. Successful and empowering experiences, inspiration from the experiences of others, and common sense, all help to shape the direction we should go (or not go).

Ordinary people's confidence in themselves and each other must grow, as well as confidence in the possibility of creating an alternative, worthwhile free society. A realistic and honest picture or 'vision' of what such a society would be like and how we could achieve it is very important. We cannot afford to ignore or dodge these issues.

People everywhere can learn much from the strengths and mistakes of the past, but most importantly they can be convinced that the current system is neither desirable nor invulnerable, and that its survival is not inevitable.

THE FACTS

In fact, the system is weak. It's just that the powerful minority and their institutions are very well organised, unlike the vast majority of the population. The seeds of the new, sensible human society are in the self-organisation, the struggles and in the positive and progressive attitudes around us today. Real changes are not made by organisations, 'leaders' or present institutions - we change our

society by the way we act, live and relate to each other, through organising ourselves in the community, through our collective strength and solidarity and mutual aid, through our initiative and confidence, and through class struggle.

People's everyday oppression and experiences can and do provoke collective responses with the potential to transform our society. Opposition to 'the way things are' stems from hardship and alienation, inadequate housing, ecological problems, from being controlled, policing and repression, from the breakdown of 'order' and efficiency etc, as well as from people's self-confidence and awareness.

Protests and struggles tend to be isolated from each other. However, when they occur on a more regular basis and begin to link up, the atmosphere in the community can swing to one of awareness, optimism and confidence...resistance and conflict has the potential to spread very fast.

If the authorities are unable or unwilling to successfully buy off these partial struggles with concessions, to co-opt them by negotiating with and integrating a supposed 'leadership', or to halt them with repression and State violence, then a 'dual power' and pre-revolutionary situation involving millions of people can develop. This has happened for

example in Europe on a number of occasions on a greater or lesser scale over the last 30 years such as in Paris '68, the North of Ireland '70-73, Portugal '74, Italy '77-8, Poland '80 and more recently in other former State Communist countries.

There have also been full scale insurrections and social revolutions in history - for example in Paris 1871, Mexico 1911, Russia 1917, Germany 1918, Italy 1920, in Spain in 1936 (probably the most libertarian social revolution in human history), Hungary 1956, and in many other countries such as China and throughout Africa and Central America and elsewhere during anti-colonial conflicts.

We can learn a lot from the positive and negative features of these momentous popular events, their successes and failures - especially that fundamental change is possible but it is essential that people keep things in their own hands.

RESISTING THE BEAST

Empowering events have occurred in recent years and they can re-occur, spread and develop. The following practical examples are of diverse and often patchy activities which tend to come and go, with varying shades of intensity and success, not necessarily experienced directly by substantial sections of the population.

Yet each is an example of people empowering themselves and therefore inspiring others to do likewise. Each also helps to tip the balance of forces in favour of the public and the working class, and contributes to undermining the 'legitimacy' and power of the establishment and the ruling class:

Strikes; solidarity strikes and picket lines in different industrial sectors at the same time; independent organisation in every street, neighbourhood and workplace; sit-ins and work-ins at workplaces; occupations of empty homes, buildings and local community centres and services; blocking streets and creating temporary no-go areas - using a street all day to communicate and organise, and blocking the flow of traffic; setting up street check points;

occupying town centres; partial and mass non-payment of bills; taking food and resources from those who control supplies, and taking temporary control of the distribution of various essential goods or services; resource-share schemes; local mutual trading networks; opening up recycling centres and schemes;....

....street and land parties and festivals; waste-land and park tent-cities; gatherings, demonstrations and carnivals; riots; defying bans on assembly and protest; setting up self-run medical services in neighbourhoods or during events or struggles (and other self-run services - libraries, mutual aid networks etc); car-free zones, and temporary bailiff-free or police-free zones....and many, many more examples of self-organisation and people's attempts to take control of their immediate lives and environment.

All these things have happened in the UK and Europe in recent years - imagine if many of these things happened widely and simultaneously...

The examples just outlined all tend to help create a more widespread positive atmosphere (and vice versa), strengthening community contacts and solidarity networks, stimulating self-organisation, initiative and mutual aid in neighbourhoods, as well as debates in the street, in workplaces and homes, the spreading of information and discussion through the use of leaflets, posters, free papers etc, and a wide range of activities and groups, including anarchist groups.

This process can lead to the calling of neighbourhood gatherings, the encouraging of inter-neighbourhood links, inter-city contacts and city-rural direct links, as well as industry-wide and regional workers' solidarity networks and meetings.

ONWARDS TO REVOLUTION!

Everyone gradually becomes involved and embroiled in the situation when the practicalities of what needs to be done become so great, when the potential to run our own lives becomes obvious, and when it becomes inconceivable for the majority to accept once again the dead weight of oppression and exploitation.

Then society moves into a revolutionary situation: General strikes and occupations of most workplaces, with local and regional workers' councils; sending continual news, messages and calls for action all round the world; repossessing areas under control of the ruling class; abolishing all State borders; liberating and using heavy equipment; the population organising alternative distribution and sharing of food supplies, as well as growing food in all available spaces...

....labourers and peasants seizing and generally but voluntarily collectivising all agricultural land; working towards maximum local and regional self-sufficiency and autonomy in all matters; abolishing money and profit systems; expropriating all resources; resisting and preventing any new structures or institutions set up to take power or to control people or their struggles, or to mould community life (whether called 'governments', 'committees' or whatever - or left-wing and other political parties, vigilante policing and nascent bureaucracy); drastically reduce pollution and the imposed industrialisation of everyday lives and the economy; encourage maximum diversity within and between communities.

ATMOSPHERE

We need to be determined to make sure of success. We need to create an atmosphere of freedom, solidarity and collective responsibility, self-motivation and empowerment, concern for each other and for all, and respect for individual personalities as well as

We need to create an atmosphere of freedom, solidarity and collective responsibility, self-motivation and empowerment, concern for each other...We need to transform the existing social, industrial and economic patterns by building on people's needs and experiences, natural social ties and collective common sense to do what needs to be done.

for individual and group initiative. This needs to be coupled with an unflinching determination to succeed, along with constant debate and self-organisation and self-defence, and constant efforts to involve ever greater numbers of people in cooperation together, to spread to other regions and eventually all countries.

We need to transform the existing social, industrial and economic patterns by building on people's experiences and needs, natural social ties and collective common sense to do what needs to be done.

A society based on freedom and sharing, on voluntary but

responsible relations and activities, has only been glimpsed briefly and on a small scale. And not everything that has taken place in past upheavals has been positive. The eventual outcome has usually been isolation from the rest of the world followed by mass repression (from outside, or from the new State controllers within). Therefore it seems it is essential that the process of constructive transformation must spread all over the world.

Everyone should be sharing the resources, the work and decision-making as equals, with a diversity of settlements and cultures, and freedom to choose where to live, what to do etc. Children's needs and desires, and their unequalled energy and imagination, should be at the centre of social life.

We need to rethink our dependence on a centralised economy, mass production and industrialisation. We need to 'green' our lives and our environment, turning villages, towns and cities into federations of autonomous neighbourhoods, each as far as possible integrated into and respectful of the natural local surroundings. Due to capitalism's environmental destruction and damage we'll have to replant forests and encourage wilderness. Road networks and traffic should be at the minimum. Would we be able to end the need for long-distance 'trade'? We need to reassess our relationship with nature and animals and work towards respect for all living things.

OURS FOR THE TAKING...

Nothing is easy, including the necessary changes we have to make to our society worldwide. However, accepting and obeying modern industrial civilisation for decades to come is the most difficult thing of all for everyone with any awareness of the consequences, with a sense of injustice or of their own potential.

The revolutionary process may involve a whole series of mass strikes and uprisings, no-go areas leading to stalemates or even defeats. New power structures will try to establish themselves and will have to be boycotted, challenged and dismantled. This may all take years or even decades. It's vital that people's struggles be under their own direct initiative and control, not 'representatives'.

People must be alert to minimise violence as far as possible, whilst recognising the freedom of individuals and communities to defend themselves when under attack. The important thing is we all continue to struggle for a better society, to learn from our mistakes, strengths and weaknesses, and to get stronger and more determined all the time.

At the same time as working within our communities at the present to build up grass-roots awareness, solidarity and organisation, we need to expand the influence of revolutionary, ecological and anarchist groups and ideas - until it is obvious to all that such a free society is not only desirable and obtainable, but is ours for the taking, together.

