

# REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM



SHREWSBURY STRIKE  
police kill two  
Militants  
Union betray  
strikers  
FIGHT  
POLICE ATTACKS  
workers' protest  
PICKETS ON TRIAL  
Phase 3  
Political & Social Action  
SCAB picket  
FREEZE  
Martial law  
STUDENT  
ENCOUNTER  
speculator



# SOCIALISTS AND TRADE UNIONS.

## The bureaucratisation of the Unions

Trade unions were established through long and bitter battles against the employers and the capitalist State, initially amongst higher-paid skilled workers and later amongst the unskilled and semi-skilled industrial workers. They were a means to defend workers' wage and work conditions by breaking the competition between workers for jobs and collectively controlling the sale of labour-power to the employers. Their very existence was a recognition that the working class had a separate identity, with separate interests from other sections of society. As such this was not merely a practical advance but represented an advance in working class consciousness and was the first important step arming workers physically and mentally for future battles. Simply stated:

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interest. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests (Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, 1847).

Both Marx and Engels, witnessing this process amongst the newly emergent English working class, were optimistic that the collective organisation of the trade unions, hemmed in by the continual cyclical crises of capitalism, would force its way through with a demand for the complete abolition of the wages system. But the sectional growth and organisation of the trade unions became solidified rather than melting and merging under the influence of mechanisation, as Marx had expected, so that later social critics could take a much more pessimistic outlook:

Trade Unionism is evidently nothing but a reflection of capitalist society, not a potential means of transcending capitalist society. It organises workers not as producers but as wage earners, that is as creations of the capitalist system of private property, as sellers of their labour power. Unionism unites workers according to the tools of their trade or the nature of their product, that is according to the contours imposed on them by the capitalist system (Antoni Gramsci, Sindacalismo e Consigli, 1919).

This sectionalism was preserved within the great amalgamations of the 1920's and 30's that produced the massive AEU, TGWU and NUGMW, whilst at the same time spurring the development of large and complicated union machinery under the domination of national bureaucracies. The "permanency" and stable character of the early craft unions had seen the growth of bureaucracy from the earlier informal leaderships and this process was repeated in the newer unions, despite the supposed allegiance of the leaders to class emancipation and Socialism.

Michels had already examined in some detail the mechanisms of bureaucratic growth in labour organisations and formulated his



pessimistic "iron law of oligarchy" in 1911. At its most basic level his argument was as follows:

When the leaders are not persons of means and when they have no other source of income, they hold firmly to their positions for economic reasons, coming to regard the functions they exercise as theirs by inalienable right. Especially is this true of manual workers who since becoming leaders have lost aptitude for their former occupation. For them, the loss of their positions would be a financial disaster, and in most cases it would be altogether impossible for them to return to their old way of life" (R.W.E. Michels, Political Parties, 1911).

More and more this bureaucracy of trade union officials has developed interests opposed to those of the rank and file membership and in line with those of the employers and their government. They seek to join the employers and government as a "third estate" in the realm --their approach is one of reformism and class collaboration. The government and employers have of course encouraged this role so that union leaders can now be seen sitting, especially through the TUC, on numerous conciliation bodies, tribunals and commissions whose aim is to control and manipulate workers' opposition to capitalist exploitation. The "successful" trade union leader can now be assured of on retirement a remunerative job as company director, personnel manager, Board member of a nationalised industry, or even Labour Minister(1). If all else fails he might even be elevated to the status of a Lord.

The ability of the union bureaucracy to secure for themselves a junior partnership in the workers' oppression does however require them to maintain "their" unions as at least potential fighting bodies, which provides a certain leeway for workers to improve their position. In periods of severe crisis the government may well feel that it no longer needs the unions as an intermediary in the control of workers and in these circumstances the trade union leaders may have to fall back and rely much more heavily on their members' direct support. This situation arises from an inherent contradiction within the unions:

Trade unions are dialectically both an opposition to capitalism and a component of it. For they both resist the given unequal distribution of income within society by their wage demands and ratify the principle of an unequal distribution by their existence, which implies as its complementary opposite that of management...Whatever the degree of collaboration of trade union leaders, the very existence of a trade union de facto asserts the unbridgeable difference between capital and labour in a market society; it embodies the refusal of the working class to become integrated into capitalism of its own terms. Trade unions thus everywhere produce working class consciousness --that is, awareness of the separate identity of the proletariat as a social force, with its own corporate interests in society. This is not the same thing as socialist consciousness --the hegemonic vision and will to create a new social order which only a revolutionary party can create but the one is a necessary stage towards the other (P. Anderson, 'The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action' in The Incompatibles, 1967. But see Adam Buick's article later about the claim that "only" a revolutionary party can "create" socialist consciousness).

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(1) See "Gunter Gives His Orders", Socialist Standard, December 1967.



Total integration of the union machine into the state apparatus has been neither possible nor from a capitalist viewpoint desirable in Western Europe and America, and may yet prove a disability in the state capitalist countries of Eastern Europe and Asia.

A socialist strategy for industry must take full account of this dual nature of the unions as it is accentuated in one direction or the other by the objective economic conditions and the balance of class forces at any given moment.

Note: For a good summary of the views of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Michels, etc on this issue see Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism by R. Hyman, published by IS in 1971 (from which some of the quotes above are taken). See also, for an examination of a modern bureaucratic trade union, GMWU -- Scab Union, published by Solidarity.

### Political Reactions to the Changes in the Trade Unions

In developing a socialist industrial strategy it is worthwhile first of all examining the way in which political groups have reacted to this changing nature of the trade unions within capitalism.

