

Libertarian COMMUNISM

no.6

ANYWAY.....

what are
workers'
councils.....?



AND SO FELLOW
WORKERS, I....
..PERSONALLY...DO NOT
SEE THE POINT...,
AS A TRADE UNION
MEMBER..., OF
WORKERS
COUNCILS!!



INTRODUCTION

This discussion journal has been produced so far by a group of us in London, but following a meeting over Easter it was decided that the next two or three issues would be produced by groups outside London. It is distributed free of charge on a roughly quaterley basis. We would like to increase the frequency and quality of the journal, but to do this we need more articles and more money, so if you can help with either or both of these please do.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the group.

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The Need for a Revolutionary Movement.

In the next decade or so, more States - for example, the oil producers - will undergo industrialisation, and the struggle among the powers over markets and sources of raw materials will grow fiercer. As the crisis of world capitalism gradually deepens, we can expect gradual deterioration in the living conditions of working people. There loom the threats of a new depression, ecological collapse and nuclear war. No way out is offered by the attempts of Leninist groups to stabilise the system by bringing private capital under the control of national State bureaucracies. The working class, at least in the main highly industrialised regions of the world, must meet the challenge of "Socialism or Barbarism" by abolishing the relationships of capital, wage labour and commodity production. A world Communist revolution must establish a system of production for use under the democratic control of the whole community. Such a revolution can be the work only of the working class itself, and not of any self-appointed minority vanguard party.

CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE MOVEMENT FOR COMMUNISM

To carry through the revolution the vast majority of workers must gain Socialist understanding. (1) Such a grasp of the need to reconstruct society on a new basis can only build up steadily over a longish period, and revolutionary organisations can assist this process by their work. The class struggle - in the employment situation, in education, in community action, in protest groups and in other fields - is a prolonged effort by workers to try to assert their needs as human beings rather than as containers of labour power. These attempts are thus implicitly in opposition to the profit-making requirements of capitalism, though workers are generally without a clear awareness of this.

The Socialist movement needs to see itself as an expression of this class struggle, which is conscious that the necessary aim of the struggle is the overthrow of capital. By their activity in working class struggle revolutionaries can clarify to their fellow workers the Communist implications or tendencies of the struggle, and develop the theory of Communist society from a set of abstract formulas for an indefinite future society into a concrete, detailed and urgent constructive criticism of capitalism, linked to the continuing activity of workers. In this way wider and wider circles of workers can be drawn into the consideration, discussion and development of Communist ideas.

Closely related to the need to develop the understanding of a self-administered society as theory is the need to advance forms of organisation which anticipate aspects of Socialist society in practice. The theory and practice can only advance in interaction with one another. Revolutionaries work to advance the self-reliance and independent democratic organisation and activity of workers. They have to combat the attempts of Leninist groups to turn workers' organisations into power bases for domination and manipulation by their leading bureaucrats. This is how a genuine Communist movement can be built up.

(1) We use the words "Socialism" and "Communism" interchangeably to refer to the future free society.

This movement is unlikely to take the form of a single unified organisation, as groups will have different views on tactics and on the policies to be pursued by the approaching Communist society. Through the growth and decline of different groupings, the movement can more easily adapt to changing conditions; also there would be less danger of groups taking on a leadership role in the working class in spite of their own intentions, or becoming identified as sole representatives of Socialism. At the same time groups would no doubt cooperate on specific issues and projects. Groups of revolutionaries would strive to develop themselves as examples of democratic self-activity in dialogue with other workers.

PARLIAMENT AND VIOLENCE

The ability of the working class, once in the majority conscious Communists, to force through the social transformation against the resistance of anti-revolutionary forces within or outside the State machines will lie in its conscious self-organisation. The growing movement will be able to prepare to neutralise the reaction by non-cooperation, confusion, strikes, infiltration and fraternisation with non-Communist workers in the armed forces. The movement must avoid inviting repression by premature adventures, and organise its efforts to make its development as even as possible - as between different areas, town and country, different countries and different sections of workers (for example, manual and non-manual, men and women).

While the revolutionary movement comprises only a small minority of the working class, it must use methods which encourage the autonomous activity of workers, and avoid methods which - at the present stage - turn the majority of the working class into passive spectators of an active minority. Parliamentary activity - even standing for purely educational purposes and on a Communist platform - is such a method, as it invites workers to look for their emancipation in the work of a few parliamentarians, who require only the passive support and understanding of the workers. Another such method is minority violence, which is suicidal in face of the military technology in possession of the State, especially when the State can still mobilise widespread support within the working class for the suppression of rebels. Indeed, the State frequently aims to provoke minority violence, by means of agents provocateurs, in order to obtain the support necessary for the repression of all radical opposition. (2)

A further point is that both electoral and secret insurrectionary politics must operate in conditions which make necessary control by a bureaucratic hierarchy; they would deeply undermine the democratic development of the Communist movement. The experience of the working class movement has provided ample evidence for this in the oligarchical structures of both the electoral party machines of nineteenth century Social Democracy (3) and (to a much greater extent still) the centralist conspiratorial Bolshevik parties of this century.

- (2) These questions are discussed in the North American context by Martin Oppenheimer in the very useful Penguin book "Urban Guerilla".
- (3) On this point see the informative book "Political Parties" by Robert Michels. We disagree, of course, with his cynical conclusion that oligarchy is inevitable. On my use of the phrase "Social Democracy" : Socialism is well defined as a social democracy, as opposed to the narrow formal political democracy which sometimes adorns capitalist rule. Whatever their failings, the original Social Democratic parties did proclaim working class interests and did stand (at least in theory) for Socialism. Since 1914, when the leaderships of most of these parties supported the first world imperialist war, those openly capitalist reform parties which still

These arguments, however, will lose most of their force in the immediately pre-revolutionary period, when there will be a vast democratic Communist movement and the struggle of most of the world working class will be consciously aimed at revolution. In these circumstances both parliamentary and armed action could be subordinated to the control of the movement as a whole, as minor auxiliary tactics. Parliaments may no longer exist anywhere; if they do, though, the election of revolutionaries to them would have its uses in smoothing the path of revolution. By demonstrating the majority nature of the revolution, the occupation of the old formally democratic institutions by Communist delegates would prevent reactionary minorities from claiming that they were protecting democracy. This would minimise the support that the reactionaries could muster among vacillating sections of the population, and thus reduce the risk of widespread violent resistance to the revolution. At this stage the Communist working class would be in a position to organise the suppression of counter-revolutionary violence, and would do so by violent means if necessary.

Nevertheless parliamentary and violent action would only be peripheral parts of the revolutionary process. Parliament cannot be used in organising the initial stage of Communism - this will be the task of the network of councils of workers' delegates which will have developed. Parliaments can be converted into museums after the revolution, or, as suggested in William Morris' "News from Nowhere", used to store dung by the local commune.

WORKERS COUNCILS AND THE NEW SOCIETY

Workers' Councils, based mainly on the workplace and the neighbourhood, are the most important form of organisation which is likely to arise as working class struggle assumes an increasingly Communist character. They provide an institutional framework within which the Communist working class majority can attain political supremacy and lay the foundations of the new society. The consolidation of the revolution enables society to dispense with armed coercion. As the working class abolishes itself as a class in establishing the classless society, the workers' councils become simply people's councils.

However, the workers' and people's councils, originating in capitalist society, inevitably embody the occupational and territorial divisions of capitalism. As Communist society matures, it gradually breaks down such divisions - between city and countryside, between industrially overdeveloped and industrially underdeveloped regions, between "intellectual" and "manual" functions, between what are at present industrial, agricultural and domestic production, between labour and leisure, and so on. The replacement of alienated wage labour by freely associated effort allows the comrades of Communism to overcome the needless over-specialisation and division of labour. Men, women and children will develop all faculties of human personality in an integrated social life.