London Greenpeace (5 Caledonian Road, London, N1)

THE CAPITALIST DREAM

The following is several extracts from a forthcoming pamphlet 'Revolution For Beginners' which attempts to analyse the world as has been, as it is and as it might be - and the prospects for changing it. The pamphlet will be available in the summer of this year, copies available from Box BM 5538, London, WC1N 3XX.

On top of the material poverty (affecting over a quarter of the population in industrialised areas) is the poverty of everyday life. Lives which are divorced from purpose and creativity are now lived by the vast bulk of the world's population. The effects of this alienation are not spiritual but physical and social. Hierarchical control of people's everyday lives makes them physically and mentally ill.

Over-work, depression, self-hatred and boredom, these become the prime causes of stress and stress-related illnesses, some virtually unknown outside the industrialised world. These now range from repetitive strain injury to insanity and suicide, even to multiple sclerosis.

Compounding the incidence of these chronic conditions are the everyday frustrations of poor quality sexual and social relationships (low self esteem being the most common cause of aggression, domestic abuse and street violence), loneliness and isolation in turn generating common-place nicotine, alcohol and drug addiction. Pollution in industrialised urban areas causes widespread immune and respiratory system illnesses.

These are just some of the life debasing, and frequently fatal, manifestations of intense alienation caused by advanced capitalism. Whilst in the developing countries famine, malnutrition and poor health care drive peasants into the slums of the urban sprawl where the misery of life under backward capitalism awaits them.

MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

Further impoverishing the quality of life and experience has been capitalism's tendency towards monopoly. Monopoly capitalism lays waste to developing areas with intensive mining, farming and population resettlement policies in the fields of production as well as the brutal control over the distribution of pharmaceuticals, food and information.

Under monopoly conditions in all areas of the world culture becomes industrialised and imposed from above by a hierarchical system of distribution. Television and mass media, the opinions of newspapers and the topics of television programmes, pop songs and software, all these are owned and controlled by an ever-diminishing clique of politically reactionary bourgeois owners and are managed for them by predominantly upper-class men (and very few women), frequently with military backgrounds.

The terms of reference for the topics of everyday conversation and communication are therefore set for the public by a small group of ruling class operators, their sympathisers and their allies in the police. As a result a constant litany of crime figures, sexist, racist and nationalist imagery (both crude and subliminal) and trivia, is employed to reduce the quality of human communication.

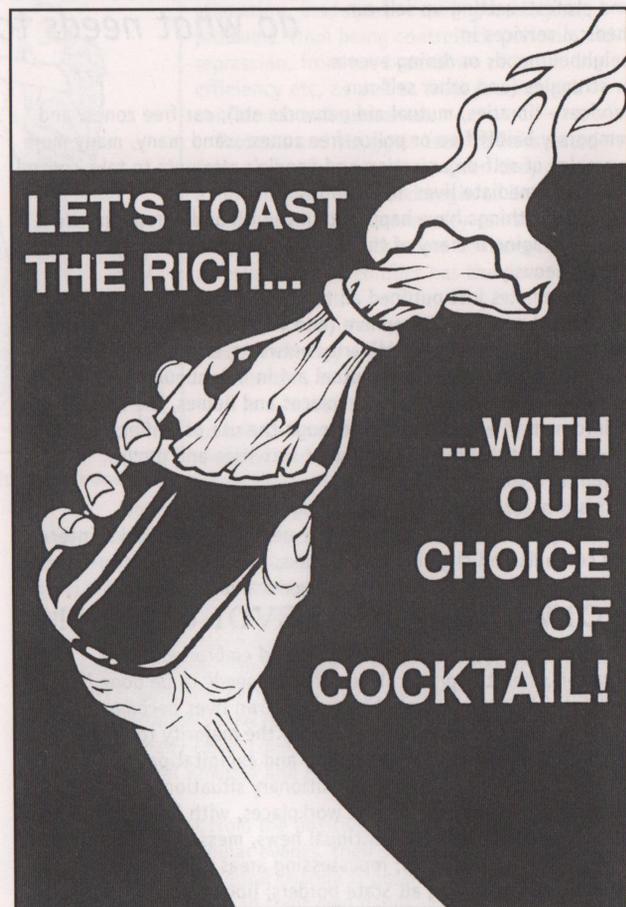
An increasing number of media techniques are used to disguise this monologue as pseudo-dialogue (at their simplest, the invented personalisation of impassioned editorials and speech to camera, and at the most sophisticated, television chat-shows, studio discussions, newspaper questionnaires and phone polls, etc). The move towards monopoly has vastly accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s, with today's global corporation now dwarfing the

"Zaibatsu" of the last era of aggressive, private monopoly capitalism in the 1930s.

RICH MAN'S WORLD

The rich, the bourgeoisie, are the owners and controllers of the world's multinational monopolies. If the national state was the "ruling executive of the bourgeoisie" in the nineteenth century then it takes global institutions to fulfil that role today.

So vast have the profits from industrialisation become that the scale of bourgeois wealth is almost beyond comprehension. Most of the apparently super-wealthy in each nation (men who can afford



to spend over £13,000 on a single restaurant meal for instance) - though they seem to us to be phenomenally rich, they are merely the underling servants of the real bourgeoisie. (See 'Dinner for Three? Not the wine you want, but a bargain at £13,091' (description of businessmen's lunch at Le Gavroche to celebrate a business deal and birthday) Evening Standard, 17.11.97).

ROLLING IN IT AND MORE

No better illustration of the modern scale of genuine bourgeois wealth and power can be made than to quote at length from a recent financial newspaper article on the "mega-rich" of America, prompted by an American billionaire's gift to the United Nations' budget.

"With one swipe of a pen Microsoft founder Bill Gates could wipe out the US government deficit...Many (American) individuals (now) have access to more money than State governments. Media mogul Ted Turner can give away \$1 billion to the United Nations and still be wealthy enough to remain (in) the top 400 richest Americans. Pundits and politicians were quick to debate the implications of

Turner's gift...but the debate should not be what is wrong with America that a rich man feels it necessary to step into the government's role (by funding the UN) but why he is so wealthy that he can. These wealthy people owe the world, especially the US and its government (the appropriate verb here would have been 'own' of course!). They are wealthy beyond belief because economic growth and investment patterns have changed in favour of Wall Street...What is wrong is that normal folk and governments should bow down before the generosity of those who have benefited most from current economic expansion.

Government policies and economic trends that have driven up stocks and enriched the wealthy have not improved the lives of those at the bottom of the economic chain. Though unemployment is down, the gap between rich and poor in the US is growing.... While Gates' purse was growing by \$410 a week, United Parcel Service (UPS) workers were walking the picket line, fighting for full-time jobs and a modest pay rise....

The billionaires should thank the government, those UPS package handlers and everyone else on whose backs their economic miracles were made."

(Lauren Chambliss - Evening Standard 1/10/97)

STRING 'EM UP!

It is impossible to make a better case for revolution than the above, except to state that the billionaires would be baffled as to why they should thank governments which have merely been carrying out their orders and that workers themselves should recognise in the power of the billionaires their own immense power in alienated form which would become theirs as soon as they embarked on a full-scale proletarian revolution.

It is the process of privatisation, the state subsidising of the bourgeoisie (or the bourgeoisie's total seizure of national states), which has facilitated the rise of the titanic, global monopolies and the billionaires who own them. From the 1940s onwards the bourgeoisie have increasingly seized hold of the state's military role and privatised it (a process vastly accelerated from the 1970s onwards).

This is the fundamental "tax break" for the monopoly capitalists. The military shoulders on their behalf the initial development costs of the sciences they all require, such as computer technology and genetic engineering. The nature of the monopoly corporations which have emerged from this process demonstrates the accuracy of the last revolutionary movement's analysis of society and the urgent need for us to renew this analysis.

At that time workers identified the emergence of a new society dominated by the commodity. Their theorists (most notably assembled within "The Situationist International", 1958-1969) dubbed this the "society of the Spectacle". This original term was used to describe the enforced passive acceptance by the working classes of the form and content now taken by their work, environment and lives, form and content over which they had no control, determined for them by an increasingly monopolistic bourgeoisie.

