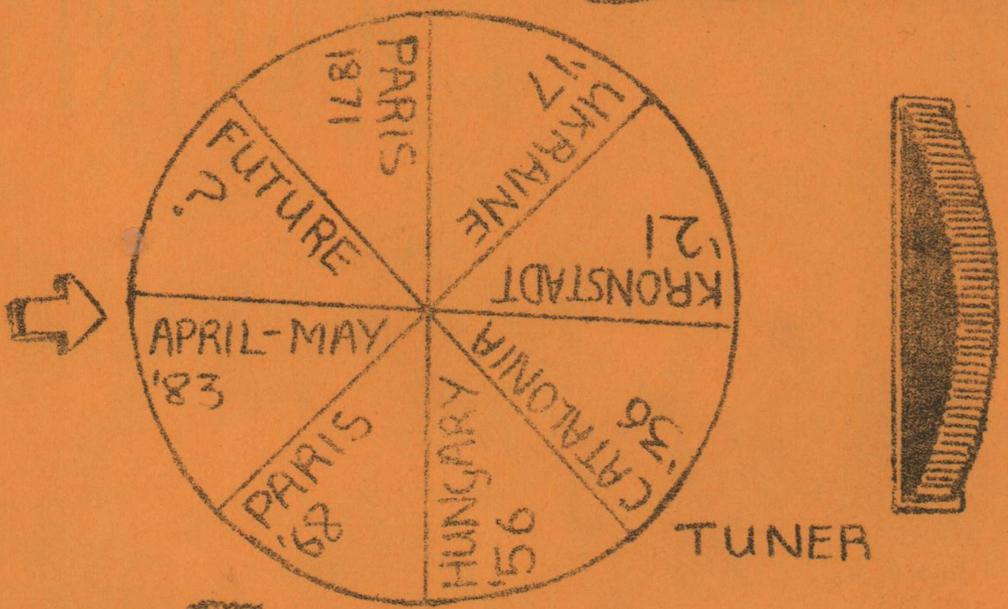


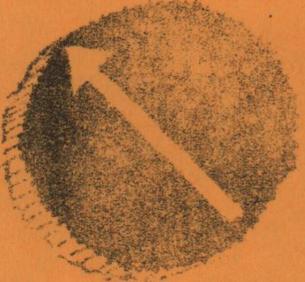
INTERCOM #2

ULTRA
IRREGULAR
FREQUENCY

30P



ULTRA-LEFT



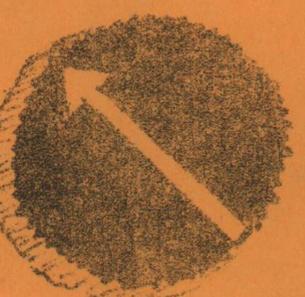
LEFT

LIBERTARIAN

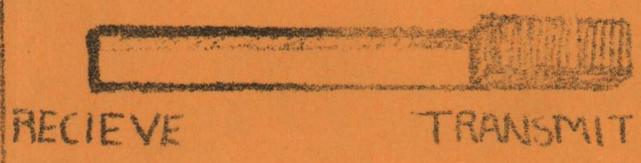
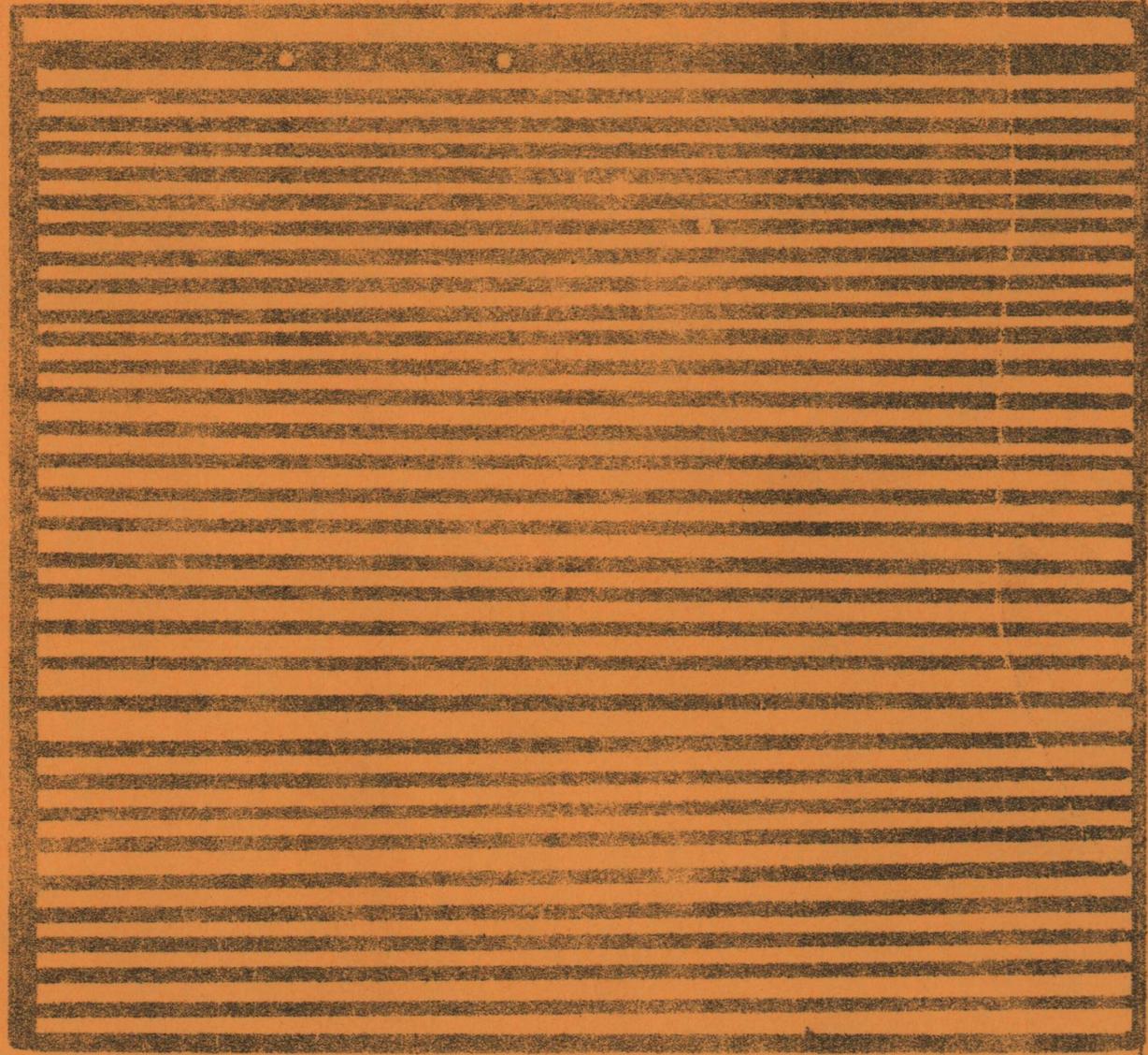
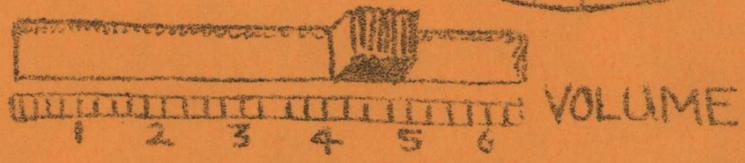


AUTHORITARIAN

REVOLUTIONARY



REFORMIST



**SOLID ANTI-STATE
CIRCUITRY**
PRODUCED BY UNEXPLOITED LABOUR
?

**FORMERLY THE NEW
ULTRA-LEFT REVIEW**

Introduction

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|---------|
| • The New Solidarity - A phoenix from the ashes? | page 3 |
| An Engineer Writes | page 3 |
| Letter from Hong Kong | page 14 |
| • Review of North American Papers | page 16 |
| Open Letter from Wildcat to the London Workers Group | page 17 |
| What's Happened to Wildcat | page 18 |
| News from William Morris | page 19 |
| The Anarchist Scene in the North-West - a personal view | page 20 |
| Organisation and the Creation of the Ultra-Left Review - a reply to Melmoth | page 22 |
| Organisation and revolutionaries, a reply to centralist critics | page 22 |
| Peace Camps | page 27 |

VARIOUS LEAFLETS AND NEWSLETTERS.....APPENDIX

WHAT IS INTERCOM????????????????????

INTERCOM is a discussion journal for and by revolutionary socialists, anarchist-, libertarian-, council-, and left-, communists.

INTERCOM is not the property of any one group, it was set up after a conference held in Manchester last September. At that meeting were groups and individuals from all over the country. We agreed that a revue like INTERCOM was needed to help break down the sectarianism and isolation suffered by our 'tendency'.

The editorial policy of INTERCOM was decided at that meeting. As long as articles are in general agreement with the 10 points outlined below, then they have a right to appear in the journal. All we ask is that they be pre-typed on Universal stencils (unless they are very short) to fit A4 paper, and that they be reasonably free of heavy jargon. The editorial group will publish anything that they receive as long as it meets these criteria. The editing of INTERCOM is to be rotated round a number of groups, this one has been produced by members of CARELESS TALK (N.Staffs).

INTERCOM is divided into two sections, new articles and leaflets and newsheets. We regard this second section as very important, as it lets others know what is being produced, and could provide examples to be copied or developed. It should also lead to discussion of their content. If you want a newsletter or leaflet to be included then send either stencils or at least 150 copies of the leaflet to the editorial group. (If the copy you are reading has no such leaflets in it, the reason is that we produced over 150 copies of INTERCOM.)