The Socialist Labour Party, though virtually non-existent today, is a logical starting point since it was one of the first to seriously face the issues of trade union sectionalism and bureaucratisation and has indirectly influenced most existing radical workers' organisations. Under the dominating influence of Daniel De Leon the American SLP, reacting against the narrow collaborationist policies of the American Federation of Labour, adopted a policy of "socialist industrial unionism" designed, theoretically, to compete with and eventually supplant that organisation. In line with this policy the SLP attempted to set up its Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance but this never reached more than 10,000 members and was reduced to 1,500 by 1905 after a split had developed in the parent body. In the same year, however, the SLP, the leftwing of the Socialist Party of America, the Western Federation of Miners and various other groups launched the Industrial Workers of the World, which in subsequent years proved an effective force in organising industrial activity amongst the previously non-unionised. This was "dual unionism" in name only and not in practice. Eventually, however, the insistence of the SLP in tying the IWW to its own specific programme led to several splits and the formation of a short-lived rival SLP-run IWW(2).

By a curious reversal of the (at the time) normal metropolitan to colonial flow of political ideas the SLP gained a foothold in Britain, and particularly Scotland, amongst dissident members of the Social Democratic Federation, who broke away in 1903. Their attempts to follow a policy of dual unionism in a country where trade unions were already firmly rooted amongst broad layers of the working class was a particularly dismal failure and soon abandoned. Since that date, with the exception of a brief period of Communist Party influence in 1929, there have been virtually no attempts at independent politically-sponsored unions in this country. Other attempts at forming breakaway unions by seamen, busmen, dockers and, more recently, by Pilkington glassworkers have proved abysmal and demoralising failures(3).

Another organisation still active today and formed a year after the British SLP from a similar split in the old SDF is the Socialist Party

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(2) See Two Pages from Roman History, Daniel De Leon, 1903; Socialist Reconstruction of Society, Daniel De Leon, 1905; "Revolutionary Trade Unionism", Jim Higgins, IS, Feb/March 1971.

(3) See Strike at Pilkingtons, Lane and Roberts, Fontana paperback; an excellent book on the question of trade unionism altogether.



of Great Britain. This group correctly dismissed the dual unionist policies of the SLP on the grounds that a trade union needed to unite all workers irrespective of political or religious beliefs and that a specifically socialist union, if at all feasible at that time, would be divisive of the workers' industrial strength(4). At the same time though, it made the mistake of reducing trade union activity to a largely private matter for its members, concentrating its efforts on basic Socialist education. Within this framework there grew up a minority within the SPGB who, recognising the sectional and collaborationist policies of the trade unions, became clearly anti-trade union and conservative, eventually succeeding --with the help of rival groups-- in landing the whole organisation with a reputation for anti-trade unionism. An attempt to rectify this in the June 1968 issue of the Socialist Standard only showed what a muddled and contradictory approach their members adopted as a result of their organisation having ignored the trade union issue for so long.

The outright rejection of trade unions is advocated by certain of the more sectarian elements in the modern Council Communist movement, which though small has been growing stronger since the May '68 events in France. This rejection appears in its most extreme form in the overall "no compromise" approach of the French Situationists and their offspring in England and America, for whom any work inside the unions can be easily dismissed on the grounds that it's boring! Theoretical justification for this stand, however, can be found in another Council Communist publication, Internationalism No.3, in an article by G. Munis entitled "Unions Against the Revolution". Here the trend towards the complete amalgamation of the State and the unions, as it has already occurred in state capitalist Russia, is falsely represented as an accomplished fact for the whole of world capitalism. Having grasped theoretically the superior nature of "workers council" forms of organisation over trade union forms, these groups have tended to raise them as a model to be imitated in all situations regardless of context, and absolve themselves from realistic agitational activity outside of the economic crisis they believe will make workers' councils a practical proposition.

The present policy of the Communist Party is to divert workers' industrial protest into support for national left union leaders and the return of a Labour Government so that, although many of their industrial militants might display a more positive role locally, the overall effect of CP propaganda and activity has been anti-working class and class collaborationist. They have reduced themselves to trailing behind the leftwing of the capitalist Labour Party. Their main trotskyist rival, the Socialist Labour League, isn't much better either, since it follows much the same line obscured only by the use of more revolutionary and militant verbiage and the promotion of tightly controlled show-case conferences of trade unionists.

A group of neo-trotskyists who have recently gained a lot of ground amongst militant trade unionists are the International Socialists. They have correctly stressed the vital importance of building up a strong democratic rank and file movement on a national scale, to help prepare workers for independent struggle and to fight for the adoption of militant aggressive policies and democracy in the unions. In carrying out this policy they have consciously imitated the more restrictive Minority Movement of the 1920's that was dominated by the then youthful and radical Communist Party(5). This movement

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(4) See Socialist Standard, July, August, September, October 1906 and February, August and November 1907.

(5) See "Communist Industrial Policy in the 1920's", by R. Hyman, IS, Oct/Dec 1972.



itself took over from the earlier shop stewards movement in which the SLP, particularly through the work of J.T. Murphy, had been influential. It was Murphy, author of The Workers Committee, and also William Gallacher, an ex-BSP man and author of Direct Action, who were perhaps the most influential members of the young CP in its industrial activity(6).

The MM eventually collapsed as a result of changed economic conditions and the tortuous twists and turns of CP policy in response to the foreign policy of state capitalist Russia under Stalin. IS have at least seen through the myth of "Socialist" Russia, China, Cuba, etc., and are not therefore tied to the power politics of any national ruling class. Still, like most Bolshevik-inclined organisations, they suffer from an acute "leadership" complex. Whilst advising workers against relying on national left union leaders like Scanlon and Jones, they propose as an alternative, not genuine workers' democracy and self-activity, but reliance on a lower more local level of militant leaders whom IS presumably expects to dominate. In 1967 it was their view that:

The spontaneous upsurge of the masses is not with us; nor is the revolutionary party that can seize the moment given to it by that upsurge to conquer political power for the class (My emphasis. "The British Labour Movement -- Aspects of Current Experience", Colin Barker, IS, Spring 1967).