As a result of this emerging tendency the Spectacle manifests itself as a lack of real communication between workers (being substituted for a "pseudo-dialogue", an image of communication produced hierarchically but presented fully-formed to an passive working class as being their own debate which they are denied any genuine access to). The Spectacle consists of an interaction



For this to occur the diversity of service provision must be homogenised by the bourgeoisie and brought within the factory system. To do this the bourgeoisie are developing the cybernetic revolution.

CYBER-CAPITALISM

Because the society of the real subsumption of leisure under capital is one of intensified consumption it therefore has to be one of intensified proletarianisation. Cybernetics, correctly identified by the most advanced sections of the worker's movement of the 1960s as the next phase of proletarianisation, is the central method being used to regiment the workplace and enable the factory system to extend into hitherto inaccessible areas.

Networked computers reproduce a highly hierarchical system of control over the labour process which exactly replicates, compliments and intensifies the in-built hierarchical control of previous industrial technology. Through networked computers managerial control, monitoring and surveillance of production speed is now instantaneous.

Cybernetics bring whole swathes of formerly skilled labour within the scope of the factory system. With computer technology workers can manipulate sophisticated equipment using ever more basic and transferable skills. Computer software homogenises production by interposing a layer of operational instructions between the workers and their equipment. The ease with which this software (as opposed to the machinery it is linked to) can be operated enables each worker to become interchangeable.

Widely differing production techniques which would formerly have required specialist basic training to perform, come to be controlled by a layer of computer software the commands of which are increasingly similar to those used by the software packages controlling all other fields of production and so can quickly be taught to any new worker. Gradually all production becomes office administration work.

The factory itself can become limitless with workers operating equipment far away or else thoroughly isolated from each other by being made to work from home, being hierarchically linked together by telecommunications. With the advent of cybernetics a "factory floor" can span the entire globe. The "farming out" of data processing within even medium sized firms hunting the globe for the cheapest packages of labour is becoming a common place in all industrialised countries.

In short cybernetics is the software to convert the entire world into a single factory to be dialectically integrated with its illusory opposition, the endless leisure shopping environment. What other dream could capitalist society have for itself?

K, London, 1998

LOCAL GROUPS - THE ONLY WAY FORWARDS?

I also called this 'Or the rantings of a confused politico' because that sums it up as well as the above title. After being involved in local groups for years, somebody recently asked me why I thought they were so important.

After coming up with my normal reply of "because I believe local groups are the only way to create the type of society we need to have - ie local people controlling their own environment and communities", they came back at me with "yeah, but why?".

This article is an attempt to try and answer that question. It's a personal view. A view which some may disagree with. I am not a great writer - why do I have to be. I don't always say things in the "correct" political terminology. This is meant no more than a starting place for a much larger discussion - maybe at Bradford 98 and/or hopefully beyond. Hopefully people will read it that way - and not try to pick it apart line by line for political purity.

GET THE GOODS

I see local groupings of people acting together in their own areas, or communities (including workplaces) as the most, and possibly only, productive way forward. These groups do not have to be town wide, or borough wide - in fact ideally they shouldn't be. What we need is street level organisation where the group is based around a street (or number of streets) or an estate, or tower block etc.

As a practical example of this look at the anti Poll Tax campaign. In Haringey, for example, we had some thing like 12 localised functioning groups at times. We tried to split this down to even more localised groups (we had a co-ordinator for every council ward in the borough), but the lack of active people during that period stopped us from doing so.

Groups would obviously come together (or federate), with other groups on a regular basis - for arguments sake borough/town wide and then less regularly on a wider scale, say nationally or internationally - to swap information and plan/organise things on a wider basis. Although I have used the idea of borders set by the present system, groups would/should not stick to these, but for the present time these can have their uses. The final decision making though must be with the local groups.

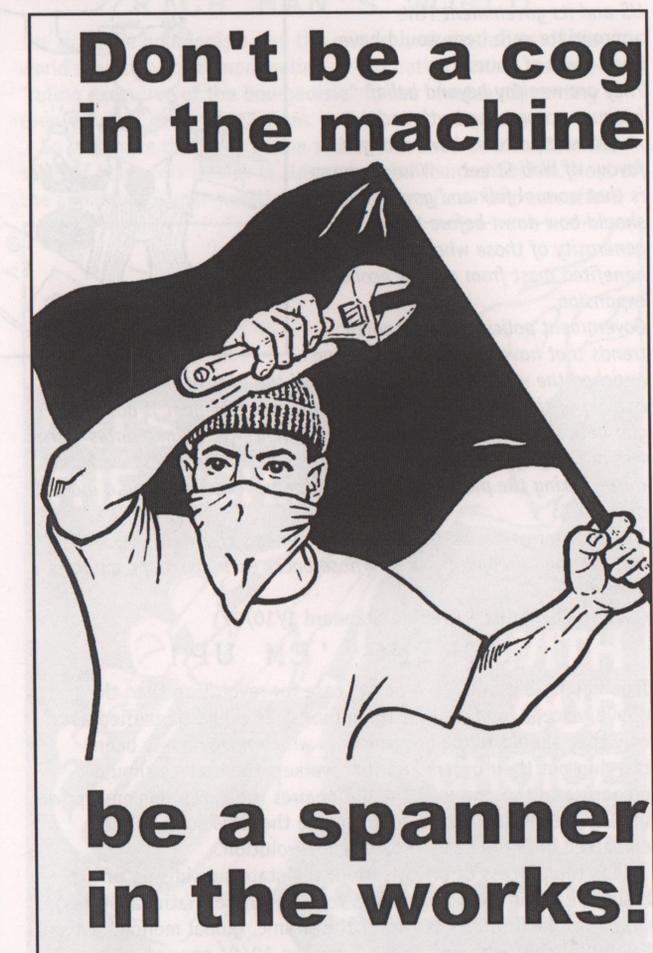
GIVING DIRECTIONS

Apart from getting local people to work/support each other I also feel local groups are important because they know their own areas, what is affecting people locally and how best to change things locally. Although some people reading this might disagree - we can't have a blue print which will work in every area.

Our tactics, our campaigns, and our ways of doing things will be different for different areas. What works in Haringey may be totally useless in Scotland, or for that matter in Islington which is a neighbouring borough to us. Or people in different areas may have different skills and/or resources.

By having very localised groups you will link up much more with neighbours, than you would with even groups the size of Haringey Solidarity Group (HSG). There are over 120 people in HSG, yet I only really work/associate with 2 people in my street and both of them were friends or ex-HSG street reps before I moved into the street. With very localised groups we would be forced to communicate with neighbours - something a lot of us (but not all of us) shy away from - especially in a political context.

Most "non-hierarchical" people agree that working locally is the best way forward, yet very few of us do it. Why? Don't we really believe what we are saying? Personally I think it goes deeper than



that. Yes most of us do believe we need to set up local groups within our communities, and then groups come together on a federated basis (especially if our ideas are going to be more than a ghetto view). The problem is we all shrink from the idea of doing it, and here I include myself as well.

How many of us are open to our neighbours about our views? Most of us (again not all) tend to hide our views. Are we scarred to have our views challenged? Or is it that we, like others in our communities, just want to keep our head down. It's (fairly) easy for politico's to be in a meeting, with fairly like minded people, arguing for revolution or the overthrow of capitalism, or whatever.

THE NEIGHBOURS

But it's not as easy coming out with the same thing to neighbours. Course it's not easy - you are confronting people who may not agree with you at all; confronting people who "know where you live"; people you have to see every day; people who may not know what anarchism or class struggle, or revolutionary strategy means and if they do, don't seem to care; people whose first (or any language) may not be what you speak.

And then if you do put forward your views they seems to fall on deaf ears, or things don't move as quickly or in the direction you want them to. But hey - ain't that what it's about? So, instead most (but not all) of us carry on meeting with people we agree with (at least politically) and think we are changing the world.

THINGS WE CAN DO ON OUR ESTATE

The following ideas were worked out by 3 or 4 of us on our estate. This document is being handed around to encourage inspiration and enthusiasm - they probably could apply to almost every estate in the country.

The following things are done, or could be done, by one or more of us on the estate to improve the quality of life here and revitalise our community (don't wait - just do it!)

We can build up a local residents' solidarity network, and various action and initiative groups....do our own door-to-door surveys, polls, petitions.... produce and deliver our own regular free news-sheet....do special local leaflets/posters/stickers....find street rep volunteers for every street...