INTERCOM is available mainly on a subscription only basis. It costs 30p a copy (including p&p) or 20p if unwaged and unable to afford any more. Bulk orders (10 or more copies) at 25p each. Money and orders for extra copies of this issue should be sent to: R.KNIGHT, c/o Students Union, The University, Keele, Staffs -with no other name on the envelope. All cheques, postal orders etc must be left blank, as we have no account in the name of INTERCOM, CARELESS TALK or R.KNIGHT.

The classical picture and course of a recession

1. For some reason (e.g. shortage of a basic raw material) prices rise.
2. High prices result, causing a fall in consumption. (You don't buy something if it's too expensive).
3. This fall in demand means less is produced. (You don't make something if you can't sell it.)
4. Fall in production causes unemployment, (less produced, fewer needed to produce it,) and wage cuts, either directly by lowering of income or indirectly by further price rises--inflation is a drop in a "real wage", i.e. less can be bought per hour spent at work, earning. Both forms of wage cut represent capitalists' attempts to maintain profitability.

Ways out

1. "Free market" model:- capitalists can't continue to ask prices nobody can afford to pay, so prices must eventually fall to a more acceptable level.

Therefore:- consumption up
demand up
production up
employment up

This is the theory, anyway. The free market economy is supposed to be self-regulating: "If I have A which you want and you have B which I want the terms of the exchange will be agreed". Is this too simple a picture? Comments, please.

2. External stimulus to the economy, e.g. war. Production is deemed essential so goods are produced, despite initial low levels of profit, wages are earned, full employment is secured, and goods are manufactured. Re-armament under the real or perceived threat of war could be placed in the same category.
3. "Artificial respiration" approach, "reflation", the Keynesian model: production re-started by injection of "borrowed" capital (from somebody else, from government funds, or simply by printing more*.) This enables investment and hence increase in production at lower cost, hence consumption increases, demand, production of consumer goods and employment all increase. Out of the wealth thus created, the loan is re-paid, further investment can be made and the economy is "back on its feet". This approach succeeded in the '30s (Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Hitler's creation of employment) and the "Marshall Plan" for the re-construction of post-war West Germany.
4. "Monetarism": aims to break the vicious circle of wage and price rises at the prices end--by controlling inflation. The price of goods is seen as being roughly equivalent to the fraction

$$\frac{\text{amount of money in circulation}}{\text{number of goods being produced}}$$

(i.e. amount of money around per commodity for sale). When production has fallen, as in a recession, this fraction is too big, since its denominator is too small. It can be restored not by increasing the denominator (the Keynesian approach, outlined above) but by reducing the numerator, i.e. restricting the amount of money in circulation. This is done by "controlling the money supply" i.e. not printing any more money, not subsidising industry from government funds and not securing loans of foreign capital.

The current recession

Its course has followed the classic model outlined above. The stimulus triggering the initial price rises is usually pinned down to the formation of OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the subsequent massive rises in oil prices at a time when industry was increasingly oil-based for primary sources of power. The wages/prices spiral hit its worst around '74 and '75 with 20% inflation.

*You can get away with printing more money if its value is going to be restored. If not, the value of money merely decreases--people don't believe a £1 note is worth what it says, and so don't invest it.

Ways out?

1. ? -We are no longer in a "free market" in the classical sense--this will be discussed--so we do not expect the economy to be self-regulating.
2. ? -We are not at war (in any major sense, he adds, thinking of the Falklands) so are not under an imperative to produce.
3. ? -The Keynesian approach of reflation--public spending--has been tried by the last Labour government along with the "social contract" in attempt also to limit wage rises. It failed. However, they appear set for another try. Why the failure? This is THE economic question of the day, though possible reasons will be discussed.
4. ? -Monetarism has succeeded in bringing down inflation, but at the expense of just about everything else, since only the top half of the fraction

money in circulation
commodities produced

has been tackled, with the result that both top and bottom are now lower than they "should" be. Alright, so prices are relatively under control but production is down, still, so people are out of work, so less money is being spent since fewer are earning, so there is less demand which could have the effect of depressing the bottom of the fraction still further, and so on. In other words prices are down, but at the expense of production and trade.

Since this recession is worldwide, it would be interesting to discuss what approaches are being adopted by other industrialised nations. Any readers who can help out in this respect, please write and tell us.

Why is this recession different? (Or is it different at all?)

End of the "free market"

Above, it was indicated that contemporary capitalism is no longer the "free market" economy of the 19th century. Why not?

--In a free market, prices are agreed between producers and consumers (i.e. between businesses and their customers) by supply and demand, purely and simply. Since Keynes, capitalist economics has been subject to government intervention as a third, semi-independent force in the market-place, by its ability to subsidise or own industries and secure loans of foreign finance.

--Nationalisation, in particular, ensured that a government could become a capitalist itself, in a direct sense, but also could subsidise its industrial concerns from public funds--something which privately owned "pure" capitalist concerns cannot do. Clearly, this affects the conditions of competition.

--There has been a move towards cooperation amongst capitalists to further their common interests as capitalists rather than cutting each others' throats in fierce competition (CBI, OPEC, etc.) so that manufacturing or producing companies cooperate in a programme to keep prices high, rather than undercutting each other.

The new technologyBackground--milestones in industrial history

- *1. F.W. Taylor studies "work rates" related to the problem of shovelling coal at the end of the nineteenth century. His ideas were adopted and elaborated by Gilbreth who developed "method study". It did not take long for the new "science" of Work Study to be widely taken up in industrial management. This "scientific management" consists, basically of improving the efficiency of tasks and assessing the performance and improving the output of a worker. For instance, in Time and Motion study, tasks are analysed, broken down to the smallest elements (e.g. "grip object") and "standard times" for each such operation are assessed. Thus tables of standard times have been drawn up from which, by synthesis of operations it is possible to arrive at the most time-effective method of doing some new task, and assess how long it should take to perform the whole job. Fine. But optimum methods for high productivity are not always

compatible with job satisfaction, and secondly the existence of a "standard" time for a job means that a worker's performance can be assessed and incentives and bonuses can be offered as a management technique of control. Method Study (closely related, since the time of a job depends on the method used) is concerned with how a job is done for the greatest efficiency and has resulted in the "division of labour", i.e. different elements of a task have been given to different workers where the whole job may have been done by one, before. Result: de-skilling and consequent alienation, detachment from product, loss of contact with overall productive process hence isolation and ignorance. "Scientific management" philosophy was summarised neatly by Taylor, himself:

"In my system, the workman is told precisely what to do and how he is to do it, and any improvement he makes upon the instructions given to him is fatal to success."

- *2. Standardisation of parts, introduced by Singer (of sewing machines fame) Previously, if a machine broke, a local engineer would make a replacement part to match the old one. With the opening of the West in the U.S. spares had to be available to order, so had to be made to specified "tolerances" i.e. allowed differences from stated dimensions. (No part can be made exactly to size every time--the closer you get to this ideal the harder they are to make therefore more expensive.) This led to the beginning of "quality control", another essential in the process of:
- *3. Mass production. This is where contemporary industry could be considered as starting. Originated by Henry Ford (of motor car fame) in the U.S. mass production relies on the standardisation of parts, planning of resources (the right bits appearing on the production line at the right time), the division of labour (at its worst on the production line)--hence a major challenge to the function of management. Here "Taylorism" or "scientific management" comes into its own.
- *4. Where mass production takes place, we are, by definition, producing large numbers of a product (as opposed to "one-offs" or "batch production" which is still common in some industries, where large runs are not required) and hence can afford to invest in expensive "plant" (i.e. machinery), since the numbers produced will justify its cost. Thus the next development was widespread automation.
- *5. Automatic machinery has to be controlled hence there was a development in "control systems" (i.e. the buttons and levers, pneumatics and hydraulics to operate the mechanical devices handling the products).
- *6. World War II provided an enormous input of technical research into all fields of industry, especially in the field of control and materials (much of the work coming from the aircraft industry).
- *7. The '50s were characterised by design for consumption (built in obsolescence, diversity of cheap and nasty consumer goods) and the growth of these consumer goods industries making TVs, washing machines, cars, etc.
- *8. In 1947, the transistor was invented, but its impact on industry was not really felt until the '60s, first in the field of consumer electronics (radio, TV, record player amplifiers, etc.) and the development of electronic control systems, in which transistor amplifier-based circuits providing electrical outputs to operate valves and drive servo-motors are used instead of more cumbersome and costly pneumatics.
- *9. As semiconductor (the stuff of which transistors are made) technology advanced, so means were discovered of making other circuit elements, such as resistors and capacitors, out of the same material, so that, for example, a transistor and a capacitor could be made out of the SAME PIECE of material, and so whole circuits could be put down on one single silicon chip-- it became a question of how much you could cram into how small a space, for economy of scale and price. Successes in this field made possible the micro-computer, for handling data, and it is this which is having such a profound effect on the world.

The hardware -- industrial uses of the computer.

The first and perhaps most innocuous use of the computer was as an aid to lengthy and tedious calculations for example in the field of stress analysis. However, I am really concerned with the effects on the productive process, and on patterns of employment.

The first area to be hit in a major way was the automatic control of machine tools (lathes, milling machines, punches, etc.). The machine can be programmed to carry out a sequence of operations, obviating the necessity of an operator to control these operations. Such machines are called C.N.C. machines (computer numerically controlled), and systems employing them are termed CAM (computer-aided manufacture).

At the same time computers were being installed in commerce, for data handling of accounts and in clerical work in the form of word processors (sort of sophisticated typewriters which can take information straight from a computer or off the telephone, and type it up neatly at a phenomenal rate. Next time you watch World of Sport look out for the machine which prints incoming football results and you'll see what I mean).

Another significant area is that of computer-aided design (CAD), in which the computer 'holds' standard parts (e.g. pipe-fittings, valves, bolts, etc.) of any size the operator chooses which are then fitted together by moving them around the screen using a light-sensitive pencil to place them where you want to assemble a 'design'. The computer is linked to an automatic drawing machine, which it controls and, at the press of a button, the finished design is drawn for you in a matter of minutes, (an incredible sight!)