The councils, then, will certainly be superseded by more advanced types of organisation as the new conditions become established; the society of workers councils is no final aim. It is very difficult to envisage Communist organisation at this point in history. Some of the procedural problems are discussed in David Barnsdale's article.

- (3) (cont'd) call themselves Social Democratic, in Europe and elsewhere, are really in no sense social-democratic. Leninists of all kinds confuse this distinction in order to discredit the less elitist traditions of the earlier Socialist movement.

SECTARIANISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

During the past fifty years genuine Socialists/Communists have worked in very difficult and frustrating conditions. Isolated groups have been confronted with the virtually total domination of the working class movement by the State-capitalist left - Stalinist, Trotskyist or "Social Democratic" reformist. On top of this, the temporary boom made possible by the destruction of the Second World War narrowed and contained working class struggle. As the present crisis develops, working class militancy is reviving, and working people tend more and more to raise implicitly Communist issues of control of their own lives. The hold of the reformist and Leninist left on the working class movement can now be weakened. We think that it is both possible and essential to build an influential, genuinely Communist movement, actively involved in all aspects of the class struggle. Only if this happens can the working class develop the understanding and democratic organisation which lead to Communism.

The isolated groups of Communists who have kept the vision of a Communist society alive for so long should be able to contribute a great deal to a new movement. They are hindered from doing so by the attitudes formed as a result of their isolation. I'll comment here on two examples, though there are others:- the "World Revolution" group and "The Socialist Party of Great Britain" (WR and SPGB). Both of these groups have small associated groups in other countries (the "Internationalism" groups and the "Companion Parties of Socialism") and so they pride themselves on being international tendencies.

WORLD REVOLUTION do not think that any permanent organisation by workers in their own interests is now possible within the capitalist system. Shop stewards, as well as all unions, are merely tools with which the capitalists suppress workers' struggles. (Only shopfloor struggles are considered.) In reality, though all workers' organisations are gradually integrated into the system, with trade unions, shop steward committees etc being successively co-opted, new forms of organisation must continually evolve to replace them for a time as genuine expressions of workers' interests. Thus WR are unable to relate Communism to any continuous trend in the class struggle. They see their task as the elaboration of "theory", which can only be dogma if unrelated to practice.

Only in the "heat of struggle" of wildcat (unofficial) strikes do WR see any revolutionary potential. These are imagined by them to be spontaneous upsurges of unrestrained militancy; the same workers who, in the normal course of events, cannot defend their interests suddenly become the vanguard of the revolution - until things settle down again. This is the view of romantics who, not really considering themselves part of the working class, see workers as a sort of latent elemental force rather than as human beings. The revolution seems to be envisaged as a bigger version of a wildcat strike - there comes the culmination of a "conjunctural crisis of capitalism", and only then is revolutionary organisation or consciousness possible. WR then jump in with all their "theoretical" baggage and "give the class struggle a revolutionary direction". But in the absence of a Communist movement built up in the class struggle, the scenario is most likely to end up in a fascist or Bolshevik dictatorship.

This apocalyptic concept of revolution dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century, when it was held by the early Marx as well as other insurrectionists, who had not yet understood the need for the mature development of working class organisation, and who looked back at the insurrections of the French bourgeois revolution as a model. These theorists were describing the class struggle of the time, when

destitute workers rose up in blind spasms of enthusiasm and despair. The theory of this early period is preserved as myth by such groups as WR into a period when it has no relevance to workers' concerns and activities. The myth enables such sects to avoid tackling the problems of overcoming their isolation from the class struggle, and to maintain confidence in their own infallibility.

If the concept of revolution held by WR dates back to the conditions prevailing at the time of the First International, then the concept held by The Socialist Party of Great Britain is derived from the conditions in which the parties of the Second International operated before 1914. During this period the material basis for a Communist society had not yet been laid : there did not yet exist the technical means to produce an abundance of wealth for a use economy, capitalism was still in its ascendant phase and had not expanded into a world-dominant system. As the class struggle could not have immediate Communist consequences, Communism became a theoretical maximum programme for an indefinite future, while the social democratic parties organised the workers to struggle for parliamentary and trade-union reforms of capitalism. Had the centralised oligarchical social democratic parties somehow come to power in this period, they would probably have had to introduce a system of State capitalism (though more democratic formally than the later Bolshevik system in Russia) in order to hold back consumption while further accumulating the means of production. The same applies - and even more strongly - to the yet less developed period of the First International; in the "Communist Manifesto", the proposed points of the programme to be adopted by the working class power which the authors then expected soon to appear are definitely of a State capitalist nature.

The shortcoming of European Social Democracy, inevitable at the time, was that it relied on forms of struggle like legislative reform and trade-union wage bargaining, which had no direct connection with revolution in terms of organisation or consciousness, because they neither raised the needs of workers to control their own lives as human beings, nor questioned the purposes of production, nor developed democratic self-organisation. Thus Socialist knowledge was not seen to emerge in the process of working class struggle, but was to be taught to the workers as unconnected abstractions by specialists in "Scientific Socialism" - the bourgeois intellectuals.

This view was put forward by Karl Kautsky, a main theorist of Social Democracy. (4) He at least held that it was the task of the "intellectuals" to teach the workers Socialism; Lenin introduced the even more elitist view that the workers could never understand Socialism, so the party of professional revolutionaries must lead the non-Socialist working class to revolution. But both Kautsky and Lenin claimed that Socialist theory was and must be the creation of "intellectuals" outside the working class, which then - unlike now - overwhelmingly consisted of manual workers.

(4) For an unfortunately highly abstract and difficult discussion of this, see Karl Korsch book "Marxism and Philosophy".

Now the SPGB correctly rejects this intellectualist elitism. It understands that a Socialist working class is necessary, and that Socialist understanding can be spread among the working class by those workers who are already Socialists. A reform programme is rightly rejected as of no relevance to this task, as well as being futile in regard to working class problems. But the SPGB does not understand that Socialist understanding must develop within some form of class struggle. Its model for the Socialist movement is merely Social Democracy with the reform component removed, leaving the abstract commitment to Socialism as the only subject of propaganda. The SPGB "puts the case for Socialism and only Socialism"; the idealised image of a really principled revolutionary Social Democratic party, contesting elections on a Socialist platform, leaves Socialism without connection with any continuing social process at all - except the propaganda activity of Socialists. The propaganda becomes a demand that workers grasp, in the abstract form of general formulas, the meaning of some totally new society floating in the indefinite future. In its most extreme state of disconnectedness from present-day reality, SPGB propaganda can degenerate almost into a religious approach, an appeal "to see the light". The meagre results of this approach produce a steady dropout of active members into passive cynicism.

Most members of such groups as World Revolution and The Socialist Party of Great Britain fail to expose the connection of the Communist aim with the existing struggle of the working class to assert their human needs within capitalism, and so are in various ways sectarian. As Communism is to them not a developing movement, but their own ready-made theoretical package, they naturally believe that they already possess the whole truth and need only convince the others, who still flounder in non-revolutionary confusion, that this is indeed the situation. But quite a few comrades become disillusioned with this approach, and we hope that they will help us in working out an alternative.

Stephen Stefan

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Discussion : Organisation for Revolution

workers' councils

by Terry Liddle

In all the major struggles between labour and capital which have taken place during this century, where the working class has been able to act independently on its own behalf, the workers have organised themselves into workers' councils. Russia 1905 and again in 1917, Hungary in 1919 and again in 1956, Italy and Germany after World War One and Spain in 1936 being prime examples. Britain has seen the Action Councils of the twenties and the idea is again being pushed, to date with very little success.