...set up a number of estate-based libraries (eg. specialist books, kids books, toys, DIY, tools, gardening, medical books and equipment etc).... also develop resource sharing (eg. equipment, clothing, garden stuff etc)....develop skills share/exchange networks and lists (eg. in languages, electrical and other repairs, form-filling, computers, pets, decorating, crafts etc)...

STAR GAZING ANYONE?

....garden-sharing for those unable to use their garden and those who need one (eg. to grow veg)...organise recycling of all kinds of things and demand well-sited recycling bins....organise evening and day classes - our own estate university!.... encourage playing in the street, and organised physical games....games clubs indoors and outdoors (eg. cards, board games etc), and also other specialist interest 'clubs' (eg. cooking, art, astronomy (set up a local attic observatory?), creative writing, local history, home food growing, Spurs, politics etc)....

....do a book on the residents' history of the estate....do shopping and errands etc for those unable to....regularly check on our neighbours to see how they are....make regular, informal street patrols....organise treasure hunts and other public competitions....football etc in the parks....special sports days or events, fundays, fundraising events, picnics, trips etc.... streetparties and fetes....do pavement bike maintenance and repair....local walks with a theme (such as a nature trail etc)...

....local public meetings on important issues....video shows....advice surgeries....erect residents' notice boards around

the area and display calendar of events and ideas....monitor and defend local trees and wildlife, and establish green 'corridors'.... get involved in the Playcentre and its parents group.... get involved in the Schools and their parents groups and turn them into hives of community activity.... communal cooking/eating get-togethers....

....more mutual childcare swaps....chatting on the street... .active campaign for traffic reduction and calming throughout the neighbourhood.... campaign for our own community centre(s)...



...set up Claimants Union....fight for residents' rights to their basic needs [eg. home, fuel, independence, respect etc].... oppose harassment and rip-offs of residents by the authorities, bailiffs, police, companies etc....challenge all anti-social behaviour (eg. vandalism and muggings, harassment of women and ethnic minorities etc)...

....set up an estate Internet website and email lists....encourage the playing of musical instruments and performances....set up a local Jobs Info index for all the self-employed and small businesses based on the estate....the possibilities are endless! What if they were all happening at the same time?!

IN THE SPACE

There are many spaces which could possibly be used as a focus. Some residents may wish to use their attics, sheds, spare rooms, garages or gardens for some of the specific purposes and initiatives detailed above. Otherwise, there is the Playcentre, museum, cemetery, park, green verges in front of rows of houses, shops, ex-scout hut, the schools, and the streets themselves.

We aim to stimulate and encourage - mutual aid solidarity empowerment determination sharing initiative self-reliance self-help...pride information communication co-operation fun and excitement...self-education and awareness survival resistance to exploitation and oppression networking self-organisation unity respect sense of justice diversity community.

When in reality most of us are either no more than a very few individuals burning ourselves out getting nowhere very fast, or small groupings slugging each other off because we thought your way of doing things were wrong or politically unpure. Or have I missed something?

But although it's bloody hard and also bloody scary - especially making that first move to convince your neighbours or communities, to get together to try and turn the world into the paradise that's needed - it needs to be done. Scary!! And it needs

to be done on a local level where individuals have control and responsibility for what they do and how they do it. If one local group wants to petition, while the next wants to block a street, while the next wants to work with the local trades union or tenants group, that's their choice.

If one group decides their main priority is to set up a food co-op, while another decides to kill all their landlords and redistribute the properties, while another wants to collectivise the residents &/or workers that's up to each group. And we need to support each

other not attack each other for our diversity. Each group must have control over its own aims, principles and tactics. When we meet together on a wider basis we can swap tactics and discuss why our views are better than yours, but the final decisions MUST lie within each local group.

This is where national organisations - and I mean all national organisations, including the Anarchist Communist Federation (ACF) and Solidarity Federation (Sol Fed) and ex & present Class War fall down and why I could not become a member of any of them.

National organisations have a structure and aims and principals which any individual, or more importantly local group has to follow. This stifles local (or individual) initiatives and diversities - not encourages them. This should not be the case.

AUTONOMY

Local groups have to have the autonomy to organise the way they feel best and to come together with other groups both locally, nationally and internationally, to discuss, swap ideas and tactics and organise joint events. Groundswell, a national campaign against the Jobseekers Allowance (and now Project Work and the New Deal) is a good example of this.

There are some 60 locally based groups involved. These are groups like HSG, to claimants groups, to ACFers, to groups which would call themselves "socialist", to some Class War groups and other groups. They meet up every three months to swap details about what they have been up to, to talk tactics and try to suggest future tactics. Those attending meetings come up with ideas for future events, but each group makes up its own mind whether to take part, and to what degree they will take part. But even where groups disagree on tactics, all the groups are still talking to each other, working with each other, and meeting on a regular basis.

Working with local people - people we may not exactly agree



The axe will fall on all false gods and tin idols!

with politically can be difficult as I have said. We are going to meet people whose views don't agree totally with our own. This is possibly why we get to the stage where we have an ACF and Sol Fed and Class War and "non-aligned" anarchist group along with different socialist and marxist groups all within the same area, all pulling against one another instead of trying to work together.

AND THE LOCALS?

And none of them are talking to the local voluntary groups, or tenants groups or lunchen clubs, etc etc. But unless we work together we will remain weak and ineffectual. Local groups may not always work - there WILL be problems. Political or personal differences may split groups. Some may want to go down a very strange path. But none of these problems should stop us trying or still keeping the idea as our ideal. Within HSG we (or at least I) think our diversity is a strength of the group - not a weakness.

We need to try doing things different ways. To learn by our own mistakes. Just being told something means nothing. In the best case you just take the information in. In the worst case you rebel against what is being pushed at you. If some people want to

do things one way, it does not necessarily exclude others within the group doing things a different way. Diversity can help groups succeed.

As the title said, this may be seen as the rantings of a confused politico. Maybe my views are right (obviously I think so) or maybe they are as useful as a chocolate fireguard. But we need to do something, unless we want many more years where the majority of the population just carry on putting an "x" in a box and we get Tory, then Labour, then BNP, or whatever shade of party, then.....then death. To me it's a fairly decent place to start!

T, HSG

The spokesman for this incredibly myopic notion is Noam Chomsky. Others are pure lifestylers - indeed, rabid Stirnerites - some of whom proceed to call themselves supporters of anarchocommunist.

As I have been writing elsewhere, there is simply an empty space where there should be a revolutionary Left, under whatever name it chooses to use for itself.

We cannot lose the rich revolutionary tradition, with its fundamental demand for basic social change. Hence my three-volume work, 'The Third Revolution' (the second volume of which is to be published by Cassell this January), which explores the great revolutions from the English in the 1640s to the Spanish in 1936.

START AT THE BEGINNING

Although I've engaged in organisational activity all my life, as I near 77 I'm much too old and ill to do so anymore. But when younger people ask me what I think should be done, I tell them we have to start from the basics: forming study groups to produce thoroughly informed militants, whose commitment rests on real



knowledge and insight into past and present social situations. These study groups, in turn, have to co-exist with public forums that involve outreach to the community at large.

In my opinion, it makes no difference how well such forums are attended; what counts is the sturdiness of the people who participate in them. Wherever possible, such study groups should form the infrastructure for a confederal organisation. Finally, I feel we have to concretely define an anarchocommunist politics (using the word politics in contrast to parliamentary statecraft).

The goal of anarchocommunist, as I see it, is the Commune of communes. Well then, let us begin in our own communities to try to establish authentic popular assemblies, even extralegally. Most local councils will be reluctant to establish such assemblies or give them real decision-making power; hence the basis for a real fight around the right of the people to determine their own fate in their communities.

These ideas have recently been spelled out very clearly in a small book written by my comrade and companion, Janet Biehl. It's called 'The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism' and is available from Black Rose.

I hope Class War revives, and I wish you my best. I'm still not entirely clear why you decided to cease publication - in most American radical circles, 4,000 readers would be regarded as a very successful publishing effort.

Do keep in touch, and all the best.

Murray Bookchin, USA

IPSWICH CALLING

Dear Smash Hits

Here's some level-headed reasoning and outright bitching from the streets of Ipswich. When I decided that my sympathies lay with the 'split faction (the populist faction? The rump?) of what was previously known as the Class War Federation, I let the National Secretary know the reason for my decision which were basically as follows.