No, but it soon will be if IS have their way! They have also busily set about organising IS industrial branches. There is always the danger that these will try and supplant united rank and file groups in their activities.

Organised anarchists are few and far between but where they do exist they are a useful counter-weight to people like IS and the CP, being very insistent on the need for "workers' democracy" though somewhat at odds with each other over more detailed programmes(7).

From what I've said so far it should be clear that I favour Socialists co-operating with other militants in the organisation of rank and file groups and a national rank and file movement. This means being members of and active to a degree in the existing trade unions, whilst seeking to develop our fellow workers' capacity for independent action. A large proportion of strikes in this country are already stamped as "unofficial", and there is clearly the capacity for struggle independent of the official union mechanisms. For practical purposes, however, it is the existing shop stewards' organisations that will have to be used in launching an industrial counter-offensive at the present time. This clearly isn't ideal since the dual role of shop stewards as shop-floor representatives and union officials often makes them unreliable. In fact the contradictory nature of the trade unions already discussed is almost personified in the shop steward. In the longer term (or in present circumstances where the shop stewards are clearly not acting in the interests of the workers) we must aim at the formation of directly-elected shop floor, factory, office and industrial committees, as the only means of carrying out a successful non-sectional struggle(8).

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(6) The Workers Committee, by J.T. Murphy, first published 1917, republished by IS, 1972. Direct Action -- An Outline of Workshop and Social Organisation, by W. Gallacher and J.R. Campbell, first published 1919, republished by IS, 1972. The British Socialist Party (BSP) was largely made up from the old SDF. As indeed was the CP.

(7) See Why and How To Fight reprinted as a leaflet from Libertarian Struggle, paper of the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists.

(8) There is probably more scope for such committees in a situation such as that in France and Italy where 100 per cent union membership is rarer and the unions are divided along party political lines.



It is also up to Socialists to try and break down divisions not only within industry but between workers in their industrial capacity and as tenants, students, housewives, mothers, the old and young. This must be attempted not merely by propagandising but by fighting for combined struggle and joint organisation on relevant issues. The possibilities have already been hinted at in small strikes to prevent evictions of rent strikers; students offering miners (and miners accepting) accomodation and printing facilities; in the co-operation of unofficial strikers and claimants unions; and many other recent developments.

In all these activities the revolutionary socialist organisation must provide its members with the facilities to discuss, debate and exchange their views and experiences, and come to agreed decisions on policy. It should also provide the necessary background material required by militants to argue convincingly to their fellow workers.

### Methods of Struggle

Clearly certain forms of struggle, such as factory occupations and work-ins and general strikes, are particularly significant in challenging the employers control of production and raising the issue of State power. Where these forms of struggle have been interlinked on the scale of May '68 in France for instance, they formed a direct challenge to the State as the only cohesive agency of the employing class capable of dealing with the situation(9). The involvement of the State on the side of the employer or as an employer itself is important in breaking down the restrictive industrial/political division in workers' ideas and organisation that has led to the containment of industrial battles and their transformation into peaceful parliamentary debates with the workers concerned becoming mere spectators.

Trade unionism itself implies a partial recognition that the wage contract is not a "fair deal", but it suggests that the solution lies in evening out the balance of power between the "contracting parties" rather than in abolishing the "parties" and the wages system altogether. Anthony Barnett, borrowing from Marx, has explained the significance of the State's involvement in industry:

In effect, the wage-contract which ensures the appropriation of the surplus labour of the worker by the capitalist presupposes the 'parity' of the two parties to it: the worker and capitalist are juridicially equal citizens, each formally free to accept or reject the exchange between them. Thus there is a structural connection between the fundamental economic mechanism of surplus extraction and the political form of bourgeois democracy... The ideological effectiveness, however, of these mystifications depends on maintaining an institutional division and distance between the 'dictatorial' powers of the State and the 'freedom' of the market. Direct interposition of the State, especially the law, in the relationship of the wage-contract inevitably tends to destroy the illusion that the latter represents a natural, and so unquestionable, form of 'fair exchange' that has nothing to do with the distribution of power. Such intervention risks making the 'invisible' inequality of the real relationship between workers and capitalists manifestly apparent. The imperative necessity for contemporary capitalism to achieve a new degree of State intervention in the economy (a modern expression of the contradiction between the increasingly socialized forces of production and the private relations of production) thus contains a danger for the bourgeoisie: it risks exposing the central ideological



mystification of the system, on which the consent of the masses to the reign of capital rests (A. Barnett, "Class Struggle and the Heath Government", New Left Review, Jan/Feb., 1973).

With the Industrial Relations Act, the so-called Counter Inflation Act, the prosecution of pickets, etc., the government is coming to confront sections of the working class much more frequently. It is essential that Socialists stress the need for united action to repel these attacks. Occupations and general strikes will be important weapons in the workers' armoury. The danger of advocating these measures on any and every occasion simply because of their inherent "educational" value must be avoided at all costs though; otherwise they will become empty slogans. Such measures should only be called for where the balance of class forces economically and politically is such as to give the measures a reasonable chance of success in achieving specific, well-defined objectives.

There is a vast variety of tactics used in the everyday industrial struggle. Whole informal networks have grown up in many factories to control the pace and quality of work involving amazingly ingenious methods of communication that seem to by-pass both the factory manager and the union official. An interesting account of this sort of activity in the American auto industry is given by Bill Watson in Disruption, a Libertarian pamphlet published in 1971. There are great opportunities here for Socialists to use their inventiveness.