It follows from the above that various types of working class organisation correspond to various periods in the rise and fall of capitalism. The oldest types of working class organisation, trade unions and consumer co-operatives arose when both industrial capitalism and the proletariat it had created were young. In the next phase, the period of capitalist expansion and imperialism, the working class realising the necessity of political action organised into political parties, some reformist some revolutionary. It was in this period that Marx and Engels worked out the concept of scientific socialism as opposed to the utopian visions of the earlier period.

Now that capitalism is in the period of its decline, as is evidenced by the present crisis, and the trade unions and political parties from the reformist SPD to the "revolutionary" LSSP of Ceylon have been incorporated into the framework of an increasingly totalitarian state, the gigantic task facing the working class is the organisation of workers' councils as the organs of self emancipation and the foundations for the socialist reconstruction of society.

It is no good a number of leftist individuals or groups, however well intentioned, getting together and calling themselves a workers' council. The existence of such a paper organisation would be purely etherial. Workers' Councils must be based on the point of production, the factories, mines, docks, depots, etc., where the strength of the working class is greatest and where it can make its power felt unlike the present Trades Councils which are based geographically as are many trade union branches and most political organisations.

Workers' councils must be class wide unlike the narrow craft conscious trade unions and the Trade Councils which exclude non-trade unionists. This means that they must be comprised not only of delegates representing manual and white collar workers but also of delegates representing students, school kids, housewives, OAPs, unemployed, claimants, etc. The working class cannot afford to allow its unorganised and non-productive strata to be won over by the forces of reaction employing the time honoured tactic of divide and rule. This will surely happen if these strata are excluded from the organisations of the class.

Here it should be mentioned that most soldiers are not psychopathic killers but workers in uniform forced to enlist by low wages and unemployment. An agitation must be mounted not only for trade union and political rights for soldiers but also for the formation of Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Councils linked locally and nationally to the workers' councils. To leave this task to the eve of revolution when the class is under attack from elite killer squads such as the SAS and the SPG, and from the bosses private armies such as Securicor would be a failure to face reality.

The Workers' Councils must be democratic, that is the delegates must be non-permanent (a safeguard against careerism) they must be directly elected by secret ballot, subject to recall and receive no more reward than those they represent.

Workers' Councils cannot exist in splendid isolation but must link up at a national level into a Congress of Workers' Councils which will take the place of the parliament which serves the needs of capitalism. Unlike parliament this Congress will be the administrative and executive organ of workers' power. As bitter experience has shown there can be no socialism in one country, so each Congress of Workers' Councils will send its delegates to the Congress of the World Federation of Socialist States which will replace both the warring blocs of capitalist states and the United Nations and which will be responsible for the international economic and scientific planning of the stateless, classless, moneyless communist society.

This is the end. How do we get where we want to be from where we are at? The first step is the formation by socialists of a campaign to agitate and propagandise for workers' councils and to combat reformist notions of workers' control (which in fact means workers' participation in the very process which exploits them) in the factories and the trades and industries where they work. But workers' councils cannot be built by abstract agitation and propaganda alone, nor will they drop out of the air like Newton's apples.

Workers' councils will only arise when the rank and file working class in the factories and workplaces begin to realise that the day-to-day struggle is not an end in itself, but only the beginning of a far greater struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. When this happens basic class consciousness expressing itself as militant economism will be transformed into a new quality - revolutionary consciousness expressing itself as the desire and the ability to organise for social revolution.

To this end the factory floor organisations, both official and unofficial which already exist must begin to break out of the straightjacket imposed on them by the traditional organisations. Their representatives must extend their contacts with other factories locally and nationally while at the same time seeking such contacts in other industries.

It is from these contacts that the delegates of the workers' councils will be drawn. As the councils gain power and influence they will replace the trades councils and trade union district committees and, when co-ordinated nationally, begin the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Within the workers' councils there must be room for all types of political tendencies while at the same time there must be safeguards to ensure that no one group exercises its hegemony over the councils to the exclusion of other groupings.

In Russia in 1905 the Soviets (Soviet being the Russian word for council) grew out of a meeting of printers who were on strike to

demand payment for setting up punctuation marks as well as letters. In Italy in the early twenties they grew out of the internal commissions which begun by being sponsored by management. Today, in Britain the shop stewards committees and unofficial rank and file groups provide fertile soil in which workers' councils can grow.

The failure of the Russian Revolution to develop along bona fide socialist lines has left a massive theoretical and organisational vacuum. Likewise it has shown that social revolution cannot be brought by the activity of a self appointed general staff of professional revolutionaries, that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.

This void can be filled and past mistakes avoided within the struggle for the forging of workers' councils as the weapon the working class will use to free itself from the tyranny of capitalism. This is the task which now confronts us.

some comments on Terry's article...

We publish Terry's article as a contribution to a discussion on forms of organisation of the working class. However, we feel that certain points should be made by us to illustrate our disagreements with it:

1) The article appears on the face of it to contain two contradictions. Firstly it talks of workers' councils based "on the point of production" and then of workers' councils containing "delegates... also .. representing students, school kids, housewives, OAPs, claimants, etc." We hold that workers' councils must represent all sections of the class, not just those working in factories, and should be organised in different realms of activity e.g. workplaces, neighbourhoods, etc., to satisfy the total needs of the class both during and after the revolution. Secondly, it talks of a "World Federation of Socialist States" at the same time as referring to communism as a "stateless, classless, moneyless society". For us communism and socialism have the same meaning, that described by Terry as communism. Indeed Terry probably holds the same view. This indeed is the position taken by the early pioneers of socialist/anarchist thought.

2) Terry refers to "housewives" delegates to councils, we doubt whether communist women (or men!) will be willing to adopt the present role of "housewives" - slave in the kitchen, nursemaid for children and whore in the bedroom. If they did then there'd be something wrong with the kind of society they'd establish.

3) Terry's article appears to us to concentrate too heavily on the form of workers councils. For us what is important is the content of those councils -- the form of councils will follow from the perspective of the workers involved.

4) Terry suggests that shop stewards committees "provide fertile soil in which workers' councils can grow". We would say that shop stewards organisations are becoming more and more integrated into the union machine and are thus becoming a barrier to the development of class consciousness. On this we would refer readers to the following:-

"Shop Stewards and the Class Struggle" -- Big Flame

"Five Month's of Struggle" -- Big Flame

"Socialists and Trade Unions" in our fourth issue.

the power of the councils:

reprinted from "POINT-BLANK!" No.1

If we are radical enough to imagine the reality of a situationist revolution, we can also think of its consequences. Up until now, the situationists have been unique in their willingness to speak of the positive aspects of proletarian revolution, but even in this respect very little has been said about the concrete problems which will arise in any practical attempt in self-management. While we have no desire to create any sort of blueprint for revolution, these questions cannot be dismissed out of hand; if we can talk of the workers' councils of the past, we can also talk of those of the future. Unless self-management is viewed theoretically as a contemporary possibility, it will remain as an easily distorted myth. The facility with which situationist theory can be turned into an ideology is shown most clearly in the psittaceous repetition of certain phrases and certain traditions in current "situationist" texts. From now on, we are the enemies, not only of those who are pro-situs, but of those situationists who are merely pro-councilist.