Also, and of growing significance, we have computer-aided management systems, which, as far as I know, are basically an extension of the data storage function to using these data (selecting relevant data) to present "optimum solutions" to management problems by working out calculable 'pros and cons' to various hypothetical courses of action.

The effects so far

The new technology started to bite with the introduction of CNC machines. Clearly, the output from these exceeds anything that conventional machines can churn out by, typically, a factor of 5 or 10, and the quality is generally better and more consistent, particularly on "difficult jobs". (I recently saw a chess set turned out in a few minutes from 1" diameter steel bar). This has resulted in large scale redundancies (just as clerical workers are being replaced by word processors) (I wish I could be replaced by a word processor--typist.) and in further de-skilling for those left--a skilled lathe operator now may well be employed to load, watch and unload 2 or 3 CNC machines.

As an aside, the way was paved for the displacement of shop-floor workers by the development of management philosophy over the previous decade or so. To illustrate:

"Our immediate concern, let us remember, is the exploitation of the operating unit approach to systems design no matter what materials are used. We must take care to prevent this discussion from degenerating into the single-sided analysis of the complex characteristics of one type of systems material, namely human beings. What we need is an inventory of the manner in which human behaviour can be controlled, and a description of some of the instruments which will help us achieve that control. If this provides us with sufficient handles on human materials so that we can think of them as metal parts, electrical power or chemical reactions, then we have succeeded in placing human material on the same footing as any other material, and can proceed with our problems of systems design. There are, however, many disadvantages in the use of these human operating units. They are somewhat fragile, they are subject to fatigue, obsolescence, disease and even death. They are frequently stupid, unreliable and limited in memory capacity. But beyond all this, they sometimes seek to design their own circuitry. This, in a material, is unforgivable, and any system utilising them must devise appropriate safeguards."

Robert Boguslaw "The New Utopians: a study of Systems Design and Social Change" Englewood Cliffs N.J. Prentice-Hall 1965

This was quoted in Mike Cooley's "Architect or Bee? The Human/Technology Relationship" Langley Technical Services, 95, Sussex Place, Slough SL1 1NN. Thoroughly recommended for a complete and thorough analysis of new technology.

C.A.D. is taking the creativity out of design and putting draughtspeople out of work. Mike Cooley suggests that the de-skilling of the design process will result in the "proletarianization" of designers and engineers as the company appropriates more of their skill and ability by "putting it on computer".

In management, the computer is taking decision-making out of the hands of people higher and higher up the line; it possesses all the facts so is in the best position to make 'rational' judgements. What we should be asking is, "The computer is the optimum solution on WHOSE criteria?" Obviously, the assumption on which its programmes are based is that the object is to maximise profit. However, the argument that, "The computer said so, it must be right" should be watched for very carefully.

The re-structuring of capitalism

Whilst all this was in its early stages, in the late '60s, major changes were occurring in the ownership of capital. This was the age of the company merger, the building of the G.E.C.s of this world, the birth of the monolithic corporations, the multinationals. Small firms were bought out by the thousand with the result that most major industrial companies are now subsidiaries of one of the big corporations, or have been bought by the government ("nationalised"). This was followed by internal re-structuring with widespread redundancies ("rationalisation"). The significant results of this process seem to be:

- 1) The centralisation of vast amounts of capital into fewer hands has put the market much closer to being a monopolistic one. (Though whilst there is still competition between corporations I'm not sure why this is significant. Any suggestions?)
- 2) The more global nature of a multinational's capital means that it is much less susceptible to sanctions or influences exerted by any one government.
- 3) The allocation of resources and capital, globally, is much more flexible. (If labour costs in the U.K. are too high, stuff it, I'll get cheap labour in Taiwan). This has led to a significant shift of capital out of the West and into the Third World. (Again, the significance of this fact as regards the present recession eludes me. Is it relevant?)

So, I have outlined 3 major areas of difference between conditions now and during the last recession:- the end of the "free market"
- the new technology
- the re-structuring of capitalism---multinationals.

Which of these are important in explaining this recession? Do any imply that this recession is different from any previous ones in terms of economics? One could put the question this way:

In the past, capitalism has always destroyed existing jobs, but it has always created new ones. Will it this time? If not, why not?

I think this question has to be answered in terms of the new technology, but before I address myself to this question I want to look at another question, to complete the historical background, namely:

The changing face of management philosophy

We must realise that the days of the 19th century capitalist entrepreneur are over (apart from the odd buffoon like Freddie Laker). Boards of directors don't sit in offices plotting how to do the workforce out of as much money as they can, anymore. Most bosses would rather pay higher wages for a docile workforce than keep wages as low as they dare. Also, I really don't think many managers actually relish the prospect of redundancies-- it is something they tend to fend off until they "have to" lay people off. By this, I don't mean that capitalists are any less devoted to making a profit than they ever have been, but that the attitude towards the workforce is slightly different. This may go back to the opening question of precisely WHO is a worker and who is a capitalist? Where do office workers, accountants, work study engin-

eers, designers come in? They do not own or control capital, but their work is non-productive. What I am getting at is that things are not so clear-cut any more.

referring specifically to industry, I choose to call share-holders, directors, senior management and those employees involved with allocation and organization of finance and commerce as the "ruling class" in industry, or "management" (though I am open to criticism about this admittedly arbitrary choice) and those involved in production, design and testing as "productive workers" or "the workforce" since without them sound products could not be produced. (What about research workers?)

The first thing to note is that management has recognised this blurring of traditional divisions and has cultivated it in several ways:

1. - It is increasingly taking after the Japanese approach, recognising that there will always be an US/THEM divide in a competitive society. They have cunningly attempted (and largely succeeded) to re-identify the US and THEM so that it is no longer management/workforce but company/competitors. The company (the "corporate us" if you like) is one big, happy team, commonly striving for efficiency to beat "them"--the competition. That way, so the rhetoric goes, all the employees will benefit from the increased profits. (But they don't. For 2 reasons--firstly, it is always in the company's interests to keep labour costs low (therefore profitability high) and second, profit must be re-invested to improve productivity and keep production costs low.)

2. - The integration of the trade union structure into the company structure. The unions, as an institution are just as conservative as the management, and in many instances far more so. They are completely committed to the smooth-running of the capitalist economy "with a human face" (i.e. a Labour government, though even this is being dropped now). Again, the same rationale applies: "the profit of the company is to the benefit of the employees."

How have the workforce been bought off? By allowing themselves to be represented by Union bureaucrats to speak for them, who agree to and are encouraged to participate in the running of the company "so that they'll realise that we have no choice but to make hard and unpopular decisions"--- true if you accept the logic of the capitalist economy. For this reason workers' demands are systematically co-opted then actively encouraged. Some examples: -The closed shop -with several unions involved; divide and rule, play them off against each other.

-with one union; only one representative to negotiate with for the whole workforce---easily bought off.

-More money; incentive schemes, overtime rates, productivity bonuses.

-all get more work out of the same number of people which is cheaper than employing more on a full time basis. Also helps to instil the work ethic.

-Worker participation; show them how tough it is at the top and get them to cooperate in their own exploitation.

-Job rotation/job enrichment (whatever that is)-make it less unpleasant and stop them moaning.

These serve the purpose of making the workforce believe they have a measure of involvement in or control over the running of "their" company, thus securing commitment.

Using these basic strategies, management has largely been able to achieve the whole-sale incorporation of CNC machines onto the shop floor--forcing redundancies, de-skilling and alienation in the interests of "our" company. (Yes, redundancy, for some people, is a bad thing, since a paid job can be an economic and social necessity.) A more recent strategy, however, has been the heavy-handed threat of redundancy to secure low levels of pay and a high level of cooperation.

Management's next problem is how to replace people with machines in the field of intellectual work. The strategy appears to be to introduce new technology as a gadget, a 'toy' or an experiment then get the computer to

pace and time its operator, thus effectively functioning as a work study practitioner. Thus armed with data about the inefficiency of operators, management can 'prove' that the humans are superfluous and cut down on staff, or at least extract more work from them by making the computer pace them. Mike Cooley sees the computer as the "Trojan horse with which Taylorism is going to be introduced into the field of intellectual work", and I see no reason to disagree.

The management's final trump card comes when they install computerised management aids, programmed with their own logic, then turn around to the staff and say, "Look, the computer says we should do this". We don't argue with computers because they give us logical optimum solutions.

What other goodies are in the pipeline?

The wittily named F.A.S.T. (ha ha) which abbreviates Factory Automated Systems Technology. This is the logical next step in the process already outlined--namely, the link-up and co-ordination of the separate computer-controlled areas:

- handling by robotics
- machining by CNC
- automated in-factory transportation
- computer-aided design
- computerised draughting
- robotic welding and painting
- procurement, sales and accounts by telephone-linked computer systems

all brought under the control of a central computer, enabling a complete works to employ only a handful of people. This has already started to happen in the motor industry (Fiat), but will be spreading to all sorts of less ideally suited industries soon.

The other up-and-coming industry to watch is biotechnology (including genetic engineering)--in its respectable guise (manufactured antibodies, improved crop strains, etc.). Of course, parallel work in germ warfare will also go on, but that can be considered as outside the main industrial arena.

So, growth industries will be (are):- information technology hardware

- biotechnology
- robotic and control equipment
- consumer electronics (videos, home computers, etc.)
- computer "software" (programme development), both for industrial systems and the consumer market, as in TV games, for example.

Technological Utopia?

Great! Fully automated factories. No more alienating work. No more shit jobs and trade union bureaucrats. No more 8.30 till 5.00. Surplus production from un-"manned" (sorry) factories, keeping us all in abundance. What more could we ask for? Unfortunately, life isn't like that. As long as 'money' exists, internationally, capitalism will sell at the highest possible prices to those who can afford to buy, i.e. to those who are paid a wage to produce (or supposedly to aid production, at least). Why will capitalists give us cars, when they can sell them to Third World developing countries? The truth of the matter is that automation means unemployment means pitiful state handouts to buy essentials and thus subsist.