It is very easy to get stuck in the usual rut as far as industrial activity is concerned of almost automatically calling for a stoppage of work (strike) as soon as the employer fails to "deliver the goods". It is always worthwhile keeping your eyes open for new tactics, especially looking at countries with different industrial backgrounds and working class histories(10). Transport workers in this country might, for instance, take a tip from their fellows in Portugal who in 1968, instead of going on strike, refused to collect fares and let everybody travel free. The history of the old IWW shows up many interesting --and amusing-- tactics as well (on one Washington farm the workers planted 1,000 young trees upside down in protest, see Disruption).

Providing this kind of information through a socialist newspaper, pamphlets, meetings and rank and file papers is just one of the valuable tasks Socialists can turn themselves to. Active involvement in everyday struggles is the only way Socialists will enable themselves to maintain a lively and influential organisation that doesn't lapse into the repetition of stale formulas for action and schemes for salvation.

Postscript: I've covered a lot of ground in this article. We hope to develop some of the points in more detail later; indeed the comments of readers on this article and on what a Socialist industrial strategy might be would be very welcome. Also, I would urge those interested in this question to follow up the articles and pamphlets I've referred to.

Mike Ballard.

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(10) See Strategy for Industrial Struggle, by Mark Fore, Solidarity pamphlet.



# TRADE UNION CONSCIOUSNESS

• LENIN, as is well-known, held the view that the working class by its own efforts was able to produce only a "trade union consciousness" and that "socialist consciousness" was something that had to be brought to them from outside the class struggle by, in the first instance, bourgeois intellectuals. He wrote in What Is To Be Done?

The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc (p.50).

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers (p.133, Lenin's emphasis).

The spontaneous working-class movement by itself is able to create (and inevitably creates) only trade unionism (pp.159-60).

Now this is a curious view for someone claiming to be a Marxist to take since it clearly contradicts the principle that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. For it is asserting that the working class needs "bourgeois intellectuals" to help them struggle for Socialism, or at least to start them off struggling for Socialism. (By "bourgeois intellectuals" Lenin really meant bourgeois intellectuals. His successors in modern trotskyism adopt a different usage calling "intellectuals" people who are really higher-paid specialist members of the working class just as dependant on selling their labour power to live as the factory worker. But at least this means that the "vanguard" they advocate is to be composed of workers, not members of another class as Lenin felt it would have to be in the beginning).

It would be easy to dismiss this as the product of Lenin's general elitism, but Lenin was not alone in holding this view. In fact Lenin (a "bourgeois intellectual" himself) quotes Kautsky (another bourgeois intellectual) to support his view:

In the draft program of the Austrian Social Democratic Party it is stated: 'The more capitalist development increases the numbers of the proletariat, the more the proletariat is compelled and becomes fit to fight against capitalism. The proletariat becomes conscious of the possibility and of the necessity for Socialism'. In this connection socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue ... Socialism as a doctrine and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge... The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia; it was in the minds of individual



members of this stratum that modern Socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow this to be done. Thus socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously (quoted by Lenin, pp. 64-5. Kautsky's emphasis).

So both the Bolsheviks and the Social Democrats held the elitist view that the workers' movement needed bourgeois intellectuals to help them to establish Socialism. This is not really surprising since, in practice, both Bolshevism and Social Democracy have proved to be agents of state capitalism not Socialism.

"Spontaneous" can be a misleading word since it normally means something unplanned, something occurring without conscious preparation. Clearly in this sense not even trade unionism (as the organised struggle of workers for higher wages, better working conditions, factory legislation, etc) is "spontaneous". Advocates of trade unionism have needed to agitate, educate and organise for their ideas just as much as Socialists have had to for theirs. Indeed, even now in a highly industrialised country like Britain less than half the working class can be said to have acquired "trade union consciousness" by becoming a member of a trade union. But Lenin was using the word in a different sense, to mean what the workers' movement could do without outside help. The workers, he was saying, in the course of their struggles can only "spontaneously" produce a reformist, trade union consciousness not a socialist consciousness.

This is a position Marxists cannot agree with. If the principle that "the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself" is correct, then socialist consciousness too must eventually be a "spontaneous" working class creation. Is it possible to sustain an argument to this effect?

First, what is the class struggle? To some it is just the struggle for Socialism; to others the organised trade union struggle. But in fact it is much wider than these: by the very fact of being excluded from ownership and control over the means for producing wealth, every single member of the working class, if he is to live, is forced to struggle against those who monopolise the means of production -- irrespective of whether he is conscious of this or not, and irrespective of whether he is organised to do this or not. The class struggle is part of the very social existence of the working class; it is something they are engaged in by virtue of being a non-owning, wealth-producing class.

We can go further and say that, in the end, the class struggle is about who shall own the means of production: the entrenched minority capitalist class or the working class (=society as a whole); that the real issue in the class struggle, whether recognised or not, is capitalism or Socialism?; that in fact the struggle of the working class is always implicitly Socialist. The working class is striving all the time to own and control the means of production, to institute social ownership, abolish the wages system and inaugurate production for use not the market. On this theory, socialist consciousness is the conscious recognition that Socialism is the goal of the class struggle.

Now, is there any reason why such a consciousness should not be the "spontaneous" product of the working class in the course of its struggle? None whatsoever. Quite the reverse; it is, surely, its natural outcome -- at least in the same way that Lenin thought trade union consciousness was.



Lenin conceded that the experience of living under capitalism as a wage-earning class would lead the workers to see:

- (1) that "unity is strength", that they must combine in unions to debate with employers the conditions for the sale of their labour power.
- (2) that employers need to be coerced by government legislation into providing minimum standards of safety and health at work, legal protection for trade union activity, etc.