The absence of sustained practical experience in councilist organisation necessitates a far-reaching theoretical debate on the nature of such organization. A similar debate was initiated after the Russian and German Revolutions by Korsch, Pannekoek, Gorter, etc., but the results obtained during this period have long ceased to be directly applicable in practice. Raoul Vaneigem's Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Autogestion (Internationale Situationists No.12 reprinted in ANARCHY No.7, 1972) represents one of the few attempts after Pannekoek to theoretically pose the questions faced in any revolutionary situation where councils emerge. Based on the experiences of May '68, Vaneigem's theses are important, but altogether tentative; much of the piece is concerned with a theoretical vindication of Fourier and the analysis of a future councilist: power is somewhat facile. Pannekoek's prescient observation that "when the workers seize the factories in order to organize production a number of new and difficult problems arise also" (Workers Councils) has not been invalidated by the technical progress of the bourgeois economy. The development of modern economic forces, while enabling a radical resolution of problems of communication, distribution, etc., has also created a situation not anticipated in previous councilist theory. The rapid decline in the productive sector of the proletariat in advanced capitalist countries has rendered the traditional model of councilist organization, the factory assembly, obsolete.

The shop floor can no longer be considered as the primary base of councilist power. The occupation of the factories will form only one of many initial steps towards the conquest of society by the proletariat - today in most advanced economies, the actual productive sector of the working-class constitutes a minority of the proletariat as a whole. Thus, the task for a councilist revolution, which seeks to establish a total democracy over society, will be to involve, not only the factory workers, but all of the proletariat in its activity. The present economic reality of bourgeois society cannot be radically overcome, however, by a simple quantitative proliferation of the councils throughout all areas of the proletariat. The councilist form must be re-examined in view of a contemporary definition of the "means of production".

It is no longer possible to talk only of workers' councils in the strict sense of the term. The strict image of workers' soviets is as archaic today as the Bolshevik Jacobinism that defeated them was 50 years ago. Since the tasks of any councils which will arise in the future must extend beyond the sphere of production, the councilist form itself must spread beyond the work-place. In any period of revolutionary occupations, it

will be necessary to distinguish between several types of councils - productive, service, neighbourhood, etc., - but such a distinction in no way resolves the difficulties posed by total revolution. The councils will inevitably eliminate various 'parasitical' sectors of the economy and this elimination will liberate large numbers of the proletariat from work. At the same time, however, it will destroy the councils in these areas and will entail the incorporation of those displaced within other organizational structures. Vaneigem's proposal to merely "open the factory gates" to those not involved in a vital capacity retains an outmoded conception of the functioning of the councils and is, in fact, elitist. There can be no 'vanguard' of the councils, no 'centre' of self-management; the revolution will be in the hands of a majority or hierarchical divisions will reappear despite the most democratic principles.

The organization of the councils must be such that they embrace all of society. Assemblies will have to be constituted not only in work areas but in other areas as well. The delineation of the various tasks, powers, membership, etc., of these different forms of organization will be one of the first priorities of the assemblies. Following this, perhaps the greatest difficulty for the revolutionary proletariat will be that of avoiding any kind of parliamentarism in the organization of the councils. The concept of revocable, mandated delegates will remain a purely formal principle until it becomes a practical reality. Even such a realization, though, does not ensure the success of direct democracy. Delegated authority, however accountable to a democratic base, always contains the possibility of developing in opposition to a power without mediators. In any revolutionary situation, bureaucratization will remain a very real contingency -- one that must be confronted, not only through the rotation of delegates, but through an awareness of the hierarchical tendencies which are likely to develop. Certain forms of organization (co-ordinating committees, etc.) will be delegated with more authority than others and, as a consequence, must be closely supervised by the general assemblies. Only the continued, active participation of these assemblies and, hence, the proletariat as a whole will prevent the possible rise of any councilist bureaucracy.

The ability of the councils to solve the question of their own organization will determine the success of self-management. In any case, the process whereby the operation of society can be reduced to a "simple administration of things" will undoubtedly be long and complex. The power of the councils will have a meaning which can only be supplied by the revolutionary proletariat -- the councils are its power and it is there that the problems raised by theory can be answered. At present, we can only dispel the illusions which will face such a power; its real obstacles can only be overcome in practice.

parliament or workers' councils?

by Bob Miller

INTRODUCTION

Some comrades have asserted that it is not for present day revolutionaries to lay down the form of revolution. Rather, they say, it is for the communist working class to decide between a number of possibilities. This choice seen as parliament plus class conscious economic action or workers' councils. However, if revolutionaries are to have a coherent programme, they

must be in a position to suggest the most likely way to succeed in revolution and must show the very real, diversionary nature of other "approaches".

It is a fundamental tenet of all revolutionaries that we draw our theoretical conclusions from the experiences of the working class struggle against capital. It is according to these theories, worked out from actual experiences of the class, that we shape our practice - whilst at all times recognising the dialectical link between them. Further we hold that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. The communist revolution must be the work of the self-conscious, active democratically organised majority of the class. The working class must organise itself to gain a position of supremacy in society, to destroy the wage labour/capital relationship.

THE PARLIAMENTARY "ROAD"

The question remains, however, how should the class organise? For some revolutionaries the answer is simple: through parliamentary elections. The view of the comrades holding the "non-dogmatist" position is closely related to this. The parliamentary analysis can be summed up as:

"When the majority of workers have become socialist there is no need for an armed uprising. They withdraw their support from capitalist parties and support the socialist party so that Parliament, which controls the armed forces, will be composed of socialist delegates...

"In Britain, Parliament has a complete and secure grip upon the armed forces, and government interventions in the strikes and disturbances of past years have shown on whose side they act. These were a forceful illustration of how necessary it is for workers to obtain control of Parliament before attempting to uproot the foundations of society. They further show that the only way to obtain control is by sending socialist delegates to Parliament". ("Questions of the Day" pp19-20, SPGB 1969 -- my emphases).

Having failed to break totally with the policies of the 2nd International, they adopt the position that control of the state machine brings with it control of the armed forces. However, it is useful to draw the lessons of the German Revolution 1918-19.

This revolution, though not explicitly socialist, was crushed ruthlessly. But it was not crushed by the armed forces of the state, these had collapsed after four years of war and defeat. It was put down by former members of the armed forces and members of the bourgeoisie organised independently in the so-called Freikorps. So what, we may ask, would prevent the armed forces using violence against the working class in the event of a communist revolution? Surely not control of the armed forces. The armed forces are quite capable of acting independently of Parliament, one look at the military coups that take place, or an analysis of the German experience, should show this.* There is only one way that the armed forces can be neutralised, and that is if large sections of them support the revolution. From this we can draw a second example, in Russia 1917 the armed forces did on the whole support the revolution and it was remarkably peaceful, but the revolutionaries did not control the State Duma.

Further this analysis is a fundamentally non-marxist one. It sees society in totally static terms. Because Parliament exists now, it will exist come the revolution, i.e. when there is a conscious majority of socialist workers. Faced with such a majority "any attempt to withdraw it ... would bring the house down around their ears." (Questions of the Day, p21). However the growth of socialist consciousness is not just a question of counting heads, with capitalism remaining static, until there is a majority. They fail to envisage possibilities as the socialist movement grows in size - the capitalists wouldn't be so stupid as to wait until the number of communists were a majority, it's more likely they would react before such a situation arose. Faced with a majority of society

* Not that I am suggesting that a military coup is inevitable in Britain. The executive and military are so close that they could just suspend the democratic facade without all the fuss of tanks in the streets.

that acquiesce to its actions, with the working class having lost the desire to maintain democracy, they could easily suspend Parliament. And there'd not be much protest from the liberal bourgeoisie, when the chips are down and they are really threatened, the bourgeoisie have always been more class conscious than the working class. As bourgeois democracy ended years ago, it would be quite possible for the state to do away with its democratic trappings. Maybe the constitutionalists have forgotten that the last two governments effectively ruled by decree for quite a while, maybe they've forgotten that the whip system makes parliament a mere rubber stamp for cabinet decisions, with little control over the cabinet?