The "Right to Work" question

The demand for the "right to work" is logical, if workers want merely to retain their living standards within the framework of a capitalist economy. It presents no threat to capitalism--whilst workers are desperate to work (even if it is on 'socially useful production'), they can be paid low wages for this privilege whilst merely slowing down the rate of redundancies. Similarly, the "rejection of work" could be just as impotent. Industrialists will be only too pleased to see the back of "trouble-makers" who opt for the dole--it saves them the hassle of sacking them! and helps cut down the

workforce, aiding management in its programme of replacing labour with plant capital.

What would be a threat is, 1) the mass refusal of work, i.e. if a large number of productive workers opt out of production, now while they are still needed, and when investment in the technology to replace them is low, due to the recession; or 2) the classic "seizure of the means of production" -- occupations, workers' councils or similar and the direct running of factories by the workers, without bosses. Both areas have their problems, in theory, let alone in practice! I would like to see these fully discussed, in future issues. Principally, the objections are:

1) How do we subsist in the mean time?

2) Sounds suspiciously similar to the existing order--factories, work, production (of what?) and the possibility (probability?) of new leaders and factions arising.

Besides, and perhaps more important, there is the consideration that both would have to be international (a) to affect the multinationals seriously and (b) to avoid the economic necessity of participating in a capitalistic global economy.

(Beginning to look a bit bleak, eh?)

But I digress: I am talking about what is happening and what the likely outcome will be, not what would be a good idea to do about it. The question was, can the population of the industrialised nations be supported without people producing? I've posited a 'no' because capitalists won't give to the poor unemployed, and governments won't pay the unemployed a wage--thus manufactured goods will go elsewhere (the Third World).

Another, quite interesting argument can be made as to why capitalism just CANNOT provide a technological Utopia:

In capitalism, things are produced when people can buy them, thus producing profit (the difference between cost price and sale price). This is what distinguishes capitalism from any other means of distribution. To buy something you need money. To have money you need to earn it. (You can't just print it otherwise it has no value). (The crucial question here is where does money come from?) Imagine yourself in 2100 AD, when all production is automated. Nobody earns anything, so items cannot be "bought" (i.e. with 'money'), so profit cannot be made, that is, the sum total of wealth cannot be increased. Capitalism, therefore, could not exist, as such. Thus capitalism and complete automation & worklessness are mutually exclusive.

(This argument only applies if money is a precondition for profit. Is it?) This is encouraging! If we want Utopia we must necessarily abandon capitalism, produce and exchange for need, without money, not for greed, with profit.

Likely developments

It seems that, because of the global re-structuring of the ownership of capital, and because of the enormous scope and impact of the new technology, the standard, Keynesian remedy of public spending as stimulus to the economy will fail again. Monetarism is stagnatory for capitalists (the CBI was amongst the first to call on Thatcher for a U-turn in economic policy), so will be abandoned, sooner or later. So, how is capitalism responding to the recession now, and how will it develop?

The basic trend, at the moment, is the gradual investment in new technology, capital-intensive but time- and labour-saving productive methods, despite the difficulty in investing now. Why? Simply as a matter of survival. If European industry does not keep abreast with technological advances then, barring major political change, it will simply cease to exist. If Japanese firms can produce cars of better quality than you can for £1000 less (and it's not just cars--it's everything--literally) which are also more reliable, you have to find the most economical way of manufacturing them yourself and opt for it, otherwise you will not sell any and collapse. It's as simple as that. Really. ("Socialists", who are pro-British industry should remember this--their own logic justifies current trends in employment and wage levels). There is no alternative, short of abandoning capitalism--beware of "socialists" telling you otherwise. It is precisely for the reason that the Trade Unions

and the Labour Party (and much of the left) believe that there is an alternative that they are such a waste of time.

The trend will continue towards capital investment and falling employment, I reckon, for the reasons above. But what of jobs in the 'boom industries' mentioned earlier-- information technology, consumer electronics, biotechnology and robotic hardware? Yes, there will be new jobs created, but fewer than those destroyed, because these industries themselves are capital-intensive and automated, in many instances. Also, many of the labour-intensive processes involved (assembly of electronic items, TVs, etc.) are carried out by cheap labour, available to the multinationals in the Third World.

It is my opinion that Western markets are becoming "saturated" (we all have cars, TVs, fridges, etc.). Several possible reasons could be suggested:

- the 'con' of built-in obsolescence no longer works so well. Consumers are demanding more reliable, longer-lasting products and forming consumer protection groups to that end. (e.g. all new cars are now well undersealed and rust-proofed). So the turnover of consumer durables is less rapid.
- Lower employment on a permanent basis (because of automation) will mean less money with which to buy goods: capitalists will be less able to sell them in the West.

Therefore we will see further development in the Third World. What may happen is that more work will be exported there and better wages paid, so that workers there will be able to afford goods produced in automated factories in the developed countries. This could solve capitalism's immediate economic problem of how to continue producing and where to sell. It remains to be seen whether capitalist concerns will be long-sighted enough to take the necessary risks. (Would you be the first to start dishing out substantial wage rises, enabling your competitors to undercut your necessarily increased prices?) It's next problems are social and political--what to do about the millions of poor and unemployed Europeans who are used to a relatively high standard of living and must have it taken away from under their noses.

The system has maintained itself so far by providing the illusion of contentment, 'good' and 'freedom', in the form of spectacular consumption, religion and representative 'democracy', respectively, in which we passively spectate and are entertained, hypnotised, conned. It has been marvellously effective, and so will be continued as a ploy.

I think that shorter working hours and 'work-sharing' will be the chosen course because,

- (a) - it will help perpetuate the work ethic
- (b) - it will continue to provide wages, (i) for consumption (ii) as a sedative.

However, both these or the dole will result in more leisure time and fewer 'productive' hours. Both leisure facilities and state handouts cost money. Where will this come from? High tax on company profits in the Third World? The major problem will be what to do to prevent the development of political consciousness as wage drops are forced and more people have more time to think/act independently. This eventuality is being catered for already, as I see it, in two important ways:-

- 1) "the Russian Threat"--"political involvement"--Soviet-style Stalinism and therefore is a crime in the eyes of the State and its mass media. Besides, who wants communist trouble-makers at home, when the Russian tanks are waiting to roll across Europe?
--other lies and distortions about "defence".
- 2) "Social atomisation"--this is by far the more insidious and dangerous.
--By means of the housing it provided, the old people's homes it built, the Welfare State it provided and the propaganda it pushed, the system has destroyed any 'communities' which may have existed and created the nuclear family (Mum, Dad and 1.8 kids) as the fundamental social unit.
--It is now going one better and smashing social ties still further, towards the goal of making

the individual as the "social" unit, and isolating her/him to become an anti-social unit. This is already being done through alienated sex (the rotting corpse of the "sexual revolution" culminating in snuff movies), television (we don't talk about the way we feel, or anything else, we just turn on the telly to save us having to make the effort to communicate), and drugs, from alcohol to smack.

--The process is continuing with the mass addiction to TV games, another TV channel, videos (so you can sit and watch telly even if there's nothing you want to watch). Few devices include the home computer (so you can do your shopping from the comfort of your home--for heaven's sake, even consumption must not involve social contact). The point is that we are being increasingly encouraged to do absolutely nothing but consume and are being pushed further and further into the "home"--your few cubic metres of private space, (private, that is, provided you behave there and pay the rent)--the machine providing the only link with the outside world.

They might even blow us all up before we get a chance to be a consumption machine, but that's a different story. Or is it.....?

Simon Leefe, Nov. '82.

P.S. Finally, some questions are puzzling me a great deal. Any answers?

- 1) Precisely WHO controls technology?
- 2) Is control of technology the same as political power?
- 3) What is political power and who wields it?
- 4) Where does the Eastern Bloc fit into all this?

NEW FROM THE LONDON WORKERS' GROUP

The latest issue of the LWG Newsletter is now available. It contains articles on: The National Health dispute, ASLEF strike, 'Work or the Dole?', Unemployed Groups, Press Agency Job Report, Notes on the Economic Crisis and letters.

The LWG has also produced a new newsheet 'WORKERS PLAYTIME'. They have produced two issues so far.

ISSUE ONE costs 10p (and send a large SAE), its 8 pages and contains articles on: the Waterworkers Strike, the NHS Dispute, Greenham Common, the Police, the Birmingham SS Officers strike.

ISSUE TWO costs 20p (plus large SAE) and is 12 pages. Articles on: Halewood strike, Nuclear War threat, the Waterworkers strike, Crossword strike, Workers autonomy, the miners strike, the dole, the Italian Winter of 82/83 the Radio Times strike.

All these are available from Box LWG, c/o Little @, Cl Metropolitan Wharf, Wapping Wharf, Wapping Wall, London E1.

NEW FROM 'ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT'

A pamphlet by Cajo Brendal, on the East German Workers Revolt of 1953. Its available from Echanges et Mouvement, A.v, Ammelrooy, Eikbosserweg 87, 1213 RT Hilversum, Holland. A subscription to E and M costs the equivalent of 25 french francs. They describe themselves as 'A group of comrades sharing similar positions and in close contact with each other, a means of exchanging news on struggles, discussions and criticisms on all struggles of all kinds carried out by those directly concerned for their own emancipation.' They produce a regular newsletter and pamphlets (in English and French).

LETTER RECEIVED BY WILDCAT FROM COMRADES IN HONG KONG ON 4.1.83

Dear comrades,

Thank you for your letter of 30.8.82 and many apologies for not replying earlier.