But why stop here? Why can't the further experience of the working class lead them to see also:

- (3) that both trade unionism and labour legislation are only defensive;
- (4) that as long as the employing class monopolise the means of production and control the State machine, the working class will always be on the defensive;
- (5) that to finally solve working class problems requires the workers to organise to exercise political power to dispossess the employing class and make the means of production the common property of society as a whole, with the consequent abolition of the wages system, the market, money, profits, etc.

This position was in fact that more or less adopted by, for instance, the SPGB, particularly in the 1920's. Their argument went as follows: the class struggle is going on anyway; the problem is how best to organise this struggle and bring it to a speedy conclusion; the task of Socialists is to help make the working class aware of the implicit goal of the class struggle so that they will consciously organise to achieve it; but that in any event the very experience of the class struggle will eventually lead workers to realise this.

The industrial struggle, the struggle to resist the encroachments of capital (the early form of the class struggle) develops of necessity into the political struggle, the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. It is out of actual class struggle experience that knowledge of it, and of the method with which to wage it, is obtained (Socialist Standard, November 1920).

The working class is destined to be a revolutionary class, whether the members of that class recognise the fact or not.. The experiences of the struggle develops knowledge on this point and breeds sound ideas. This knowledge is not acquired in a day, a month or a year, but is the result of the accumulated experiences of years of struggle -- class struggle (Socialist Standard, March 1925, emphasis in original).

In recent years the SPGB has tended to move away from this earlier (and substantially correct) position towards suggesting that the emergence of socialist consciousness depends on the propaganda activities of a devoted band of Socialists rather than on the workers' actual experience of the class struggle -- a position which leads back, if not to Lenin (since it is not tied to a theory that therefore a vanguard party is needed to lead the workers beyond trade union consciousness), at least to Kautsky.

This is an understandable position in view of what has actually happened over the years: the working class has as a matter of fact nowhere evolved beyond a reformist, trade unionist consciousness and trade unionists seem no more receptive to socialist ideas than non-trade unionists. (In fact it is frequently the case amongst the handful of existing socialists that socialist consciousness precedes trade union consciousness!).

Dealing with this second point first. It is not a part of the theory of the "spontaneous" emergence of socialist consciousness from the



experience of the class struggle that there are necessary stages of class consciousness through which workers pass, e.g. first to trade union consciousness, then to reformist consciousness, then to socialist consciousness. For, remember, every single member of the working class is unavoidably involved in the class struggle, whether organised in a trade union or not. It is therefore quite possible for some workers to become socialists without first being trade unionists.

Indeed it is possible for members of other classes to become socialists from observing the class struggle. This is the grain of truth in Lenin and Kautsky's view that socialist theory was the product of the bourgeois intelligentsia. As a matter of history, Marx and Engels, the men who played an important role in elaborating socialist theory (though not the idea of a socialist society, which had long existed), were, in origin, "bourgeois intellectuals. But they still got many of their ideas from working class thinkers and socialists -- nor did they have the same inflated view of the importance of "bourgeois intellectuals" that Kautsky and Lenin had.

True, the workers have not yet advanced beyond reformist, trade unionist consciousness. Various explanations as to why -- some psychological, some sociological, some political, some economic -- have been offered but the fact remains: the class struggle of the working class in capitalist society remains implicitly and objectively a struggle for Socialism, whether recognised or not. This will remain so as long as capitalism lasts. As long as capitalism lasts in fact, Socialism will always be on the agenda because of this and because as a matter of fact (not opinion or desire) Socialism is the only solution to the problem of working class existence.

The danger of rejecting the view that Socialism has anything to do with the class struggle (including the struggle over wages, etc) is that the actual class struggle comes to be seen as irrelevant, utterly useless or even selfish and anti-social. Socialists then become, not workers fighting for a conscious prosecution of the class struggle to a successful conclusion, but sectarian cranks divorced from the working class preaching the universal panacea of a perfect society. If this happened to a socialist group they would have become anti-working class because they would be ignoring or condemning the only activity that can ultimately lead to the growth of socialist consciousness on a mass scale, viz., the class struggle of the working class.

But working class history also provides some evidence that the class struggle is about who shall control production. There have been occasional advances -- though still not consciously socialist -- beyond reformist, trade union consciousness: the times when capitalist political and/or industrial authority has collapsed, albeit temporarily. Then the workers themselves have taken over the means of production and operated them themselves. This happened in Russia, Germany, Hungary and Italy at the end and just after the first world war, in Spain in 1936 and, to some extent, in state capitalist Hungary in 1956. None of these workers' take-overs had any chance of leading to Socialism (if only because the rest of the working class was not consciously socialist, quite apart from the fact that most of those involved weren't either) but they do show that the class struggle is implicitly socialist in the sense of being about who shall control production.

As such, these isolated incidents in working class history hold out hope for the future, when the immense majority of workers everywhere will have learned from their experiences what the class struggle is all about and consciously organise to bring it to a successful conclusion by establishing Socialism. For, in arguing that the class struggle is implicitly socialist, it is not being said that deliberate,



revolutionary socialist propaganda is unnecessary. Of course it is, but by workers who are Socialists speaking to their fellow workers in the course of their daily struggles. Nor is it being said that the establishment of Socialism does not require majority socialist consciousness. What is being said is that the necessary consciousness will be the creation of the working class itself, and not something that has to be brought to them from outside, either by an elite of professional revolutionaries or by a sectarian band of utopian preachers.

Adam Buick.

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# APEX ACTION

## Introduction

The following was written by a socialist member of the white collar union, The Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer, Staff (APEX). It was originally intended for publication in a journal which a group of rank-and-file militants called "APEX ACTION" had intended to publish. In the event the APEX bureaucracy used the undemocratic powers described in the article to suppress the group. By EC decision anyone associating with "APEX ACTION" was threatened with disciplinary action (ie. a fine or expulsion) and the "International Socialists" were added to the list of prescribed organisations.