I joined CW, and wanted to continue to be active in CW, because I wanted to help put out a paper, and other propaganda that promoted the politics that I supported, in a style that was accessible and attractive to non-political people (i.e the vast majority of the working class, the kind of people I'd been to school with who rejected politics as 'boring'). What the Fed had chosen to do, it seemed to me, was exactly the opposite.

Still, I wished them all the best; I genuinely hoped (and still do) that they would succeed in creating a new dynamic, revolutionary organisation. I just didn't think it was very fucking likely. You can write as many pieces headed by attractive fonts as you like whilst you wait for the new big idea to drop in your lap, but I just don't think it's going to happen.

I was very amicable about it all; said I was still interested in receiving the discussion documents, and that I would pass them around the other local anarchists that I knew. Unlike London, I had no particular reason to feel animosity towards those who had decided to disband the Fed. It is perhaps symptomatic of the current climate that I never received any further communication at all.

The 'Smash Hits' was eventually passed to me by a friend, and very interesting it was too. It's good that you are printing both sides of the argument, though of course you've got the handy advantage of having the last word (I look forward to being savaged at the end of this, should you print it). Here's a few thoughts on your version of events, and other things in the document...

Most perplexing of all was your claim that we "didn't say" what we thought about the review process and the eventual decision to dump the paper. Hang on, I seem to remember the Internal Bulletins immediately prior to the split were filled with several articles from members (including myself) arguing in favour of a) continuing the Fed, and b) reverting to a more populist approach. Did I just imagine it? Or was it only those that found the time to traipse halfway across the country to tedious meetings whose views were taken on board?

FUCK ALL IS FUCK ALL

Statistics : Yeah, so 40% of fuck all is fuck all, and so's 60% for that matter. It just means we get described as the 'minority faction' in the new AK catalogue for example. Both sides have admitted that we were/are a tiny organisation, which makes me wonder why we expect anyone to listen to us anyway. Seriously though, I can't help feeling if you bare your souls any more, you're in danger of winning an award for piety, whilst everyone else in the 'ghetto' sniggers into their pints. Which brings me neatly to...

Red Action : in the minutes to your last meeting you accept that you have similar politics to RA (so you're in favour of the IRA and twatting fascists - wahey!), and decide to contact them and get chummy. The Notts group have long been in favour of involvement with the IWCA; I believe several members of the group quit CW and joined RA at the start of the Fed's internal problems. In the Notts group report in Smash Hits they tell how they attended the 'Anarchists in AFA' meeting. Excuse me, have you actually read 'Red Action'? Their line on anarchists and CW in particular is somewhat well-documented. As a famous philosopher probably



LETTERS

WE PRINT'EM COS YOU WRITE'EM

AMERICA CALLING

Dear ex-Class War

Sorry for the delay in writing to you, but I've been under the weather for weeks and overloaded with work in the bargain. No - I never saw an issue of Class War before. What I read of your final (?) issue is very much in tune with what I think. Back-biting often cannot be avoided: there are real differences between people who call themselves anarchists.

Since I wrote 'Social Anarchism versus Lifestyle Anarchism' no fewer than three books have appeared attacking me, including one from the Marxists. I'm gratified that people who like yourself, who believe in fighting capitalism, not merely forming psychotherapeutic encounter groups, like my pamphlet.

The situation in the U.S. is truly appalling. Even liberal is a dirty word in the 'Clinton Era', let alone Left. The entire political spectrum has shifted so greatly to the Right that conservatives are outright reactionaries, liberals are conservatives, and so-called socialists and anarchists are social democrats.

It's true - we even have self-avowed anarchists who believe a centralised (!) state is necessary to control the multinational corporations, indeed that its powers to do so have to be increased.

once said: "If you don't get your head out of the sand, you're in danger of getting your arse kicked". Still, good luck with it!

Speaking of everyone's favourite sectarian squaddists, I see the latest issue of Fighting Talk delights in lumping us in with the Trotskyist Left, and giving us a theoretical working over (ouch!). Its the usual "they talked a good fight but couldn't get the numbers out on the streets" stuff you'd expect from the hardened street fighters. Sadly, they neglect to point out that the odd, admittedly embarrassing, tactical faux pas over the years was absolutely nothing to do with why we split.

We never aimed to be a cadre of hardmen out for a fight with the enemy. We aimed to promote and participate in the class war that was already going on, to involve ourselves in debate and action as equals, not to lead, theoretically or otherwise. All of this raises questions about how widely you are prepared to cast your net in terms of who you're prepared to work with. 'Libertarian' and 'Class-struggle' are fair enough, but like everything else these terms are open to interpretation.

Class War was always a broad church anyway, and we wasted large amounts of time arguing the toss over minor issues. How the fuck are you going to get on with an even wider range of opinion in one organisation? Obviously, in times of struggle like the miners strike, and the poll tax to a lesser extent, we worked together to some degree in our local communities, to achieve our aims. This makes practical sense. But when you look at the bigger picture, I can't help feeling that the political differences, not just about where we're going, but how we're going to get there, will be the cause of potentially insurmountable problems.

THE POPE'S A CATHOLIC

The Paper: So Ian Bone's a bit of an egomaniac. I've heard the Pope shits in the woods too. There was a lot of truth in what he said though. I would say the paper went downhill post-poll tax, partly due to not having a big class-orientated issue to focus on (inevitably the paper's high points have been when class struggle in this country has been at its peak - the miners strike, inner-city riots, poll tax etc.)

But there's no doubting that the paper changed its style and made a conscious effort to get serious (the bandwagon-jumping Malcolm X issue springs to mind as a good example). The main problem was a debilitating lack of ideas. I haven't heard one good argument why we shouldn't revert to producing a populist paper that people will want to read.

It's not pining for the good old days because we're nostalgic for the eighties and 'Hospitalised Copper'. It's because then the paper worked, and I see no reason why it can't again. If it does just turn out to be a rehash of the past, then we will have failed. A couple of contributors to the document bemoaned the 'premature' decision to jettison the paper; special mention must go to 'G' who wailed: "...must we leave the brand name to people stuck in an eighties rut...", and then went on to argue in favour of populism and stunts. Make up your mind mate!

Sniping: Well, it's a shame I suppose but hard to avoid in this kind of situation. Both sides have been guilty of this, so let's just hope we can get over it and move on. I can see why London are pissed off about the computer. Those were paid for by members and supporters of the Fed so we could put out a quality paper, something that we at least want to continue to do. It's a tad tricky without a computer though. Broken, or fixed, it might be a nice gesture to hand it over as agreed. Or am I being naive?

That's it I think. I wasn't at the anarchist bookfair due to illness, but I understand that between the swearing it was decided that we go back to our localities and our communities; talk to people; try to get our politics across; try to get fucking organised. I thought that's what we'd been trying to do for years, and I'll certainly drink to that. Here's to revolution folks, and the long-awaited death of capitalism. Good luck everyone, and I do mean it.

Neil, Ipswich, PO Box 87, Ipswich, IP4 4JQ

GENERAL REMARKS

Dear Smash Hits

I'd glad it looks as if a conference will take place in Bradford this May. I'd come mainly to see what kinds of political principles and strategies the members of the late CWF might be developing, and to learn some more about the recent history of the left in this country. My interest in participating in the planning meeting in Leeds was spurred in part



by what I had read in CW 73 and "Smash Hits", but I may have overestimated the general interest in the Encuentros and the politics emerging from them. It was probably a mistake to let myself get drawn into a debate on the topic of the Encuentros.

Like the Bristol group, I'm concerned that some leftists and activists are making a fetish of "neo-liberalism", though I don't think anyone in Leeds was so deluded, and I addressed this problem briefly in my report on the second Encuentro passed around at the meeting. Yes, capitalism is still exploitative capitalism and the state still the oppressive state.