For your information, Int'l Correspondence is now sadly down to the undersigned alone (in fact, has been for a while). Despite that the objectives set out in the open letter are still being pursued with the same rigour. At the moment, I'm writing several articles to be published under the name IC (which will be retained as an intervention vehicle). Though they are to be in Chinese, I'll send you a copy when it's out.

I know Solidarity broke up some time ago, but don't really know the full reasons. I believe it will be politically important for parties involved, like yourselves, to publish something on the why's (if not also the relevant hows) of the break up. Similarly, those of you who broke from WR should do likewise. (As far as I know it was not only the Chernier affair or was it?) Or has there been anything of the nature published already?

Minus/Undercurrents is now virtually finished, as far as I can ascertain; and what is left of it are now pursuing activist free-lancing (co-operating now with the Trots and now with Social Democrats, now with... what have you); all as a result of a lack on the one hand of a rigorous theoretical back-up, and on the other, of political courage (to face up to the pressures of political isolation, cooperation with sundry activists is, after all, doing something, no matter what it is). I mention this, because some of you may be under the same pressures.

I guess your national bulletin must already have come out, as another contact mentioned a certain U-LR recently, though I have not received anything further from you.

Reading your stuff, I'd like to mention the following preliminary comments, though even these may be premature for I only have WC 2, 3, 5 + 6, SG 1, 2, +3, the 'Supplement to the NU-LR' and Aberdeen Solidarity's 'Riots in Britain'.

My general feeling is that your orientation is still in a state of flux. You reject the, frankly childish libertarianism of John and Cliff, yet somewhere you mention you are for libertarian communism while in WC's 'Our Objectives' you say you are aiming at 'the overthrow of all governments, bosses and leaders by a revolution in which the majority of people, who at the moment are just expected to follow orders, all play an equal part', which, I believe, is a libertarian formulation. You say that you agree that capitalism has not and will never be able to overcome its inner economic contradictions (which is the central tenet of the Marxist perspective), yet you are for federalism. As far as I understand it, Marxism is such a coherent framework that if you follow it through, you find that you must accept or reject its basic tenets lock, stock and barrel. Thus, if you reject the economics of libertarianism, ie self management (which you do) and accept that the only way to do away with the wages/money/market system is through central planning, then you must also reject federalism. Of course, I do not envisage a central plan that covers everything, and in fact, am in favour of a lot more autonomy for individual units than many centralists do, I reject federalism (applied to macro issues) as integral to libertarianism.

LETTER FROM HONG KONG CONT'D

One of the matters which I think must be organised centrally is the proletarian class struggle, by which I mean the ~~class~~ class should organise as a whole through the maximum coordination of the various moments of its struggle (after all, what we are fighting against is a world capitalist system, and there is no way the workers can succeed without such coordination). Yes, I know centralism has a lot of practical problems, but they can only be tackled if one faces them instead of avoiding it altogether. What applies to the class applies to its revolutionary minorities as well. While they are not the general staff of the class's struggle, it's certainly true that they understand that something is seriously wrong and that this "something" is the capitalist organisation of society (and should therefore) put across this message as widely and forcefully as possible', which means to say that they must coordinate their activities 'as widely and forcefully as possible', ie, organise centrally on the international level. Which brings me to the following point:

Groups like the ICC accuse you of localism. Based upon your publications alone, I cannot possibly comment on that because their size itself is a most severe limitation. You limit yourselves to local bulletins, but that probably only reflects your lack of resources to produce a national agitational paper. As a matter of fact, resources permitting, I believe revolutionaries should, in addition to their inter'l/national press, produce local bulletins similar to yours. Yet I do sense inversion of priorities in your press. Even for lack of resources resulting in a group being confined to, say, Manchester, I think it should start from a global perspective, and not refuse to 'write about a strike or other struggle without first talking to the people involved'. I said I'm for local bulletins by national/international organisations (resources permitting), but I'm against doing it the other way round. In fact, in practice you've been forced to rescind your avowed immediatism by reporting, for example, on Poland in WC 3. This immediatism is most apparent in SG 3 where you even personalise struggles as in Thieving Landlord & Tarmac Robbery (though I don't think it was your intention). SG also betrayed perspectives close to investigative reporting and alternative press when it says in No.3 'We want not only to report on these struggles but also offer practical support if we can. If you know of anything we would report, investigate or be involved in action on....'

As to agreements, I'm with you on two points. 1. Revolution is a down-to-earth thing (I used exactly the same phrase in a recent discussion with a friend) which takes place from an often dramatic transformation of defensive struggles into offensive ones (there can, in fact, be no offensive struggles short of the revolution itself) 2. That workers don't learn through defeats alone, but also through temporary victories which they then see are inevitably annulled and more later. It's surely one of the most difficult tasks revolutionaries face in the question: what do we do in a struggle that we know can at best only result in a temporary victory, to tell the workers that we can win is to sow illusions, to tell them that we can only be defeated in the long run if we don't overthrow capitalism during that struggle is surely nonsense.

continued on bottom of page 16

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE LONDON WORKERS GROUP ABOUT THEIR
LEAFLET ON SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFITS

Manchester Wildcat group were quite impressed by the leaflet "Whose Benefit? Changes in the Social Security System" published by the London Workers Group and we have decided to distribute it in Manchester.

However we felt that the leaflet was marred by the following line "still it's not all bad - 1,000 of the bastards will lose their jobs as a result of these changes." We are going to delete these lines by Tippexing them out.

We don't wish to glorify the role of D.H.S.S. workers. Some of them, such as members of the Fraud Squad are no better than the police. But these are not going to be the ones who lose their jobs. Many D.H.S.S. staff - clerks and typists for example - are ordinary workers trying to earn a living as best they can. As such they are subject to the same frustrations and attacks as the rest of us. Important links could be forged between these D.H.S.S. workers and the unemployed. Insulting people and telling them that you are glad they are going to lose their jobs is not the way to forge these links.

Obviously some D.H.S.S. staff can be obstructive when the mood takes them, although often the rules of the bureaucracy they work for leaves them no choice. But D.H.S.S. staff who are deliberately obstructive rightly deserve our anger and any way of expressing this anger should be encouraged.

A reduction in the numbers of D.H.S.S. workers will have the effect of making things worse for claimants. Dole queues are not enjoyable for most claimants, and an extra thousand in the dole queue from the D.H.S.S. will not make things better for anyone.

On a personal note I would like to add that I dislike intensely the term bastard as an insult. As someone who disapproves of marriage I think anyone who chooses parents that are not married deserves to be congratulated not insulted.

Steve, on behalf of the Manchesters WILDCAT group.

=====
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO 'WILDCAT' ?
=====

Up until the end of November 82 we had produced and distributed seven issues of our local bulletin, Wildcat. The later issues have been distributed regularly to fairly large numbers of workers in four main areas: Manchester City Council workers, two unemployment exchanges, Leyland vehicles, and Parkinson Cowan Engineering. Bulletins and a leaflet were also given out to many hospital workers. Smaller numbers have also been given out at other workplaces through local contacts and at political meetings and demonstrations. Three issues have been included in a local alternative 'What's On?' and small numbers have regularly gone into local radical bookshops.

We have had reasonably favourable reactions from many of those who received the bulletin regularly and have generated a considerable local and national correspondence. Unfortunately we have had almost no success in attracting new people to help us produce and distribute the bulletin. Despite some initial interest from a few individuals the active membership of our group continues to fluctuate between 4 and 6 ...

Although we have recently been distributing the JWC leaflet on Social Security benefits, we have not produced any more 'Wildcat' bulletins since October. This was primarily the result of a relapse in the general level of class struggle. A certain demoralisation occurred in our group (in common with the rest of our class we think) in the light of the massive and continuing unopposed redundancies and in particular the defeat of railway and hospital workers here and the Polish workers abroad. This political demoralisation combined with some personal frustrations has so far prevented even the current water workers strike from engendering a collective response from us.

However we don't intend packing up altogether. We are continuing with regular meetings and intend to produce occasional bulletins or leaflets when the occasion arises. So keep in contact. We are always open to suggestions for activity within the broad framework of the political principles in our objectives and in 'Intercom'.

Our address for correspondence remains:
Box 25, 164-166 Corn Exchange, Hanging Ditch, MANCHESTER M4 3BN

Wildcat Report, Manchester, Feb 83

News from William Morris

"reformists by blows, but reformists nevertheless" (Adam Buick in the course of an epistolary debate about anarchism describing syndicalism, some 20 years ago.)

The concept of the Social General Strike, - the revolutionary upsurge when the vast mass of the working class having become convinced of the anarcho-syndicalist case, there is a world-wide mass occupation of all factories and similar capitalist institutions from which the bosses would then be locked-out, and the workers would then proceed to reorganize society, on libertarian communist lines, - has always been of course a central aim of anarcho-syndicalism. A central aim, but also - in the Sorelian theory - a motivating myth; i.e. the social general strike was for Sorel a deliberately over-simplified picture of the revolutionary process, which could be offered workers when they first enquire how we see anarchism coming about, but offered in the knowledge that when the working class has achieved that degree of consciousness there are a myriad smaller ways whereby it might make the actual conquest of power.

But while the picture of the revolutionary transition is essential to syndicalism, it can still be admitted that in the interim the syndicalist concept of the revolutionary industrial union within capitalist society, acting at one and the same time as a defensive organization against increased capitalist exploitation & as an example, an effective sign, a body which is both the embryonic revolutionary movement and the propagandist organization to spread the idea of the social general strike does involve gradualism, does if you like involve "reformism by blows". (It is difficult incidentally to see, how the SPGB which boasts that its members are to be found in every struggle whenever the working class is actively defending its standard of living, thinks it avoids such "reformism by blows.")