We publish it as an example of the kind of practical activity socialists might engage in, both to fight the everyday class struggle and to encourage the democratic self-organisation of the working class. We must add, however, that the article is open to criticism. It is addressed exclusively to APEX members and does not raise the issue of co-operation between workers, whatever their union, to protect their interests independently of the existing bureaucratic unions (which, particularly in the white collar field, compete and overlap in their sordid struggle for more dues-payers to bolster the power and prestige of their leaders).

## For a Democratic Union.

The aim of APEX ACTION is to turn APEX into a democratic and militant union of office workers.

At the moment APEX does not function democratically in the sense of being run by and in the interest of the members. Certainly, on paper (with some important exceptions we will mention later) it has a more or less democratic constitution. But in practice it is run by well-entrenched bureaucracy made up of the leading fulltime officials and the national executive. It is this bureaucracy which runs the union, to a certain extent, admittedly, in the interest of the members. But a democratic organisation is one run not only for its members but by its members. And bureaucracies always develop vested interests of their own.



The APEX bureaucracy seeks to maintain its control of the union by encouraging amongst the members the passive attitude of "Trust your Leaders" and by discouraging, sometimes by blatantly undemocratic practices, any organised opposition to its position and policies.

The most important source of the bureaucracy's power is its ability to manipulate Annual Conference, formally the unions policymaking body. This it can do by:

- Placing its own motions on the agenda (and the executive can propose amendments to Rule at any time; the branches can only do so once every five years).
- Ruling critical motions out of order on the slightest technicality.
- Re-wording motions to make it easier to interpret them in ways they favour (this is called compositing).
- Discriminating against opposition speakers (Conference being chaired by a leading member of the bureaucracy).

On paper the executive and officials only apply union policy as laid down by Conference. In practice they have wide powers of interpretation which in effect amount to policy-making powers. And they can also decide which resolutions should be given priority (generally their own) and how forcefully particular resolutions should be pursued, if at all. In these circumstances Conference resolutions are more recommendations than binding instructions.

They only get away with this because at the moment the membership, including many union activists (some of whom are merely seeking to join the bureaucracy of course), are prepared to "Trust the Leadership". APEX ACTION is opposed to this and seeks to encourage instead active membership participation in union affairs backed by a more critical attitude toward the activities and policies of the executive and officials.

This is not easy, particularly as the bureaucracy has the power to hinder any opposition from organising. For instance, under the rules they can:

- Prevent branches from communicating with each other (Rule 22).
- Threaten, and take, disciplinary action against opponents on the vague grounds of "acting in a manner inimical to the interests of the union" (Rule 15).
- Discriminate against members with certain political views by placing the organisation to which they belong on a list of "Proscribed Organisations", thereby preventing them from representing the union on outside bodies and forcing them to reveal their politics when standing for union office (Rule 13). (We have no objection to a person's politics being made known, only we think this should apply to all candidates).

APEX ACTION advocates the abolition of these undemocratic Rules.

In APEX not a single full-time official is elected -- they are all appointed, for life. In our view this is quite wrong. All officials should be elected by a ballot of the membership and should come up for regular re-election. This is the practise in other unions and there is no reason -- apart from the vested interest of the present bureaucracy -- why it shouldn't apply in APEX too.

If all these changes were made then, with increased membership participation, APEX would be well on the way to becoming the democratic, fighting union we want it to be.

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"So there is nothing to stop us from making a critique of politics the starting point of our critique, from taking part in party politics and so identifying ourselves with real battles. We do not then set ourselves opposite the world with a doctrinaire principle, saying : 'Here is the truth, kneel down here!' It is out of the world's own principles that we develop for it new principles. We do not say to her, 'Stop your battles they are stupid stuff. We want to preach the true slogans of battle at you.' We merely show it what it is actually fighting about, and the realization is a thing that it must make its own even though it may not wish to.

The reform of consciousness consists solely in letting the world perceive its own consciousness by awaking it from dreaming about itself, in explaining to it its own actions. Our whole and only aim consists in putting religious and political questions in a self-conscious human form, as is also the case in Feuerbach's critique of religion.

So our election cry must be : reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but through the analysis of mystical consciousness that is not clear to itself, whether it appears in a religious or political form. It will then be clear that the world has long possessed the dream of a thing of which it only needs to possess the consciousness in order really to possess it. It will be clear that the problem is not some great gap between the thoughts of the past and those of the future but completion of thoughts of the past. Finally, it will be clear that humanity is not beginning a new work, but consciously bringing its old work to completion.

So we can summarize the tendency of our journal in one word: self-understanding (equals critical philosophy) by our age of its struggles and wishes. This is a task for the world and for us. It can only be the result of united forces. What is at stake is a confession, nothing more. To get its sins forgiven, humanity only needs to describe them as they are."

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An extract from Marx's correspondence of 1843.

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# REVIEWS:

## 1. TOWARDS A SCIENCE OF WOMENS LIBERATION. 15p. Published by Red Rag, 9, Stratford Villas, London N.W.1.

This pamphlet comprises an ~~article~~ from the Cuban magazine Casa de las Americas, together with a short introduction by the Red Rag collective. It is plainly written using the framework of Marxism to analyse and explain the relationship of women in the family to the modern economy of capitalism.

As might be expected the authors have accepted the myth of "Cuban Socialism" and the "marxist" nature of Castro's military takeover. It is disappointing to see this view accepted and in fact compounded in the introduction. The article is particularly concerned with the problems of womens "second shift" as more and more women in Cuba are drawn into social production alongside the men. This process has been necessitated by the shortage of "manpower" during Cuba's period of primitive capital accumulation in the difficult circumstances of America's economic blockade. The Cuban rulers have been directly concerned with the promotion of "womens emancipation" not only to overcome their economic crisis but to create a wider political base for their rule, having overthrown the old regime.