However, we as libertarians have other objections to this argument. For the view that the revolution comes about through parliament has other effects. It encourages an attitude of delegating power to others, it encourages passivity and discourages involvement by workers. It discourages the development of an autonomous, self-active, revolutionary working class - the first prerequisite of a successful revolution. Thus the approach reveals itself as non-marxist, unrelated to reality, diversionary and counter-productive. We must therefore look for an alternative.

AN ALTERNATIVE?

However to merely reject the legalistic, constitutionalist approach is inadequate for a revolutionary group. If we are that which we claim to be, an expression of the class conscious working class, then it is our duty to be as clear as possible in our propaganda and all other activities. This requires that we develop a theory of revolution, including the most likely way for the class to succeed. Fortunately it is not necessary for us to merely provide a hypothetical blueprint, by examining the activities of the class at various stages of its development we can present an analysis based on experience and reality.

It is our contention that the class must organise itself democratically, autonomously and self-consciously to succeed. This is not a contention based on mere ideas in our heads, but is firmly rooted in the experiences of the class during its times of most intense struggle. There is a surprising uniformity about the forms of organisation adopted at these times, in Russia 1905 and 1917, Germany 1918, Spain 1936, Hungary 1956, etc., mass democratic bodies electing instantly revocable delegates based on the units of production -- workers' councils, factory committees, etc. These bodies were the creations of the class to fulfill the needs of the time:

"While this kind of organisation was unknown in practice, within four days a vast network of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils covered Germany. Perhaps some talk had been heard of Russian Soviets (1917/18) but in view of the censorship, very little. At all events, no party or organisation had proposed this form of struggle. It was an entirely spontaneous movement." (The Origins of the Movement for Workers' Councils in Germany 1918-29, p.1, Workers Voice, Liverpool).

What is the significance of this form of organisation? They are organs that the class itself created, and by means of instantly revocable delegates, can control -- organs that inspire the participation and self-activity of the class. Furthermore they are organs of the class that can have no role outside the destruction of capital, upon failing they cannot be co-opted without losing both their form and content:

"Their fundamental purpose is the unification of the class for the revolutionary struggle, combining decision making and executive power in the hands of workers' delegates who are subject to recall by factory committees at any time. Because the creation of workers' councils is an expression of a fundamental opposition to capitalist society and the beginning of a new form of social organisation, the councils can only exist in periods of revolutionary struggle; they cannot become permanent, institutionalized structures within capitalism without

surrendering both their form and content." (Leninism, Ouvrierism or Marxism, Internationalism No.2, p.12, New York.)

Workers' councils federated on a national and a world scale, controlling the armed forces of the proletariat, responsible for the smashing of the wage labour/capital relationship and the bourgeois state, responsible for the running of the initial stages of the new communist society, at all times controlled by those who elected them by means of instantly revocable, mandated delegates - this is the way that an analysis of working class struggle shows us is the way to success.

LIMITATIONS OF THE COUNCILS.

However, there is another factor that becomes apparent when we analyse working class struggle. The workers' councils failed to transform existing society into a communist one. In Russia they destroyed the old property relations, but at the same time failed to destroy the existing relationships of production. By lacking a clear, communist perspective they let the Bolsheviks seize state power and rapidly destroy the advances made, until in 1921 they were in a position to shoot the Kronstadt workers and sailors trying to reassert the old ideals. Their failure led to the establishment of a state capitalist society in the image of the Bolsheviks.

A similar situation appears in the Spanish Revolution:

"Despite the rapid advances of the workers' militia in Republican Spain, the social revolution which began in July failed to establish the absolute authority of the councilist power. While the Republican Government had been severely weakened, it did not, of course, abdicate in favour of the proletariat; after July, dual power existed in "Anti-Fascist" Spain between the forces of a new revolutionary order and the remnants of the bourgeois Republic. The councils of July were defeated to the extent that they failed to see the necessity of consolidating their power..... A misplaced trust in the leadership of the CNT-FAI led to a situation where the anarchist masses were to acquiesce to the gradual abolition of their power." (Self-Management and the Spanish Revolution 1936-7, Point Blank! No.1, p77, California)

Apart from this lack of a communist perspective, the old model of councils has, due to the development of capitalism, become inadequate for any future revolution. The workers' councils of the past tended to be based on the "point of production" -- factories, however since then the structure of the proletariat has changed. Nowadays many workers are employed in the so-called non-productive occupations. Thus any future development of a councilist movement based purely on the factories would exclude a significant proportion of the working class. Clearly if the socialist revolution is the task of the vast majority of the working class then such a form of organisation is inadequate. Further, with many workers now living a large distance from their place of work, the decisions of factory based councils are likely to be useless for their needs outside of production or for those living close to a workplace but not working there. Any future councilist movement will have to delineate itself between factory, "professional", service, neighbourhood and education councils. Only in this way can the total needs of the proletariat be satisfied.

Thus we can see that firstly it is not the form of councils that is important, but their content and secondly that any new councilist movement must embrace all sections of the class in all ways or it will fail to transform society.

THE TASK FOR REVOLUTIONARIES TODAY.

If it is the content of the councils that is important then it is inadequate for a revolutionary group to merely propagate the "idea" of councils. Although it is important for revolutionaries to have a programme for revolution, the

actual form of organisation adopted in a revolutionary situation has to be secondary to the consciousness of the workers involved. If the workers are class conscious then the form of organisation adopted will follow from that perspective. Therefore for revolutionaries to run around shouting "workers' councils" at all times and in all situations is as diversionary as the constitutionalist position analysed above. For communist workers the task remains that of assisting in the development of their fellow workers consciousness, so that the next time the proletariat enters into a potentially revolutionary situation the result will be a successful socialist revolution.

NOTE: I have avoided giving a general history of the development of workers' councils. This can be obtained by reading the following:-

THE BOLSHEVIKS AND WORKERS CONTROLSolidarity

THE ORIGINS OF THE MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS' COUNCILS IN GERMANY 1918-29
.....Workers Voice

KRONSTADT '21 by Victor SergeSolidarity

THE KRONSTADT COMMUNE by Ida MettSolidarity

HUNGARY '56Solidarity

POINT BLANK! No1 contains three useful articles including one on the Spanish Revolution.

These publications can be obtained from any self-respecting lefty bookshop, if you can't get them near you, try "Rising Free".

"THERE are groups and parties pretending to be in the exclusive possession of truth, who try to win the workers by their propaganda, to the exclusion of all other opinions. By moral and, where they have the power, also by physical constraint, they try to impose their views upon the masses. It must be clear that one-sided teaching of one system of doctrines can only serve, and indeed should serve, to breed obedient followers, hence to uphold old or prepare new domination. Self-liberation of the working masses implies self-thinking, self-knowing, recognising truth and error by their own mental exertion. Exerting the brains is much more difficult and fatiguing than exerting the muscles; but it must be done, because the brains govern the muscles; if not their own then the brains of others.

"..... TO restrict the freedom of discussion is to prevent the workers from acquiring the knowledge they need."

These quotes are from THE WAY TO WORKERS' CONTROL by Anton Pannekoek.

libertarian communism and organisation.

REVOLUTIONARY Anarchists and libertarian communists seek, and are working for, the establishment of a society which will render impossible the growth of a privileged class, and the domination and exploitation of man by man. We therefore, advocate the common ownership of the land means of production and transportation, democratically administered and controlled by the people as a whole, on the basis of voluntary co-operation and mutual aid. In such a society, the wages and monetary system, as well as the coercive State and Governmental apparatus, would no longer exist. The State would be relegated to the museum of antiquities! It would be a classless society. It would as far as is practicable, be a decentralised society. Mankind would at last attain its freedom.