CRISES AND CHANGES

Having affirmed that, I think we have to take seriously some of the strategic changes that have taken place under the neo-liberal model, which have been direct responses to crises in the global capitalist system in the last 25 years or so. These include:

- the changing organisation of the workplace - shift from industrial production to service in the core countries, just-in-time

production, outsourcing, increased contracting, more waged work in the home, the re-emergence of precapitalist modes of production (especially at the global level), etc;

- the increasing fluidity of capital and relatively decreasing mobility of the work force, especially across international boundaries;

- the blurring of the distinction between employment and unemployment - temp work, "workfare", on-demand work, etc.;

- the shift away from welfare-state capitalism toward a state which promotes key economic projects through research and development and stricter property rights protection, and spends more on heavily arming the police and building more prisons to deal with the "surplus" people;

- finally - and as a consequence - the growing fragmentation of the communities to which we belong, as diverse strategies are employed against them in various places - which should urge us toward integrating our struggles against capitalism on all fronts, not returning to some imagined "core" group for whom everyone else's issues are "peripheral".

OPENING UP

This last point was a major purpose of the intercontinental Encuentros - to help us figure out various strategies for fighting back against global capitalism in its latest incarnation. But another, equally important purpose was to discuss how we can take the initiative in rebuilding the world, rather than retreating behind the defensive barricades of received leftist wisdom, or simplistic and localised notions of "our party line", "our community", "our class", "our struggle", etc.

We talked about how we are going to organise ourselves as a "network of struggles" at local, regional, and the increasingly crucial global level, which is really just another way of saying how we are going to organise ourselves as a global "revolutionary class". No priority is given to the global level, though it is essential; in fact, the priority ranks highest at the local, descending as the scale gets wider.

The discussion in Leeds made me painfully aware of how much work has to be done to avoid falling back on knee-jerk ideas of "class", "struggle", and "revolution". If a lot of people in the States, where I come from, can't think straight about class because they are either in denial about it or reduce it to questions of income and "consumer power", I suspect, especially after what I heard in Leeds, that a lot of Brits may confuse particular, "cultural" day-to-day notions of class with economic ones, even to the extent of self-parody.

I'm not trying to pass judgement on any particular concepts here; there's a lot of value in cultural concepts, because of their "immediacy" and the tools they provide us for day-to-day resistance. My point is that they don't translate readily from community in struggle to community in struggle, and so they have to be considered critically.

MOVING ON

For example, in the States, the debate about class on the left has, for at least the last 30 years, been bound up with questions of race to an extent that I haven't seen here, because of the particular history of institutional racism over there. Those old leftists who treat such questions as misleading are usually white, and are basically saying to ethnic "minorities", "the problem is that you won't be like us, the [white] revolutionary working class".

This is a joke anyway, since their notions of the "working class" are invariably simplistic. In fact, they're more troublesome: they're objectifying, treating the working class as something "out there" that should be emulated, rather than actual people (presumably including us!) with various desires and in various struggles. Such white leftist "interventionists" (as they're called) have a shameful colonial history in the U.S. Even when they pretend to be interested in the specific problems faced by minorities, they often cynically exploit them for "revolutionary capital" (greater political recognition, party membership, money,

etc.). These were my reasons for pointing out that 20 of the 22 participants in the meeting in Leeds were white men--which I don't think was an accident!

Notions of class aren't just different between countries like the U.S. and the U.K., which supposedly have some shared cultural heritage, but certain white class identities, like those cultural ones I mentioned above, aren't even applicable to "black" communities within the U.K.

So basically, I'm not saying that we shouldn't refer to "class" because "it might upset the neighbours". It's just that some notions of it are about as meaningful and useful as "the masses", bandied about by Maoists and capitalist bureaucrats alike. Surely, our relation to capital and our stance towards it is crucial to defining "class" and "radical", but beyond that simple statement, things get politically complicated.

We're never going to be able to make a concerted struggle against global capitalism if we keep demanding a simple-minded, stereotypical set of class credentials of potential allies. We're certainly not going to do justice that way to each other, as living, thinking, feeling human beings stuck in an alienating world system.

CIRCLE DANCING?

The intercontinental Encuentros were not some sort of lefty, feel-good love-in. (And if I had suspected they were, I wouldn't have gone; I've been to too many pointless "conventions".) They were steps in a method of organising locally and strengthening bonds for a new internationalism. As intercontinental meetings, they will probably make themselves obsolete in time.

In fact, over the winter holidays, I sent out messages to some comrades who have been involved, outlining cases for and against planning a third Encuentro, in an attempt to get some serious thinking about it going. The consensus among those who cared to reply was that there should be no more intercontinental meetings for the time being. They offered two main reasons:

(1) one of the explicit messages of the last Encuentro was "take the method home" - work on a network of struggles locally and regionally, however you might think those might properly be defined; and

(2) it's almost impossible for the "hardcore" unemployed to participate, as opposed to those of us who don't know whether we'll be working one week to the next, but might still have money to spare for a cheap plane ticket. (This in spite of the efforts of the organisers to supply grants and use a sliding scale.)

These points only emphasise that the Encuentro is a method, and not a way of recruiting people to the EZLN/FZLN or traditional "solidarity work" - which the Zapatistas weren't looking for when they called for the Encuentros in the first place.

I will defend the Encuentro process against what I thought was a groundless insinuation that I picked up on at the meeting in Leeds. That is that it was a talk-shop for "intellectuals", however that might be defined. The backgrounds, interests, desires, degrees of formal education, vocabularies, and types of activism represented, as well as the concrete work accomplished, at the Encuentros is, I think, enough to dispell that notion, if it has any specific meaning.

FALSE DIVISIONS

Similarly, I'm bothered by the sharp distinction I heard being made between "theory" and "practice", as if practice were reducible to street tactics (the only important kind of political activity?) and theory was something detached academics do. Theory is - obvious at least to me - a kind of practice. It is a practice essential to any viable revolutionary movement, and includes serious discussions, analysis of problems, criticism, and self-criticism - exactly the kind of thing we've been talking about doing in Bradford. (I think!)

I think that the distinction drawn must have something to do with those local cultural notions of class I mentioned above, which I'm still trying to get my head around. In contrast, I would point to the militant labour union activists I've worked with in the

States, many of whom have educated themselves in matters other than their work, don't have any problem calling themselves "intellectuals" (not "professional intellectuals", mind you, implying a division of labour), and don't think they've sold themselves or anyone else out by taking such a stance.

It's struck me as just a little ironic when I've heard anarchists here rail against "fucking wanker intellectuals" (or something like that) and then quote Noam Chomsky in the next breath. Just as a reminder, though Chomsky is from a working class background, he is currently Institute Professor of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT, one of the most prestigious universities in the world, where it costs \$25,000 a year for undergraduate studies. Of course, one should be sceptical of academics. But there aren't any easy answers to questions of who the despicable "intellectuals" are and what "theory" is.

SOME AGREEMENT

First the points that I agree with broadly:

- A radical critique of the justice system - I think this should include discussion of the effects of class, race, gender discrimination in the courts, the problems of adversarial proceedings, the role of prisons in contemporary capitalist (neo-liberal) society, and the importance of supporting movements behind bars.

- "Leaving Labour" - Blair can't crawl any deeper into the pocket of that neo-liberal mastermind Clinton, and he's a shrewd politician himself, making him a worse Tory than any of the Tories. I think discussion should focus on the broad economic strategies behind Labour's policies and what they mean for resistance. Unfortunately, anarchists and libertarian leftists in the U.S. and the U.K. have been pretty weak on economics lately, sometimes resorting to crude versions of Marx's analysis of 19th-century industrial capitalism. I think it's about time this changed. Enough said.

- Ridding ourselves of nostalgia and hero worship - yes. I think this also needs to include casting a critical eye on self-stereotyping and mythological ideas of class.

- "New ways of organising" - A crucial question should be "What do we mean by 'democracy'?" In other words, what kind of participation and where, how formal, and participatory at every level of a political structure? Are we committed to it in principle, or, as has too often been the case on the left, is it a question of a grudging, compromising kind of 'democracy' built on discontent with previous forms of organisation only?

- Radical agendas in the workplace - what more needs to be said? Talking about complex workplace, domestic, and community relations, I suppose.

SOME DISAGREEMENT

Now a few points I take issue with, mainly for reasons given above:

- Careful consideration should be given in advance of what is "central" to a radical agenda and what is "peripheral" and "irrelevant", instead of just assuming it is obvious to any "true" revolutionary.

- Ghettoized movements - it seems to me that if "direct action green politics" has a peripheral existence - less so than the late CWF, it seems - it is precisely because it keeps treating people as the passive "masses" who have to be led and instructed. We should always be looking for actual struggles of people against capital and political power, not so we can subsume them into a programme, but so that we can critically engage with it and link it to other struggles. In my experience, there has never been a problem of getting "community involvement in political initiatives", but then I may not have felt so alienated from what the communities of which I am member see as their needs and wants.