Engels in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State explains how the achievement of legal equality between the sexes within capitalism reveals the true social inequality of the sexes that can only be abolished by Socialism. The article quotes Lenin from A Great Beginning, 1919, and say that it is socialism that will achieve this initial "legal equality". Actually the difference is in name only since "Socialism" in Russia turns out to be state capitalism, the model upon which Cuba and other underdeveloped countries have based themselves.

Whilst the article is right in criticising the false reduction of "womens liberation" to a purely ~~social~~ issue and also the tiring consumerism of western capitalism, I detect in the article a slight note of puritanism dictated more by the needs of capital accumulations "thrift" and "saving", rather than by the real needs of women.

But despite these conclusions it is still worth reading.

Mike Ballard.

## 2. POST-SCARCITY AN ARCHISM. Murray Bookchin, Rampart Press. £1.50.

Murray Bookchin, some of whose essays are published in this book is one of the better anarchists. Describing himself as an anarcho-communist, he makes it clear that he stands for a stateless, classless, moneyless (and decentralized) society in which work will be voluntary and wealth distributed according to individual needs. He realises (and here he owes only a partially acknowledged debt to Marx) that such a society only becomes possible at a certain stage in the development of the means of production; when in fact they can provide abundance for all. Bookchin's argument is that this stage has now been reached -- we are on the threshold of post-scarcity, as he puts it -- and that



after centuries of toil mankind now has the technology to create a free society of abundance. His essay, the longest one in the book in fact, TOWARDS A LIBERATORY TECHNOLOGY (originally published under the name Lewis Herber) is an excellent and well-documented exposition of the possibilities of modern technology and of ~~of~~ how the free society of abundance technology now makes possible can be set up without causing ecological problems. It is essential reading for all Socialists.

The other long essay LISTEN MARXIST is not so good, as it isn't really addressed to Marxists at all but rather to assorted Leninists, Trotskyists and other pseudo-marxists. Nevertheless it makes some good points against them -- many the same we make, though from a Marxist position. Bookchin accuses them of living in the 19th century and of advocating revolutionary tactics -- a vanguard party seizing state power and using it to further develop the means of production -- that might have made some sense in what was then still an age of scarcity, but which are today completely irrelevant. Today, says Bookchin, there's no need for a "transition period"; the task for revolutionaries is not to seize state power or develop productivity but to dissolve state power and liberate technology. Anarcho-communism (socialism) can now be established almost immediately by the self-activity of a revolutionary majority.

But Bookchin lumps Marx too as an outdated 19th century thinker. True, Marx couldn't help being a 19th century thinker and his tactics were inevitably shaped by then existing circumstances, namely, the fact that capitalism had not then <sup>fully</sup> created the material basis for socialism (hence his support for centralization in Germany and Italy and other measures he felt would hasten capitalist industrialisation) and the connected fact that full free access to consumer goods and services could not have been introduced very quickly (hence his first phase of socialism during which consumption would have to be rationed by labour-time vouchers.).

But in the changed conditions of the 20th century-- the creation of the material basis of Socialism which the coming of potential abundance represents -- it would be quite unMarxist for those who regard themselves as Marxists to cling to 19th century tactics. Those in the socialist movement have long said that lengthy transition periods, labour-time vouchers, etc., let alone support for further capitalist development, are outdated concepts; world socialism, including the full application of the principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs", can be very rapidly established as soon as the majority working class organise consciously and politically to do this.

Bookchin disagrees with the last part of this not only, obviously, over our view that the self-organisation of the working class must be primarily political but also over the view that the "working class" must be the agent to establish Socialism. For him anarcho-communism (socialism) cannot be established by this minority group but must be the work of the immense majority of society once imbued with revolutionary ideas and attitudes. This, however, is partly due to the fact that Bookchin accepts the narrow definition of working class, as industrial workers only, made by the pseudo-Marxists he is criticizing. His disagreement with us here is largely, but not entirely (since he toys with the idea of a "classless" revolution"), semantic since we too say that the immense majority must participate in and carry out the socialist revolution, but that the immense majority in modern society are now working class in the proper sense of being people who have nothing to sell but their labour-power.

We would also say that Bookchin's concept of the revolution, explained here in some letters on the May 1968 events in France, as a spontaneous revolt seriously underestimates the degree of preparation needed before the working class majority can successfully transform society. In fact leaderless socialist organisation and mass socialist consciousness are the only



guarantee that some vanguard group does not exploit mass discontent during a potentially revolutionary period to seize power and pave the way for the emergence of some form of state capitalism. Without these in fact any attempt to establish Socialism will fail since socialist society can only be maintained by people who have acquired the habit of organising themselves democratically without leaders. Here, incidentally, though fully sharing his suspicion about vanguard groups that prattle on about "seizing power" or "revolutionary dictatorships", we would disagree with Bookchin's posing of an opposition between dissolving power and seizing power. We would say that it is necessary for the revolutionary majority to democratically and, if possible, peaceably gain control ("seize" if you like, as long as this isn't understood to mean a coup or minority insurrection) of political power precisely in order to dissolve it along with the rest of class society.

There are other points on which Socialists will find themselves disagreeing with Bookchin, but his views are interesting and stimulating since he's so obviously on the same wavelength as us in wanting a free society of abundance.

Adam Buick.

#### PERIODICALS AND PAMPHLETS WORTH READING.

THE ORIGINS OF THE MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS COUNCILS IN GERMANY  
1918-20. "Workers Voice" pamphlet, Liverpool. 15p

SHOP STEWARDS AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE "Big Flame" pamphlet,  
Liverpool. 5p

THE WAR AFTER THE WAR. Marx's labour theory of value  
simply explained by Scottish radical John Maclean in 1917  
together with a usefull historical introduction. Socialist  
Reproductions. 20p

SHIPYARD WORKERS REVOLT AGAINST COMMUNIST PARTY LEADERS  
transcript of a meeting in a Polish shipyard Jan' 1971. 10p.