To achieve such a society, we are working towards the abolition of all those mechanisms which are necessary to our present chaotic, authoritarian, unjust and unequal society - such as capital accumulation and production for private- and State- profit, instead of production for need. Libertarian communists stand for the self-emancipation and liberation of the working class.

DESPITE what our opponents say, we are not opposed to organisation. Far from it! We favour more - and better - organisation than we have in our chaotic, capitalist, society today. But we are against authoritarian, bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation. A free society is impossible without organisation. Unlike some socialists, however, we conceive of a classless society organised without "impervious authority" (see Engels' essay "On Authority" and my arguments against in the latest issue of Anarchy). We favour the delegation of function, but consider that all delegates should be subject to immediate recall if, or when, necessary.

We also contend that, at the present moment, a revolutionary libertarian communist/socialist organisation is necessary to the extent that the working class, as a whole, has not yet developed a revolutionary consciousness. A revolutionary organisation understands that the only possible proletarian revolution is one in which the workers seize power, ownership and control from the bourgeois class, and in doing so destroy the whole apparatus of bourgeois power. The workers must destroy the state before - not after - the taking over the land and means of production and distribution, otherwise their revolution will be doomed to failure. Any other "revolution" simply puts a new ruling class in power.

The State is, above all, the instrument by which the ruling class conserves its power. It cannot be "captured" by the working class; and if it could, it would not be desirable. Indeed, the greater degree there is of socialist consciousness, the less likelihood there will be of a State machine capable of mobilising effectively against a revolutionary majority! Whilst the new society is slowly (but increasingly rapidly as time goes by) germinating within the old, so the old, ^{society} including its State, is slowly (but, again, increasingly rapidly as time goes by) dying and disintegrating. So we repeat: the workers will never "capture" the State; they will subvert, challenge, immobilise, dismantle and, finally, destroy it. Instead of a Government over people, there will be an administration of things. Grassroots

democracy! But, in the words of the old anarchist-communist, Alexander Berkman: "The revolution must be prepared", and organised.

LIBERTARIAN Communists are not concerned merely with changing the basic property relationships (from private and/or State ownership to common ownership) and material conditions of life, even if this was possible in isolation, but the whole quality of social and individual life in general. For example, we advocate complete access to all information. We oppose, and challenge, all forms of censorship. On the other hand libertarian communists do not debate with, or involve themselves in dialogues with, totalitarian groups (such as avowed racists like the National Front, or such organisations as the Workers Revolutionary Party) who would suppress sections, or all, of the working class. That would be both stupid and anti-working class!

As a means of working towards a free, classless, society, libertarian communists concern themselves with an accurate criticism of, and opposition to, the chaotic (not anarchic) and oppressive society in which we "live" today; we oppose private greed with social and individual need; we encourage co-operation in the interests of all, rather than competition which only serves the interests of the few; we support, and are involved in, working-class organisations such as rank-and-file action groups, shop stewards committees, tenant associations, school-neighbourhood councils and the like, and by doing so help evolve the many and varied ways by which working people themselves can organise without a privileged or ruling class. A libertarian communist organisation does not seek power for itself, but seeks at all times to work, not in opposition to, but through, working-class organisations. We, therefore, support all working-class organisations which could be the forerunners of workers' councils, and develop in them a revolutionary communist consciousness.

As revolutionaries, we are striving to build up our own organisation, not in order to dominate and oppress people, but to act as an instrument which, among others, may assist working people in their self-liberation. We are completely opposed to any action (such as vote-catching), or organisation (like political parties) which takes the initiative from ordinary people, and gives it to permanent Trade Union officials, so-called Parliamentary representatives or "revolutionary" (ie, reformist) vanguards or "leaderships".

ON the other hand, an organisation of revolutionary communists and libertarian socialists considers as its task the assistance of the working class, as members of that class, to prepare and organise for the bringing about of a classless and Stateless society. The establishment of such a society is something that has to be consciously struggled for by the working class itself. The organisation is, therefore, a conscious organised expression of libertarian ideas and aspirations. We are not "leaders"; we have no "leaders", but we do, in one sense, offer a "lead" within the working class movement by example and by explanation, to build into that movement a high level of political consciousness, so that it is able to defeat capitalism and combat the creation of a new State and ruling class. Libertarian communists reject both reformism (not to be confused with militant class struggle and direct action on the industrial field and elsewhere) and vanguardism.

We, therefore, base our work and activities on the day-to-day struggles for better living conditions and a greater joy and satisfaction of life, by linking up the aspirations and actions of ordinary people, and developing from them an understanding of their common problems - and common enemies - which will act as a guide to our own struggles for a more satisfactory and freer form of society. Socialism will not come about "overnight". It will not "evolve" in the

Fabian sense; nor will capitalism be reformed out of existence. But capitalism will, through the constant struggles of the working class, evolve towards a social revolution. Quantity becomes a new and higher quality! For us, as revolutionaries, meaningful action is whatever increases the initiative, participation and solidarity of working people; that which is sterile is whatever reinforces their apathy, cynicism and passivity. That is the acid test. We have no desire, even if it could be done, of leading people to the "Promised Land"!

The form that a libertarian communist/socialist organisation must take must be, as far as is possible, a realisation of libertarian perspectives in the current situation. It cannot be a social model of a free society, but it must develop in interaction with the developing liberation of mankind itself. Such an organisation will inevitably make mistakes. An organisation which is always right -- is either dead or a completely sectarian monument. Indeed, "honestly made mistakes, providing we are organised in such a way to learn from them, are much better than the dictates of the most infallible Central Committee. We, therefore, reject the 'though shalt obey' attitudes of the Leninists". (Libertarian Struggle, March, 1973).

A libertarian communist organisation should be a membership organisation. To some extent the failure of the so-called Anarchist Federation of Britain, with its irresponsible individualism and disparate and mutually conflicting ideas, proved that; it should, moreover, have a specific object: libertarian communism, i.e., common ownership, production-for-use instead of for profit, abolition of the State and the wages-prices-money system. No elected delegate, or group of delegates, should have more than a co-ordinating function; and, as previously noted, all delegates or members of an executive committee (if there is one), must be subject to immediate recall at any time by those who mandated them. A libertarian organisation should be decentralised, with all groups having autonomy of action. At the same time, members should accept the principle of collective responsibility. (The subject of federalism and collective responsibility within a libertarian organisation has been dealt with in some detail in The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists by Nestor Makhno, Peter Archinov and Ida Mett, first published in Russian and French in 1926, and now obtainable, in French and English, from the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists of France and Britain).

THE only revolution worth having, then, is when ordinary working people rid themselves of all those who live off them, and organise society in their own interests. Such a society will be communism or socialism. Such a condition can be called "anarchy" (without rulers).

Socialism does not exist anywhere in the world today and, as a system of society, has never existed in the past. But there have been times when people have, at least, successfully organised whole societies, vast agricultural areas, large towns and cities and, on one occasion, a whole navy of modern ships (see my article "Anarchy in the Navy" in the magazine, Anarchy) on a non-authoritarian basis. They have created "anarchy" -- and it worked! But the powers-that-be suppress, or ignore, these facts. Moreover, whenever the masses attempt to "create anarchy", and reconstruct society on the basis of libertarian communism, the rich and powerful, the former bosses and bourgeoisie, and the State, do all in their power to crush the people and their revolutionary movements (this is why libertarian communists insist that the State must be destroyed before and not after the taking over of the land and means of production).