- Labour militancy - more useful than considering the "militancy" of movements like that of the French truck drivers, which is a hard thing to measure anyway, we should consider the specific forms and targets of their strategies and tactics: for example, the impact of the the French strikes, or the Liverpool dockers' lock-out, or the UPS strike in the U.S. on crucial nodes in the increasingly important routes of international trade. This, of course, should be discussed in the context of the changing nature of the workplace.

- "Pockets of Resistance" - why is the question of "social rebels"



"I told you that I didn't want to discuss the degeneration of neoliberal capitalism anymore you fucking bastard"

treated as a issue of turning them to "political aims"? Who has a monopoly on political aims? Why is politics not considered inherent in broader questions of shifting and conflicting social relations? These issues are related to the questions of bringing people "into" a movement, as opposed to how a network of struggles might be formed.

- "Keeping perspective" - to my mind, the most effective and automatic way of "keeping up to date on the way that capitalism operates" is through a decentralised network of struggles, which will inform us of new capitalist strategies and methods of resisting them. Of course, you might be content just to read what the neo-liberal economists hand down from on high, but that will always be rather impersonal and distorted in the interests of power. However, we should remember that Marx didn't read "Class War"; he read the "Economist" and the equivalent.

- Communication and media - we have to be careful of not simply replicating the mass media in our efforts to counter them. Tons of anarchist newsprint and a hundred pirate radio stations by themselves aren't going to change people's (especially leftists) often passive, consumptive attitude towards the media. (This was one of the conclusions of a "mesa" at the last Encuentro.)

SORTING IT OUT

Finally, I agree that libertarian communists/anarchists and the likes of the SWP are not ready to sit down and hash out strategies in this country. They may never be ready. (From what I've witnessed, the anarchists alone have done a brilliant job alienating one another and may have some making up to do!)

My mentioning the diversity of leftist tendencies represented at the last intercontinental Encuentro was just meant to illustrate what a significant step it was that so many people recognised a common enemy, as well as the futility of their previous strategies, that they were willing to sit down and talk seriously and reasonably about it in some forum.

It would be nice to see something similar - not the same - happen here too. I hope this is what goes down in Bradford in May. Stay strong, stay real, and stay in touch. In solidarity,

Michael, Sheffield 15 January 1998

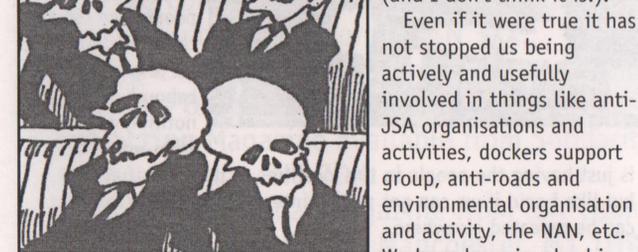
ONE ORGAN?

Dear Smash Hits

Subversion (and Wildcat before us) has involved itself in many initiatives over a period of time to try and develop wider networks of revolutionaries.

Most of these have unfortunately been of limited duration and/or effectiveness (eg the former Class Struggle Anarchist Network and current Northern Anarchist Network and the Revolutionary Socialist Network).

I don't think this has been our fault particularly though others might disagree! Recently one of our members suggested that our efforts in this direction had been hampered by others view of us as a 'tightly knit ideological recruiting organisation' whether or not this is true in reality (and I don't think it is!).



Even if it were true it has not stopped us being actively and usefully involved in things like anti-JSA organisations and activities, dockers support group, anti-roads and environmental organisation and activity, the NAN, etc. We have been involved in co-operation with many other revolutionary groups as diverse as the Communist Bulletin Group (in the past) and the Anarchist Communist Federation (today).

The point in saying this is NOT to suggest that we're good and 'Class War' is bad. In fact, despite our criticisms, we've always had a healthy respect for the 'Class War' organisation and for a short while worked closely with the former Manchester Class War group.

The point is that in our view the political revolutionary movement like the wider social revolutionary movement is made up of a large and diverse number of organisations and activities which grow, change or disappear with the ebb and flow of the class struggle. Revolutionary political groups are just one part (if an important part) of the equation.

JUST A FEELING

I still get the feeling that many of the ex-Class War people involved in your initiative are looking for a single organisation of some sort that can somehow encompass the best of what is presently produced by a much more diverse movement. If this is the case then I think you are bound to be disappointed in your efforts.

Having said that, there is a need in Britain and internationally for something better than what we've got in the way of an open and practical network of revolutionaries, not tied to historical ideologies of 'marxism' and 'anarchism' which can facilitate both honest debate and useful action. That is certainly something we are interested in.

On a related matter - some contributors still lump revolutionaries in with the political 'left' and talk about "its" and "ours" failure in the same breath. If we 'revolutionaries' are to be more effective we must try to work together better but we must also understand what distinguishes us from the 'left', who's more spectacular recent failures reflect their political ties to 'state capitalism' and not just their organisational and propaganda methods.

Fraternally M (member of Subversion)

TALKING HONESTLY

To Smash Hits

I thought, when it came, that CW no.73 was one of the best ever. You don't often get such an honest appraisal of the successes, problems and failures of a revolutionary organisation. CW 73 provided not just that but also an analysis of the situation facing genuine revolutionaries today, with excellent articles on the 'state of the left', women and class war and 'getting organised' which considered 'activism vs vanguardism' and what sort of organisation is needed at the moment.

I personally agree with many of the conclusions in CW 73...."there is no blueprint for the perfect organisation, because in the end organisation is not a thing but a process. It's an ongoing thing - we come together to contribute to the collective struggle against capitalism and to contribute to the active debate about the best way of doing things".

Initially I was hoping for a Class War mark 2, but after reading CW 73 and 'Smash Hits', I personally feel, like others, that this would be a mistake. We can't glorify one form of organisation and methods as the be all and end all. I think the CWF had probably taken things as far as it could.

STILL A PLACE

However I do feel that there is still a place for many of the activities of Class War and I was glad to see Class War no.74, which we got hold of on the Liverpool dockers' demo. I wish all the people who are carrying on with the paper all the best and, in Lancaster, we do make sure that 'Class War' the paper is on sale in all the usual places locally.

I think it is a realisation of the above (regarding organisation) that has meant we have been able to organise with some success in Lancaster. We have an anarchist group meeting every week with 10-15 people regularly attending. We produce a magazine - the last issue sold about 100 copies, we have covered areas of the town in stickers and posters and we have also played a prominent role in several local 'campaigns'.

The meetings, to me, have been a breath of fresh air. We have an open agenda which is passed round at the beginning and anyone can add whatever. We do tend to concentrate on practical activity rather than tackling topical issues in the abstract but I feel this allows us to talk about politics anyway, and it's not boring when it's centred on how the theory relates to the practice.

Just to give you an idea - the most recent things we've been involved in is a fight to stop tallow burning at a local animal waste 'farm', a campaign against council corruption/crap policies and the campaign for Steve Booth, one of the jailed Gandalf 'activists' whose family lives locally.

I don't think there is a particular blueprint for what to get involved in - it depends on what's happening in your street/estate/town. Whether it's disrupting council meetings, fighting fascists or cleaning up dogshit (Nottingham!!), it's important to get involved - both for personal reasons (it's good fun!), also for practical ones (it puts anarchist/libertarian ideas into practice) and a magazine, stickers and posters can give a group of 10-15 people a much greater presence in a town.

VISIBLE PRESENCE

I think one person reviewing CW no.73 in 'Black Flag' pointed this out when she/he said the only reason the SWP attracts new members is because they have a visible presence everywhere. I think we should be aiming for this type of visibility with maximum publicity of our activity and ideas.

Our group is not dominated by any particular people. We have to

be aware of problems like 'dogma', 'dictatorship of the big mouth' and personal arguments and try to prevent them from creeping in.

Obviously we don't all agree on everything and we don't all see each other socially all the time. We do try, though, to avoid letting personal arguments disrupt meetings and also try to avoid letting anyone dominate the meetings.

Numerically, women, unfortunately do form a minority in the group, however in terms of a voice, opinion, experience and activity, this is not the case and hopefully this sort of atmosphere will encourage others, especially those on the periphery of the group. We also do socialise together, we try to go to the pub after meetings and let each other know what's going on in the town regarding gigs/parties/events.