Accepting the label reformist by blows, is not necessarily therefore embarrassing, nor is the description true only of syndicalist forms of anarchism, nor only of anarchist forms of "ultra-leftism". The current Direct Action carries a reprint article of Malatesta's, & though he was a noted opponent of syndicalism within the anarchist movement spurning the revolutionary syndicates as means to social change his concept of the relationship between present struggles and future revolutionary change differed little from the syndicalist. The same dichotomy is to be found in Council Communism, & - as already stated - in SPGB practise whatever the theory. The only possible exceptions - Bordighists & the ultra-De Leonists of the BSISLP - are exceptions at the price of abstention from struggle.

What is evil in reformism is not the fact of gradualism, but the assistance given the state & the ruling class to remove some peripheral ills and thus strengthen themselves for the future. Certainly it is true - as De Leon so often emphasized - that concessions won from capitalists by strike actions may be reforms in just this sense. That the capitalist can compensate for the gain of higher wages, by adjustments to the overall economy, which cause other workers to fund the pay rise. It is even true that workers win some partial measure of workers' control through strike action that the capitalist system is capable of transforming itself so as to absorb the gain. That is not an argument for refusing to engage in partial struggles, which is a recipe for demoralisation, & involves abrogating the use of the movement's most important propaganda weapon; it is an argument for being aware of the limitations of each struggle; & it's perhaps necessary to be more aware than syndicalists are sometimes, of the dangers of engaging in unwinnable struggles which may lead to demoralisation of a different kind.

Thus even though the "ultra-leftist" rejects the perspective of the real reformists - taking power & either legislating for social change, or to impose it by administrative fiat - s/he does not totally escape the Maximalist/Minimalist divide that lay at the base of the traditional division between reformists & "revolutionaries" in the statist tradition. It is the same problem that caused Trotsky to

continued at foot of page 20

THE ANARCHIST SCENE IN THE NORTH-WEST - A PERSONAL VIEW

One of the concerns of 'Intercom' has been to open an exchange of information and debate between the revolutionary traditions of both anarchism and Marxism, and individuals involved in this project have therefore attended and contributed to meetings organised by both these tendencies.

I recently attended the afternoon session of a 'day school', held in Burnley and organised by the Direct Action Movement where a healthy discussion took place on the role of trade unions in modern capitalism, drawing on the theoretical insights of syndicalism, anarchism and Marxist council communism, and the practical experience of the individuals involved. In fact the discussion was opened up by an International Communist Current sympathiser who gave a very concise introduction without the usual accompanying jargon of the I.C.C. In all, I think this was a practical demonstration of the possibilities which do exist for an ongoing debate between these tendencies if the participants could only overcome some of their current sectarianism.

By contrast to this, the subsequent North West Anarchist Federation Conference held in Liverpool on the 20th February was really depressing. The Direct Action Movement, whilst itself open to heavy criticism from a revolutionary viewpoint, none the less represents one of the healthier elements of the modern British anarchist movement. It was noticeable that very few of their members were in attendance. What was left, besides a handful of individual revolutionary or anarchist communists, was a motley crew of 'revolutionary' anarchists, proponents of extra-parliamentary reformism. Their anarchism amounted to little more than putting a 'militant' gloss on various campaigns against the Cruise missile, blood sports etc, or organising the alternative ghetto through punk gigs, housing co-ops and the like. They came together not in any attempt to achieve a coherent understanding of the system, but simply in a celebration of anarchist 'diversity' with everyone going their own way - going nowhere. Their concerns were undoubtedly worthy causes, but they can hardly be the primary concern of a revolutionary movement. Perhaps they are excusable in the absence of a strong social movement of the working class, but I suspect that most of these folk would not recognise such a movement if it were under their noses. The only way they eventually united the assembly was the traditionally negative anti-statism of the anarchism which expressed itself in support for an abstract 'anti-vote poster campaign for the next parliamentary elections.

Perhaps I should have expected no more than this, but I did. Is it too much to hope that future anarchist conferences might be more productive?

M.B. Manchester.

News From William Morris (continued from page 19)
produce his programme of transitional demands. Whilst naturally no Leftist would accept that programme as adequate in the form presented, since it was an essentially power-oriented programme of reforms, the same programme presented in a different context in those days, presented as guidelines for syndicalists to prevent their defensive acts falling into reformism, (broadly the approach of 'Revolution Proletarienne', the Rosmer-Monatte group,) becomes a very different matter.

However a policy which is adequate at one historical stage, is almost by definit- /continued on page 21.

ion - inadequate in the next. (A lesson which of course has not been learnt by Trotsky's epigoni.) When - in his Testament, & in the exchanges that followed it - Trotsky at the end of his life was considering afresh bureaucratic collectivist analyses of the soviet union; Trotsky (for the first time conceding the theoretical possibility of the analysis & in so doing accepting the deadline of the end of the war for a final test between his theories and the "new class" analysis,) said that if a new class analysis was accepted, it went without saying that his perspective of attaining socialism had "ended as Utopia", that it would be necessary to abandon his programme and adopt a "new programme of minimal defence of workers" against the new barbarism of the triumphant bureaucratic ruling class.

That was obviously itself just a temporary programme. Writing then only just over twenty years since the October Revolution, & basing himself on Marx's dictum that it was impossible to pose a revolutionary alternative to a new ruling society, until that society had exhausted its potential for progressive economic function, he would be unable to pose a revolutionary alternative to bureaucracy, just as in his earliest days, Marx held both that Jacobinism had outlived its usefulness as a revolutionary philosophy, & that socialist proposals were Utopian - i.e. premature. It is not a judgement that need worry us now, since more years have passed since the Russian Revolution than intervened between the Bastille & the Communist Manifesto. But in its day, (again if one transports Trotsky's concept of the programme from a governmentalist framework, to being guide lines for syndicalist agitation within the trade union context,) it would have had a lot to recommend it as a basis for syndicalist strategy. (It was indeed, whether consciously or unconsciously I know not, what Rosmer's group did, in launching the Circle Zimmerwald, & in pursuing a fairly reformist industrial policy. Given Rosmer's position as a critical supporter of Trotsky's, it is probable that it was a consciously pursued policy.)

In noting that the time has gone beyond this, one recalls that in News from Nowhere Morris forecast that despite the warnings of libertarian socialists the future probably lay with Fabians and Bellamy-type state socialists; and that only when these had imposed a bureaucratic "nightmare of Utopia", would it be possible for the real revolution to break out against this social-democracy. That that revolt would itself begin on a gradualist basis, (interestingly he guessing foretold 1958, the year of CND's launch, as the beginning of that revolt.)

The basis of a revolutionary rejection of a new class system, - if one uses the methodology of Marx in the Manifesto, - is to take the minimal defensive demands that the working class has evolved for its own protection, & enlarge this, spell out its potential, in such a way as to build on the basis of the workers' instinctive yearnings a prospectus of a future society consistent with the march of technology, but subordinating that technology to the interests of the people rather than vice versa. Once again, if such a perspective is put in a non-governmentalist framework it should suffice.

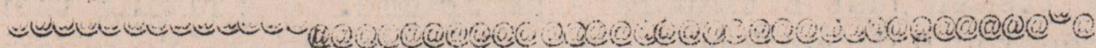
It is not only reformism by blows that is a traditional part of the revolutionary armoury; the Mutualist tradition of anarchism descended from Proudhon, reinforced by Tucker, Thoreau & Tolstoi, (admittedly a somewhat petit-bourgeois tradition,) was reformism by construction; and while one can accept that that tradition can be dismissed as reformist, nevertheless many of the acts of more authentic revolutionaries come within the same category. The whole move, from Sebastien Ferrer on, towards more libertarian forms of education, as a means to combat the ruling class's system of indoctrinating the children of the working class, is after all an aspect of reformism by construction. (Made more revolutionary than that of the Mutualists by the fact that it was consciously linked to syndicalist struggle, reformism by construction coupled to reformism by blows.)

Any work towards defence of civil liberties, towards mutual aid to blacklisted strikers & other militants, - all activities which are essential adjuncts of militant revolutionary struggle, are taken by themselves, in isolation, essentially reform-

News From William Morris (continued from page 21)

ist. In an age of nuclear weapons, of soveso-type chemical poisoning, of the destruction through agri-capitalism of the fertility of large tracts of land, of nuclear power stations; the ostensibly reformist act of trying to prevent the capitalists - while they retain power - destroying the world, or making it barren so that a socialist productive potential is impossible, is not only in itself a necessary prelude to social revolution; but also posing the demands necessary for this apparently limited aim, brings one into conflict with capitalism; and the demands cannot be won without the destruction of class society.

Laurens Otter.



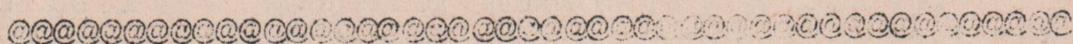
ORGANISATION AND CREATION OF THE ULTRA-LEFT REVIEW, A REPLY TO MELMOTH.

The creation of Intercom is a positive move towards revolution and the way we as revolutionaries organise ourselves is now more important than ever before. If the capitalists remain in power the future of the human race may be in doubt, and even the british revolutionaries will agree that without the humans there can be no revolution.

Intercom should not become a central organ with a fixed production staff and system of funds because central co-ordination would lead to oppression of minority viewpoints. This oppression would occur not because it was vital to the revolution but because it was practical for the running of a central national mouthpiece. Revolutionaries share a common aim to create through social revolution a society without bosses and governments, where all have an equal say in how things are run without any relationships of domination and submission, where production is for need not for profit. The way we organise ourselves and even the way we live within the capitalist system should reflect our ultimate goal. If we want to achieve a society where freedom of the individual is of the utmost importance, then freedom of the individual must be of the utmost importance in our movement. All of our organistaion must be as informal as possible, if efficiency leans towards oppression or coercion, then efficiency must suffer.