This they, and successive governments and ruling classes did, for over ten years, from 1919 to 1920, when Emiliano Zapata and the Liberation Army of the south, and the peons of South and Central Mexico, took over the land from the great landowners; this is what they did in Russia and the Ukraine between 1917 and 1920, when the peasants created their communes and organised their free (non-Bolshevik) soviets and councils. This is what they did in Spain in 1936. And so on.

In fact, the capitalist, ruling, class will never give up without a fight. But by their struggles, and from such examples, at least the workers can learn that, without proper preparation and organisation, as well as an idea of the kind of society they want, they will be doomed to failure. The class struggle will have to be fought to the bitter end. "Either the social revolution will terminate in the defeat of the workers, in which case we must start again to prepare the struggle for a new offensive against the capitalist system; or it will lead to victory of the workers; and in this case, having seized the means which permit self-administration - the land, means of production and social functions - the workers will commence the construction of a free society". (The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists).

POSTSCRIPT

In writing the above, I have assumed that most readers are familiar with the works of Marx and Engels, and that they generally accept the Marxist analysis and critique of the existing mode of production. No economic analysis of capitalism has, therefore, been made. The above arguments will, no doubt, be dubbed anarchist or, perhaps, anarcho-marxist, I call them libertarian communist. What they are called does not matter: the ideas do!

Some of the arguments and ideas may be new to some readers of this journal. They are not the ideas of one person or group, though to some extent they are held by people in a number of groups (the Libertarian Communism group associated with this journal, the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists - of which I am a member - and, to a lesser degree, Solidarity). Many of these ideas can be found, together with other views not necessarily held by libertarian communists, in many works. A few may be suggested for further reading:

Mutual Aid by Peter Kropotkin.

The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists

What Is Communist Anarchism? by Alexander Berkman.

The Sane Society and The Fear of Freedom by Erich Fromm.

The Mass Psychology of Fascism by Wilhelm Reich.

Anarchism by Daniel Guérin.

Post-Scarcity Anarchism (and other essays) by Murray Bookchin

Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society by Paul Cardan, Solidarity pamphlet. But also see Adam Buick's article "Solidarity, the Market and Marx" in a previous issue of this journal, copies of which are available on request.

PETER E NEWELL.

Organisation in Socialist Society

Some socialists will tell us, come the revolution, after elected representatives have more or less taken control of the capitalist state, abolished its coercive apparatus and declared money, wages etc. obsolete, a world council of delegates will be elected to run society. That such an institution would differ little from parliaments, congresses etc., which have proved so unresponsive to the wishes of the "electorate", seems not to worry our friends. Should it be suggested that such a body is likely to become unresponsive & possibly pursue a policy of its own, they tend to reply that, in a society without class conflict & the irrationalities of the market, all that will be needed is simple administration that is unlikely to cause disagreement. One is left wondering why bother to have an elected council at all. The fact is, of course, that there are many economic problems without "mathematical" solutions. At what rate does one allow mineral resources to be used up? What proportions of one's resources should be given to scientific or medical research at a time when, though everyone might have access to a free house, many of these houses leave a fair bit to be desired? How much account should be taken of the ecological effects of industry? Capitalism, when it faces up to these problems, sees them in purely economic (i.e. profit) terms & has to work on what are pretty arbitrary estimates of the profits to be gained by any course of action. In socialist society it will be the human aspect that will be all important & therefore everyone must be involved in deciding at least the basic outline on which decisions can be made. Other revolutionaries, despite recognising that there is a problem, tend to ignore the cause. A council of revocable delegates is proposed, more because Marx gives the idea support than because it is a truly democratic way of doing things. Revocability is something which sounds very nice in the abstract but is much more difficult to explain how it will work in practice. There are two ways one could do this. One could have direct elections, in which case, even if the world council was 2,000 strong, each constituency would have an electorate of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ million. Revocability on this scale is possible (a certain percentage of voters could demand another election by means of a petition) but it would be unlikely that such a right would be exercised sufficiently often to ensure that the delegates genuinely worked for the wishes of those they "represented". The alternative is to have a series of indirect elections, from factory committees to regional councils, regional councils to provincial councils until one reaches the world council. There are going to be few issues where people are so outraged that they will go the

trouble of getting their delegate recalled from the factory/ childrens' etc. committees & bully their new delegates to replace the next stage until eventually this machinery gets through to the world council. Even if people did have the energy to attempt to make their opinion felt, issues would tend to conflict. It is conceivable that delegates placed in a council to push one issue would be recalled due to another issue before other factory assemblies etc had got round to taking action on the first issue. Revocability would only be effective while people were so alert that the right of recall would be exercised so quickly that the world council would back down as soon as opposition presented itself. Once people's vigilance relaxed & the delegates began to gain a little confidence, they would probably be able to last out all but major storms, with little change in policy. The most likely result of people's activity would be for a tendency to conservatism, with councils not daring to do anything at all radical, in case this annoyed people. Revocability is a pleasant rallying-cry, but it is not a realistic way of running democratic society.

The third alternative is to decentralise most, if not all, decisions to local communities. I would not deny that this is perfectly practicable. What concerns me is whether it is desirable, except as a partial solution. It is a notable fact that modern society, despite increased means of coercive technology, is less able to repress deviants than previously decentralised, village-based societies. Pre-industrial revolution empires rested on these self-sufficient villages and those truly conservative empires confined central interference to a tax collector. Not only has capitalism tended to break down these communities, but the modern state has tended to displace all rival sources of authority. In that it has made social control more difficult. Local communities controlling production &, most important, distribution, would have far greater potential for social control than any modern state. It will therefore be desirable to have some decisions centralised & so we are again face with the problem of how to ensure that such centralised bodies that exist are truly controlled by society as a whole.

The danger inherent in all forms of election is that those who are elected are likely to be those who have gained some form of prestige. Arguably people in a socialist society are far less likely to be influenced by whether they have heard a candidate's name often, or if he is a good speaker, but there is still likely to be a personal bond between a reasonably good representative & his "constituents". People are unlikely to dismiss a representative, who in the past has been reasonably sympathetic to their opinions, over a single issue, & even the best representative cannot avoid his representation being distorted by his own opinions. Furthermore delegates tend to be very different from those they represent.

They do not just tend to have a different social background, but also a different psychological outlook. Inherent in the very process of standing for election is a certain arrogance & this applies to the person who sees his job as passing on the personal opinions of those he represents as well as to the person who considers himself to be elected to put his own opinions. Perhaps most important is the fact that "ordinary" people are denied responsibility in the community's decisions. Representatives are clearly not "the community in microcosm" & will not be seen as such.

Major decisions would be made by referendum & the potential for this, with modern technology, is far greater than is normally supposed. The referendum, if fully utilised, could put people in a comparable position to those in the small number of genuine democracies of ancient Greece. Another process is needed for the less general complications of modern society. In most of the Greek democracies, this was solved by elected representatives, but this was seen as, at best, a "sensible" compromise &, at worst, an aristocratic distortion which negated the whole democratic ideal. In the extreme democracies (which included the very respectable Athens throughout her 200 years as a major power) all day to day running of affairs was down by a council chosen by lot every year. Most if not all of the dangers of an elected body did not apply here. Such a body is unlikely to diverge more than minimally from a cross-section of society & there is none of the ego-tripping involved in running for an election. Also those on such a council will not wish to allow this institution to gain power at the expense of ordinary people, because next year they will probably be one of those ordinary people themselves. It might be necessary to have a second body, as a balance, just in case the law of averages slips up, but this would be desirable rather than essential. Though where to maintain their control over events means continual struggle people tend to go through phases of apathy broken by sharp moments of militancy when things get too bad. Where they are accustomed to full control it is, however, a different matter. A truly democratic people would have no trouble in displacing a minority who oppose their aims, just because this minority controlled the council.