I think that sometimes it's important to remember that although sometimes we disagree on tactics or certain ways of approaching direct action, we do share a common enemy. The things that we agree on are much more fundamental, and by creating open, friendly meetings and avoiding backbiting, we can always resolve our differences and work together.

AGAINST SECTARIANISM

I don't want to pre-empt any of the debate at Bradford but I hope that this can come across as centrally important. There is no place for sectarianism in our movement. There is not one organisation that has all the answers and we can work together with individuals or with other libertarians/anarchist organisations (ACF, SolFed, Class War, ABC).

This ties in with our work around MayDay 98. I think at present in Lancaster we've got 10 people committed to going - and if we can get that number (and hopefully more) from a town the size of Lancaster then there is no reason why that can't be the same elsewhere.

In the last 'Smash Hits' there was a debate about the "numbers game". I agreed with a lot of the points about the need and possibilities to work together but I don't think we need to redefine our ideology and practice. Meetings/leaflets/demos/papers still have their place. Just because there is a relatively low level of working class political struggle at present, this will not always be the case.

I do however agree that we also need to look at new forms of direct action and be positive and have fun. I think anarchists should be actively involved with Reclaim The Streets and environmental protests, but to drop more 'traditional' ways of organising for "raves, games and culture" would be a big mistake. Personally I am a committed "fierce dancer" party creature (I even

suggested an all night party for Bradford) but at the end of the day a rave is just a party - it's a great way to enjoy yourself but it's not going to change the world. We should (and do in Lancaster) have something to say when parties are prevented by the police and hopefully anarchists would be involved directly in efforts to prevent the state telling us what we can and can't do in our leisure time but just organising parties at the expense of other activity would be a disaster for the serious anarchist movement.

Going back to the numbers game, I agree with what's been coming out of the MayDay meetings - we can think big but we should also be realistic. The way I look at it is that although the

numbers of organised anarchists/libertarians are quite small at present, our potential audience is very big. "More and more people are pissed off with the new government" and I think now many people can see that the traditional 'left' (ie reformist Labour) offers nothing at all.

What might limit us

is just having the people in the localities to do the initial work, but like I said if we can get people interested in Lancaster, that can be repeated elsewhere.

OUT AND ABOUT

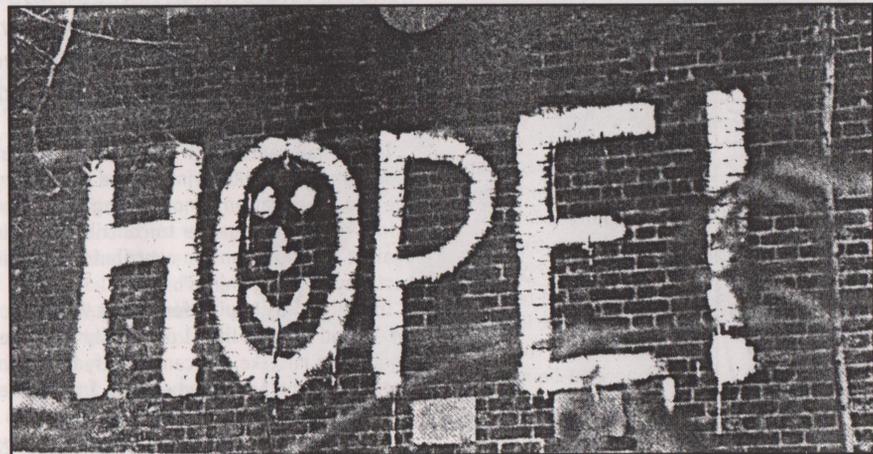
We've been talking about Bradford with all our friends and people on the periphery of the group. We have leafletted at local community based events and local gigs. The local radical bookshop have organised a series of benefits for themselves (Undercurrents video nite, 'One Love' reggae do, etc) and we will have a presence at these events, hopefully a table with information and publicity about Bradford.

We will also get the leaflets into our local community centres/libraries/wholefood co-op/veggie cafes etc and I'm trying to arrange a rave/party with a local drum'n'bass DJ as a benefit towards transport costs. I think you all know your own towns and what you can organise and where you can publicise MayDay 98.

On a national level we've also got to get in touch with any groups/organisations who may be interested, including Reclaim The Streets, Advance Party, Alarm UK, ACF, SolFed, CW, local anarchist groups, etc. Lets get organised and I'm sure Bradford will be a success.

Anything over 200 people will be brilliant (considering where we are starting from now) and even anything less will hopefully give us the base from which to start working together and re-establishing a real revolutionary tradition.

N (Lancaster Anarchist Group, c/o The Bookcellar, 9 Meeting House



We want to keep 'Smash Hits' going - and we want you to write in with your own ideas, thoughts and practical hints on how we can all get more things together and be more effective as a force for revolutionary change. The editorial policy is that there is no particular line and we will try to print everything that is sent to us - so send it to us at Box BM 5538, London, WC1N 3XX. Deadline for next issue is 31st July 1998.

We would like to thank Anarchist Graphics (Box 5, 167 Fawcett Road, Southsea, Hants, PO4 0DH) for their designs - they want to start a graphic collective to circulate designs so if you're interested, get in touch with them.

IF YOU LIKED THIS... THEN YOU MIGHT LIKE THESE

SchNews Excellent weekly news sheet from Brighton that has a whole range of articles on various things, plus upcoming events and regular features such as 'crap arrest of the week'. They have also just bought a book covering the last 50 issues of SchNews (and loads of other bits and pieces), available for £6. Both the book and the news sheet are recommended - subscribe and copy. Write to SchNews, c/o on-the-fiddle, PO Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 2DX.

Counter Information Quarterly bulletin of resistance and struggle produced by independent collective. Covers news from this country and around the world. Write to Transmission, 28 King Street, Glasgow, Scotland, G1 5QP.

Organise Magazine produced by Anarchist Communist Federation. Available from ACF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX.

Class War Paper produced by those who have carried on with the Class War Federation. Available from PO Box 467, London, E8 3QX.

Black Flag Longstanding anarchist magazine that has much improved in recent times, available from BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX.

Do or Die Excellent journal that covers environmental activism with a critical look at times - get it from PO Box 2971, Brighton, BN2 2TT

Direct Action Magazine available from Solidarity Federation (anarcho-syndicalists). Write to PO Box 1681, London, N8 7DN.

Subversion Occasional magazine from left communist/anarchist perspective. Available from Dept. 10, 1 Newton Street, Manchester, M1 1HW.

Haringay Solidarity Group This longstanding locally-based anarchist/libertarian group are compiling a list of all active local groups. Contact them for more information/ideas about how to get something going - write to PO Box 2474, London, N8 (or telephone 0181 374 5027).

Groundswell This national grouping co-ordinates action against Jobseekers Allowance, Project Work, the New Deal and much more - contact them at Claimants Action Group, c/o OUWCU, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes Street, Oxford OX4 1HU (tel 01865 723750).

Between The Lines An irregular and unpredictable magazine that's worth reading - get it from Box 32, 136 Kingsland High Street, London, E8.

Revolutionary Socialist Network Linking various non-aligned lefties and other types who are prepared to honestly discuss what's going on (and don't want to build a party) - RSN, c/o 180 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG1 3HH.

And don't forget two big events coming up in the near future.....

Reclaim The Streets mid-May somewhere in London - should be as exciting as previous happenings have been! Contact them at PO Box 9656, London, N4 4JY (tel 0171 281 4621).

March on Buckingham Palace 31st October you know where it will be - lets show the stinking parasites what we think of them! For more details, write to Movement Against The Monarchy, PO Box 14672, London, E9 5UQ.

STICK 'EM UP!

After the great success of the anti-election stickers (200,000 printed and widely distributed), we want to do another whole load of stickers that say what needs to be said (like 'New Labour, New Bastards', 'The Great Royal Debate: Do We Hang Them Or Do We Shoot Them?', 'Shoot The Suit', etc) - but we need money and any ideas for sticker designs. We want to raise £2,000 which would allow us to print 250,000 stickers - can you help in any way? Send cheques (payable to Active Distribution) to Stick 'Em Up, BM Box 5538, London, WC1N 3XX. And if you want a load of stickers, write to us and we'll send them to you when they're printed (hopefully mid-April).