Why does Melmoth place so much importance on the difference between revolutionaries and yet fail to mention the common ground? If we wait for a time when all comrades agree on every dot and digit of the way forward then we will do nothing other than wait. I agree that the differences that exist between possible contributors to Intercom must not be ignored. But I see the role of Intercom as clarifying the reasons for such differences, Intercom acting as a means for discussion will enable people to compare the way forward as they see it to the way forward as seen by others with the same aim. Such discussion is the way to create a unified attack on the capitalist system in all areas.

Mike Stone.



ORGANISATION AND REVOLUTIONARIES. A REPLY TO 'CENTRALIST' CRITICS.

The latest issue of The Communist Bulletin¹ contains a somewhat premature obituary for Intercom. Their report of our demise is part and parcel of their analysis of the current situation and the response that revolutionaries should make to it.

The publishers of the Bulletin correctly say that the present situation is one of downturn in class struggle. They believe that in such circumstances that groups of revolutionaries will find it very difficult to achieve much by way of impact with their interventions. They say:

"There are no magical solutions to the separation of revolutionaries from the class as a whole and in the testing years ahead only those communists who base themselves on the solid foundation of disciplined theoretical work and centralised organisational activity will be able to fulfill the tasks demanded of them by the class struggle!"²

Elsewhere they describe what they see as one of the most important tasks of their new grouping, they say that "...we would want as much debate as possible and on as fraternal a basis as possible..."³ However, they apparently do not see Intercom as a means for extending that debate, rather they see it as "... a means of communication and swapping leaflets between autonomous local grouplets... and as such is designed as a crutch for localism and federalism."⁴ They therefore decided to abstain from participation in the project.

It appears that their main objection to Intercom is not the idea of a journal for revolutionaries to use as a means for discussion, rather it is the way the groups participating organise themselves. The Bulletin group at least openly proclaim that they intend to be anti-sectarian, though their practice to date seems to indicate otherwise. However, their critique of us bears many similarities to that of the organisation they recently departed from, the International Communist Current (ICC), who published an attack on us in the June 82 issue of the British publication World Revolution. According to this article, our rejection of an "international centralised organisation" and preference to build up local groups amounted to "localism". It is difficult to know just what is meant by this term, but it can be assumed that it implies a certain parochialism and refusal to see the need for collective work on a national and international level. They cite our publishing of articles with a local flavour as evidence of this, conveniently ignoring the ones that have dealt with Poland, the Falklands, CND, the threat of war, national implications of local strikes and so on.

For too long we have left these charges unanswered, or have been too soft when replying. Generally we have preferred to concentrate on positive work, rather than get dragged into polemics which serve little purpose other than to give tiny groups the illusion of doing something. However there comes a time when the kind of views being peddled by groups like the Bulletin and the ICC become a source of potential despair and destruction of revolutionary enthusiasm, at this point some response is necessary.

The aims of the Bulletin then are, discussion, disciplined theoretical work and the creation of a centralised political organisation. Discussion is to take place within the "communist milieu". Quite what constitutes this milieu is not certain, but there is some evidence that it includes such groups as the ICC, the Communist Workers Organisation (CWO) and their various French and Italian contacts. Possibly we are also included, as a kind of simple cousin who people really don't like to talk about too much. At any rate the Bulletin's main preoccupation seems to be their disagreements with the ICC and CWO, and the articles are full of complex criticisms of them - but unfortunately they make little attempt to relate them to folk not versed in the politics of such groups. So far, their discussion has been incredibly introspective, fixating on their obsession with a centralised political organisation. They recently left the ICC, because as they say, it tolerated little real internal discussion. But they seem to have learned little from their experiences. They still agree with the ICC's platform and statutes - apparently they feel the basic politics of the organisation were not at fault, what was wrong was the control exercised by the central organs of the ICC. It seems

strange that these self-proclaimed marxists cannot see the essential link between ideas and political activity.

The ICC was formed in the mid-seventies as a coming together of various groups of left communists. This was a time of creation of a number of other groups. For all of us the eighties have proved difficult times, yet for the 'centralist' groups could well prove fatal - and indeed for some nearly did so recently.

The problem for the centralists has been that they have been loaded with a theory which dooms them to inactivity. Central to their theories are the twin ideas of 'capitalist decadence' and the 'role of the party'. Capitalist decadence holds that capitalism is on the road to its imminent demise, having outlived its historical purpose. The future now holds the prospect of war and revolution. The revolutionary group exists as both a leadership of the working class and a 'pole of regroupment', around which working class activists will flock as the crisis deepens. Well, the seventies and early eighties have certainly seen a worsening of capitalism's crisis and certainly seems to be heading in the direction of war. The problem is that the groups have totally failed to recruit in large enough numbers and worse, the working class looks further away from revolution than it has done for a number of years.

The centralists, however, continued to preach the imminence of the revolution, and set about preparing their organisations to act as the centre around which the new communist party could coalesce. That this organisation had little more than a paper existence in many countries seemed to matter little, the more addresses that could appear in the press the better. The escape from isolation in one country lay in amalgamation with other isolated communists in other countries - the end result remained, of course, isolation, but on such a grand scale!!

But what were they left with, other than this perfect centralised machine? The revolution did not come. It is hardly surprising that many of these members started to question the line of the organisation. The problem seems to be that the organisation could not tolerate questioning. Instead they entered into a fantasy world, where police spies were trying to wreck them. The theory developed that their was an international conspiracy of the bourgeoisie to prevent the proletarian revolution. Increasingly the pages of World Revolution became unreadable, being mishmashes of fantasy and megalomania. A paper that is supposed to be read by working people became difficult even for people who had been reading it for some years and were aware of the particular style and jargon used by that sect.. Then came disaster, for the British section lost about half of its members, most of whom (including some long-standing communists) entered the void of political oblivion. They have since become increasingly introspective and obsessed with their own importance.

From this split emerged the small group that publishes the Bulletin, yet they seem to have learned little. Possibly they are aware that the extreme sectarianism of the ICC is obsolete, but that is about all. Their principal obsession is the question of organisation. In fact this dominates their 'disciplined theoretical work' to date. Presumably they will go on with this, supplementing it with lengthy theoretical documents on world shattering events, over which tiny groups can have no influence whatsoever. All in the interest of building a new 'pure' party. Thus their response to this very trying time for revolutionaries is for us to sit around in small groups of 6 or a dozen or so, and talk to ourselves. Presumably when we have got fed up with that we will be free to sink into political oblivion - a state that will perfectly match the impotence that their schemes offer.

What their concept of organisation offers has got nothing to do with the lessons of working class struggle. Rather it is a remnant of their leftist heritage, appearing remarkably similar to the ideas of the Trotskyist 4th International. Lacking a mass movement, what you do is to create an international leadership and wait for the working class to follow it, having been shown the brilliance of the leaderships lines. For the Trotskyists such a position was ludicrous (not to mention counter-revolutionary), but what can it possibly be for groups of the miniscule size of the left communists.

Far from the position of the Bulletin, it is not sufficient to simply say that 'it is not a question of centralisation or not, but what kind of centralisation'. Their experience of centralisation is far from unique, in fact it seems nearer the norm. Those of us who formed the Social Revolution group in 1975 had faced similar problems with the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the comrades who set up Solidarity back in the late fifties were reacting against the centralism of the Trotskyists. It is hardly surprising that the libertarian, councillist and left communist 'movement' is sprinkled with people with similar experiences - in many cases it was precisely that experience that led to a rejection of their former politics.

What then is our alternative? Let me just say that none of us regard the current situation and state of organisation as ideal. Intercom is the best we can manage at the moment. The question as to what form of organisation we would ultimately like to see is one that would produce a variety of answers. We all agree that the struggle for revolution requires the activity of groups of revolutionaries (as part of the ongoing class struggle, rather than some abstract leadership). We all agree that for the groups to be isolated from each other is a recipe for defeat - otherwise we would not contribute to Intercom, the main purpose of which is to bring revolutionaries together. However, we certainly do not think that the time is right to create another unified organisation. Our experience of them so far has been that their impact was totally negligible. Those of us in Solidarity left because the internal arguments reached the point where they were paralysing our external work, we were sick of contemplating our revolutionary navels - and we suspect that the comrades setting out on the Bulletin project will get sick of it too one day. However, given the current situation it seems likely that any attempt to set up a unified organisation will meet the same problems we experienced in the past.

What we set out to do was to talk to members of our class, rather than to members of our sects. Thus the Aberdeen comrades set up Subversive Graffiti, the Manchester people started Wildcat and we in the Potteries have started producing Careless Talk. Moreover we are not alone - the number of similar sheets being produced seems to be growing. We would hardly claim to be responsible for the other publications, but it can be seen that we are part of a general trend. All these newsheets carry some local, some national and some international stories. The decision to feature local stories is not because we think that the revolution is going to start in Aberdeen, Manchester or Stoke-on-Trent, but because we see it as a way to let our fellow workers realise that important struggles do take place in their own localities and not just in far away or 'important' places. And let us be frank, there is a propaganda decision involved too. We believe that workers will be more likely to read revolutionary material if it is directly relevant to them and is written in a style that is accessible to ordinary people.

Now, times are hard, as the Bulletin correctly points out, revolutionaries are isolated and feedback is very limited from our efforts.. But can they honestly say that we are more likely to despair and despondency than the ICC and CWO are with all their fine talk and introspection? At least with out more realistic assessment of our own importance we are unlikely to give up because nobody follows and the revolution does not come next week!