INTERNATIONALISM Council Communist publication from U.S.A.  
(three issues so far) 20p.

GAY MARXIST discussion journal. See particularly David  
Fernbach's article in issue No 2. 10p

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NOTE: Issues No's 1 & 2 of our journal are now out of print. Copies of  
No 3 are still available on request for cost of postage. It contains  
articles on: Education and Schooling, by Cath Gascoigne & Kate Hall.  
Authoritarian Conditioning, by Bob Miller. and,  
Marx and Fromm, by Ken Young.

LETTERS: ARTICLES, AND FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO;

S.D. Ritchie,  
Hillcroft College,  
South Bank,  
Surbiton,  
SURREY.

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3 STUDENTS by Dave Cook. A Communist Party pamphlet. 12p  
This pamphlet, by the National Students Organiser of the CP, is an attempt at a comprehensive analysis of the position of students and their role in the "socialist" revolution (of course Dave Cook really means a state capitalist takeover). It could be roughly divided into four parts:- students as a group in society; education in capitalist society; the effect on students by various "external forces"; the National Union of Students and the way forward.

The first section attempts to define students as a social group. He correctly states that ".... the fact of being a student, and being a member of a student union, in no way constitutes this significant section of the population as a social class". (His emphasis). "A more rigorous approach" is needed -- but whether he reaches any valid conclusions is a matter of doubt. By using the bourgeois analysis of workers as being only those who do manual work (witness his constant reference to the industrial working class) he fails to achieve a satisfactory definition. Using this method he approvingly quotes from an article in Marxism Today to show the background of university students:-

	Percentage of University Places	Percentage of Population
Manual Workers	28	64
Non-Manual Workers	28	22
Professional	30	8
Administration and Management	14	6

This of course shows nothing -- except that it could show that no capitalists <sup>send</sup> ~~and~~ their offspring to university!

He comes close to a correct analysis when he shows that the majority of full-time students are studying direct or indirect "vocational" subjects. He then refers to the jobs they are likely to do, calls them workers, dismisses their own subjective analysis of themselves as middle class and then says they "must be considered to have the potential to become the closest allies of the industrial working class"(!). Thus by rejecting a marxist analysis of social class for a capitalist one he fails to see the wood for the trees.

But what is a correct analysis of students' position vis-a-vis the working class? Clearly it is ludicrous to refer to all students as members of that class -- many come from capitalist families or are destined to become petty bourgeois. However it is easy to see that along with the trend towards state capitalism in Britain, so the colleges and universities are increasingly becoming institutions for the training of highly skilled workers. Thus the state is training the apprentices of the capitalists for them, rather than them doing so themselves. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the "dominant tendency is for the interests of the majority of students to increasingly coincide with those of the working class -- since the majority of students are members of that class-- as are apprentices anywhere.

The second section on Education in Capitalist society is the best part of the pamphlet. He clearly points out the dual nature of education-- firstly as a training ground for highly skilled workers and "educations" consequent domination by big business and secondly its role in the



ideological indoctrination of kids.<sup>+</sup>

The section on external factors influencing students is decidedly messy. He helps perpetuate the myth that Labour is in some way socialist and goes on to suggest that the support given by many students to state capitalist national liberation forces is in some way encouraging. Anyway this section is not particularly worthwhile as it is just the usual CP line.

In the final section on the NUS and the way forward, Dave Cook outlines the changes in NUS over the last ten years and attempts to lay down a "Strategy for Action". To him the increasing domination of NUS by the "Broad Left" (CP and others) is encouraging and what is needed is more of this leadership. Thus he fails to see the role of leadership (or maybe he does) as one of stultifying the creative self-activity of workers in struggle, reinforcing authoritarian consciousness and the spectacular nature of politics. He sees the role of students in the revolution as one of alliance with the working class -- and not as one of students participating as workers. This continues his analysis of students as a middle strata in society, thus in practice he splits the class instead of uniting it. He is playing the game of the ruling class and not that of the working class.

Incidentally this section is interesting as it includes an explicit recognition of the CP's reformism: "Let us be clear. We are not here talking about socialist revolution. What we are talking about, though, is the possibility of a crucial step -- a break from the dismal sequence of alternating Tory and right wing Labour governments which has acted as a barrier to Left advance in the past".

But if the CP's strategy is inadequate, what is the way forward? None has been developed yet, but I would suggest the following points as a basis for discussion and action by revolutionary socialists.

1. Increasing the democracy of local Student Unions. My own experience would suggest that student unions can be made into representative organs of students. This should include:-

- + All decisions to be made by the S.U.
- + Executives not being able to place motions before the S.U.
- + All sabbatical officers (if they are considered necessary) to be paid only the weekly rate of the student grant.
- \* The fullest possible flow of information to the S.U. from its officers and the national organisation.

2. In all campaigns (particularly the Grants Campaign) the most militant as possible action to be taken by the S.U. -- this will require a great deal of consistent agitation by militants and revolutionaries.

3. Real rank-and-file unity with other sections of the class. This involves participating in other workers picket lines, demonstrations, making S.U. facilities open to them, etc. Only this way can reciprocal assistance be encouraged and the class united.

Of course socialists must at all times be able to bring out the revolutionary implications of these and other activities and ensure their discussion by students in general.

Despite the many criticisms that can be made of this pamphlet, the section dealing with Education in Capitalist society is worth reading.

Bob Miller.

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<sup>+</sup> See our last issue for a fuller analysis of this.