If it is ridiculous to try to set up a unified organisation now, it may not be so in the future. But any organisation that is set up must be based on a real existence, with a real membership in strong, functioning groups. In other words it must be built from the bottom up, in answer to a real need.. It will be created as a result of increasing working class struggle and will grow or die with that struggle. Our task now is primarily one of working towards such a situation, of creating local groups, spreading propganda and discontent. Sometimes this will be in the form of specific interventions, but in times of downturn in class struggle will take the form of more general propaganda. At the same time it is important that the groups retain contact with each other and don't develop in isolation. It is vital that discussion continues in print and face to face. That is why we set up Intercom, to work for the strengthening of revolutionaries, to overcome their isolation - not as the Bulletin and ICC allege, to perpetuate our sepeateness and diversity. What the eventual outcome will be will be determined by the seriousness of the revolutionary milieu in its desire to co-operate and overcome the sectarianism that poisons us at the moment. What seems inevitable is that when an organisation is formed we will have learned the lessons from the past and have rejected the notions of 'centralism' being peddled at the moment, seeing them as more likely to cause problems than to solve them.

LOUIS ROBERTSON

NOTES

1. THE COMMUNIST BULLETIN 3, article entitled "Ultra Left Review" on page 48
2. The same article, page 44.
3. THE COMMUNIST BULLETIN 3, article entitled, 'Letter about the CWO', page 44
- 4..The COMMUNIST BULLETIN, p 47
5. WORLD REVOLUTION, No50 June 1982, article, "Solidarity lies a mouldering in the grave but its localist soul is marching on."
6. See various issues of WILDCAT, SUBVERSIVE GRAFITTI, CARELESS TALK.

THE COMMUNIST BULLETIN can be obtained by writing to: The Bulletin, c/o 57 George Street, Aberdeen
WORLD REVOLUTION can be contacted at: BM Box 869, London WC1 3XX. They ask that there be no mention of their name on the envelope.
THE CWO can be contacted at: CWO, PO Box , 283 Clarence Drive, Glasgow G12. They publish the paper 'Workers Voice' (probably the most readable of the left communist publications).

@@

THE CURRENT ANTI-WAR DIRECT ACTION AND THE PEACE CAMPS

I'd like to discuss the current anti-war direct action and the Peace Camps in Britain by contrasting the article in CARELESS TALK February issue 'After the Peace Camps' with the article 'War and Peace' in Subversive Graffiti no.8.

Both articles agree in that they argue that to end war people need to overthrow the whole capitalist system. However there is a difference in emphasis in the articles. The CARELESS TALK article gives the impression that 'overthrowing the whole system' is an alternative to today's anti-war direct actions. Instead of blockading military bases, people should be making a revolution.

The SUEVERSIVE GRAFFITI article on the other hand argues for the anti-war direct action to be more effective (eg rejection of dogmatic pacifism) and for this action to be considered and proclaimed to be part of the struggle to overthrow all authorities and totally transform society.

I think this second approach is more productive. Because today, when the majority of people are not revolutionaries, what in practice does it mean to advocate 'overthrowing the system' as an alternative to taking anti-war direct action? I think in practice it would mean handing out leaflets advocating overthrowing the system instead of taking direct action. Now I've nothing against handing out leaflets (I must have handed out millions), on the contrary its very its very important to spread our views as widely as possible.

But I believe that a majority revolutionary consciousness will arise mainly out of social struggles against the system (at the workplace, street riots, anti-war, anti-nuclear etc) rather than just from revolutionaries' propaganda. Thus, where such struggles have a potential for generalising I think its more productive for revolutionaries to be involved, with an openly revolutionary attitude, rather than only to write about such struggles.

I think also that people becoming revolutionaries is not just a question of having certain ideas. For a revolution to take place people will have in practice to overcome the habits of obedience to authority, fear of breaking the law etc. which I think can still affect people deeply, even after they have intellectually rejected such attitudes. Taking direct action I think helps people to reject habits of obedience to authority in practice.

Some may agree that revolutionary consciousness arises out of social struggles but argue that the Peace Camps/anti-war actions are not such a struggle, they're just a single issue campaign we should not become involved in. I would say its important to distinguish between on the one hand, CND, CND -type propaganda, CND marches etc and on the other hand invading and blockading military bases, direct action. I would not join CND, give out single issue anti-nuclear leaflets, I'd only go on a CND type march if I was giving out revolutionary leaflets or taking direct action.

But anti-war direct action I think is very different. Intrinsically it is implicitly challenging the whole set-up where most people are passive spectators leaving the important decisions to the authorities. And this can be made explicit by what revolutionaries involved say/write before during and after such actions. Also the nature of the direct actions can be developed to challenge the system more explicitly and fundamentally (eg a mass occupation that drives off the police rather than a sit-down where everyone allows themselves to be arrested).

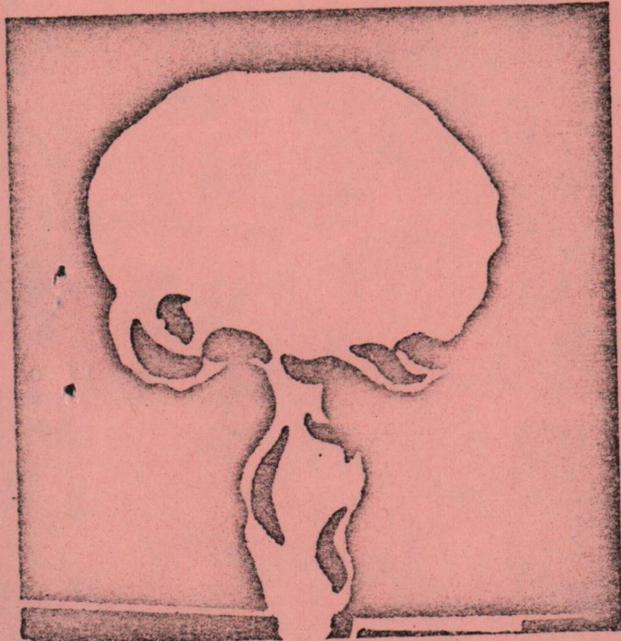
Finally, I think the CARELESS TALK article may under-estimate the consciousness of those involved in the direct action/Peace Camps. Certainly there is no one view-point all hold to. From a very limited involvement (a demo organised by Lossiemouth Peace Camp and a festival and blockade at Faslane)

CONTINUED...

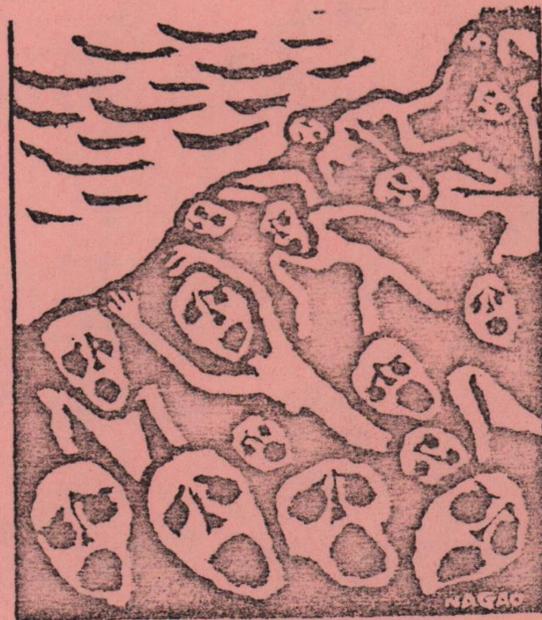
it seems the most influential viewpoints amongst the participants are pacifism and anarchism. Ok, those involved in Intercomm would probably have significant differences with most people involved, but I'm sure the majority involved are against all wars (not just nuke weapons) and most have probably some idea of there needing to be a major change in the entire system. Its important to realise that almost all the direct actions have been carried out outside the CND framework. At the Faslane blockade I was involved in there were no CND (or any other) bureaucratic order-givers to be seen. In fact the action was really good for its self-managed nature and the commitment of those involved.

Mike (Aberdeen).

P.S. There are good articles on anarchist involvement in the resistance to the Comiso Cruise missile base in Sicily in INSURRECTION magazine, 80p from A Distribution.



NO
CRUISE
TO
ARMAGEDDON



*** On 13th December 1982 one thousand women blockaded the United States Air Force / R.A.F. Base at Greenham Common in the south of England. This was to oppose the siting of new nuclear Cruise missiles there. They succeeded in causing serious disruption at the Base that day - despite the violence of the police in manhandling and hitting protesters. The police brutality was predictably ignored by the mass media. The police arrested three people, including one woman from Aberdeen. She will have to appear in court at Newbury, Berkshire sometime in the New Year.

*** Despite evictions and imprisonment, the Women's Peace Camp continues outside the Greenham Base. The Greenham women say "As women we have been actively encouraged to stay at home and look up to men as our protectors. But we reject this role. We cannot stand by while others are organising to destroy life on our earth. "

*** NATO wants to put 160 Cruise missiles at Greenham and at Molesworth, Cambridgeshire - as part of the 572 new nuclear missiles planned for Western Europe.

*** East and West, Governments spend a fortune on weapons - at the same time attacking their populations standard of living. The Tories, backed by the Labour Party in Parliament, spend millions on murder in the South Atlantic and Northern Ireland - but Thatcher is refusing to give the low paid health workers a rise. Why should resources be used like this, only to increase the power and profit of a small elite? Why shouldn't the world's wealth belong to the world's people, and be used to benefit all?

*** People need to oppose all war-mongering governments, no matter what flag they've got painted on their nuclear bombs. The Polish workers' mass strikes and street actions have weakened the Warsaw Pact war machine. But one year ago the Soviet and Polish rulers imposed martial law to try and crush the people's resistance. Nevertheless the class struggle between rulers and ruled continues - on both sides of the iron curtain.

*** From Gdansk to Greenham Common we can only rely on our own collective direct action. If we leave it to Governments to ban the bomb and improve things, we'll wait till doomsday - literally. Actions like the blockade of the Greenham Base can be a step towards the mass direct action needed to reclaim the whole planet for its people.

We invite comments on this leaflet, and welcome requests for more information and literature. Please write to : Subversive Graffiti Collective, 162 King St. Aberdeen. (23rd December 1982).