As this system has already existed in semi-capitalist states, of mercantile Greece, would it not be desirable to implement it in capitalism today? I think not. Athens, the usual example of an extreme democracy, did not fully involve all voting citizens. Meetings of the assembly were dominated by orators who were usually of aristocratic origins, & this includes radicals such as Pericles & Alcibiades. During the exceptional circumstances of the Peloponnesian war, such popular leaders such as Cleon & Cleophon came to the fore. However, despite being despised by aristocrats, they had far more in common with Ramsey MacDonald than examples of self-conscious workers. The way that the citizens allowed themselves to be manipulated by the Theoric fund (a cash distribution comparable to a wages

subsidy) during the period after the peloponesian war until Athens lost her independence to Macedonia, shows that the ruling class were quite capable of maintaining power. This, despite a constitution which in theory was the most extreme democracy ever to exist. After 40 hours work (& usually much longer with compulsory or semi-compulsory overtime) one simply does not have the energy to ensure your opinions carry proportional weight. Political activity which gets beyond supporting leaders like Cleon tends inevitably to personal contact with friends & workmates. But revolutionaries must not be deluded by the idea that when people are able to work for inherent satisfaction & do not need to work for wages, because they have access to all that they need to satisfy their wants, free control of society will fall into people's hands. If society is so organised that people must maintain a permanent state of rebellion to retain control of events (as will be necessary to control a world council of delegates) people simply will not bother. Democracy, like happiness, is worthless if it cannot be taken for granted. Ultimately democracy can only survive if people have gained the confidence to control their lives, & this can only be done through their own actions. Institutions cannot bring this about where it does not exist.

DAVID BARNSDALE.

WORTH READING

LIBERTARIAN STRUGGLE monthly O.R.A.

LIBERTARIAN COMMUNIST REVIEW quarterly O.R.A.

OPPOSITIONIST periodical London.

WORKERS VOICE periodical Liverpool.

WORLD REVOLUTION No 1 theoretical journal.

THE LORDSTOWN STRUGGLE by Ken Weller, Solidarity also see article Trouble in the Auto Industry in INTERNATIONALISM No4 and for follow ups Solidarity Motor Bulletins.

A WORLD OF ABUNDANCE Socialist Party of Canada from a special edition of the Socialist Standard S.P.G.B.

THE LIMITS OF THE CITY by Murray Bookchin Harper and Row paperback USA.

WOMENS CONSCIOUSNESS MANS WORLD by Sheila Rowbotham Penguin paperback.

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION 1918-1919 by A.J.Ryder The Historical Association.

Most publications mentioned in this journal can be obtained from Rising Free Bookshop, 197 Kings Cross Road, London, W.C.1.

Middle East Films

I went to see a couple of films set in the Middle East at the Paris Pullman cinema (Drayton Gardens, South Kensington).

RAMPARTS OF CLAY (director Jean-Louis Bertucelli) portrays life in the walled desert village of Tehouda in Southern Tunisia, an isolated life of silent toil and religious ritual. We see the women pull water from the well, wash clothes, look after kids, spatter red dye on the face of the bride; and the men labour in the quarry breaking rocks, which are taken away each evening in a lorry. One payday the agent from the company which owns the quarry comes and gives out fewer coppers than before. The men refuse to work on the reduced wage - so the lorry leaves with rocks and returns with soldiers who surround the workers for two days. The women sacrifice a sheep, and one removes the well bucket to deny the soldiers water. Two men are shot to defeat the strike and the soldiers are withdrawn.

The stark simplicity of the setting, corresponding to the primitive level of production, flashlights the coercive basis of capitalist property. A power alien to the producers requires broken rocks - it is not for the producers to question why. The power arms and disciplines one group of its subjects to enforce the labour of the others. This is capital - private or State, local or imperialist. How can the unarmed and dispersed resist? But in the schoolhouse the children are being taught to read, and shown the countries on the globe ...

TO LIVE IN FREEDOM is a left-wing documentary on the Israel-Palestine problem from a viewpoint which is hostile to all the regimes in the area and thus relatively acceptable to Socialists. As Zionist and Palestinian songs follow in sequence ("To Live in Freedom on the Land" is a Zionist song, but could be either) we grasp the similarity of the longings of oppressed people, in both East European ghettos and Mideast expellee camps, to recover a more or less mythical agricultural idyll from the past. Nationalist bureaucracies use these longings to gain power in new nation-States, and are themselves used by rival superpowers. The longings are betrayed - except in idealised form as blood-and-soil racism - for capitalist States need wage-workers and not peasants to compete on the world market.

The film concentrates on the exploitations of and discriminations against Arab and Sephardi workers in Israel and the occupied areas - maybe the evils of a new Arab Palestine will be the subject of a future left-wing documentary, if the imperialist powers settle on a more stable carve-up of the region. The philosophy of the film-makers is expressed through the mouth of a Palestinian writer - that Palestine-Israel is the homeland of two peoples, the Jewish-Israeli and the Arab-Palestinian, who must live together in a "secular Socialist State". Socialists who hold that the workers have no homeland, and aim at a united humanity, are reluctant to speak about different "peoples", but perhaps this is a necessary concession in a situation where the minds of workers are so deeply imbued with racist nationalism. But while Socialists must oppose discrimination and can advocate secularisation, they should remember that capitalism is a global system and can only be replaced with a genuine Socialist community (without States) by a worldwide movement. To advocate "Socialism" locally is in practice to work for a bureaucratic State-capitalist regime, which must also exploit workers in order to survive and expand its capital in competition with other States.

Stephen Stefan

Grants - What Now?

As we march today the grants campaign has entered a new, critical stage. Recent announcements in the media have indicated that degree course students can expect an increase of about £100 next year. Although this is welcome news and a partial victory for the campaign we must be aware of the very real nature of the dangers it poses.

To see why these dangers are posed we must be aware of the nature of the education in modern society. Britain, like all other countries is a class society, where a tiny minority own and control the means of producing and distributing things, whilst the vast majority of us having little control over our own lives and no great ownership of property are forced to sell our mental and physical energies in order to live.

In such a society education plays two main roles, firstly as a long term investment for the ruling class and secondly as a socialisation process whereby a substantial section of the working class accept and defend the interests of the ruling class. However in a period of severe economic crisis the normal reaction is to cut down on long term investments. We can see this process at work in education today - grants are cut, less expenditure on education, etc. The crisis also leads to a general attack on the living standards everywhere. However this has led to growing hostility, amongst students, to the system, - thus endangering the socialisation process. So Labour has felt it is opportune to offer university students a rise. THEY THINK THAT STUDENTS ARE SO STUPID THEY'LL ACCEPT A FEW MORE CRUMBS AND QUIETEN DOWN.

There is another reason for this move. The government knows that the real value of grants will fall, again in the near future. But they've said nothing about discretionary awards, the means test or married women's grants. Hoping that university students will take the crumbs and scab on their brothers and sisters in other colleges, they aim to so poison the present student unity and solidarity that it will be years before another campaign can be launched. Many of us now at college will be impotent then in our attempts to stop further cuts in our grants.

The aim must be - a full grant of £655 for all students. We mustn't be fooled by the governments. Students must fight as militantly as possible, in connection with other workers under attack - or we'll pay the price in the near future.

OTHER PROBLEMS FACING STUDENTS

But with all the activity around the grants campaign little has been done to treat other problems facing students today. Whether or not we win a large increase in grants, colleges will still remain closely biased towards the rich, dominated by exams and assessment, and will be as undemocratic and hierarchical as before. Study will remain alienating and work boring. Indeed there is a simple reason for this - colleges are little more than education factories run in the interests of the ruling class.

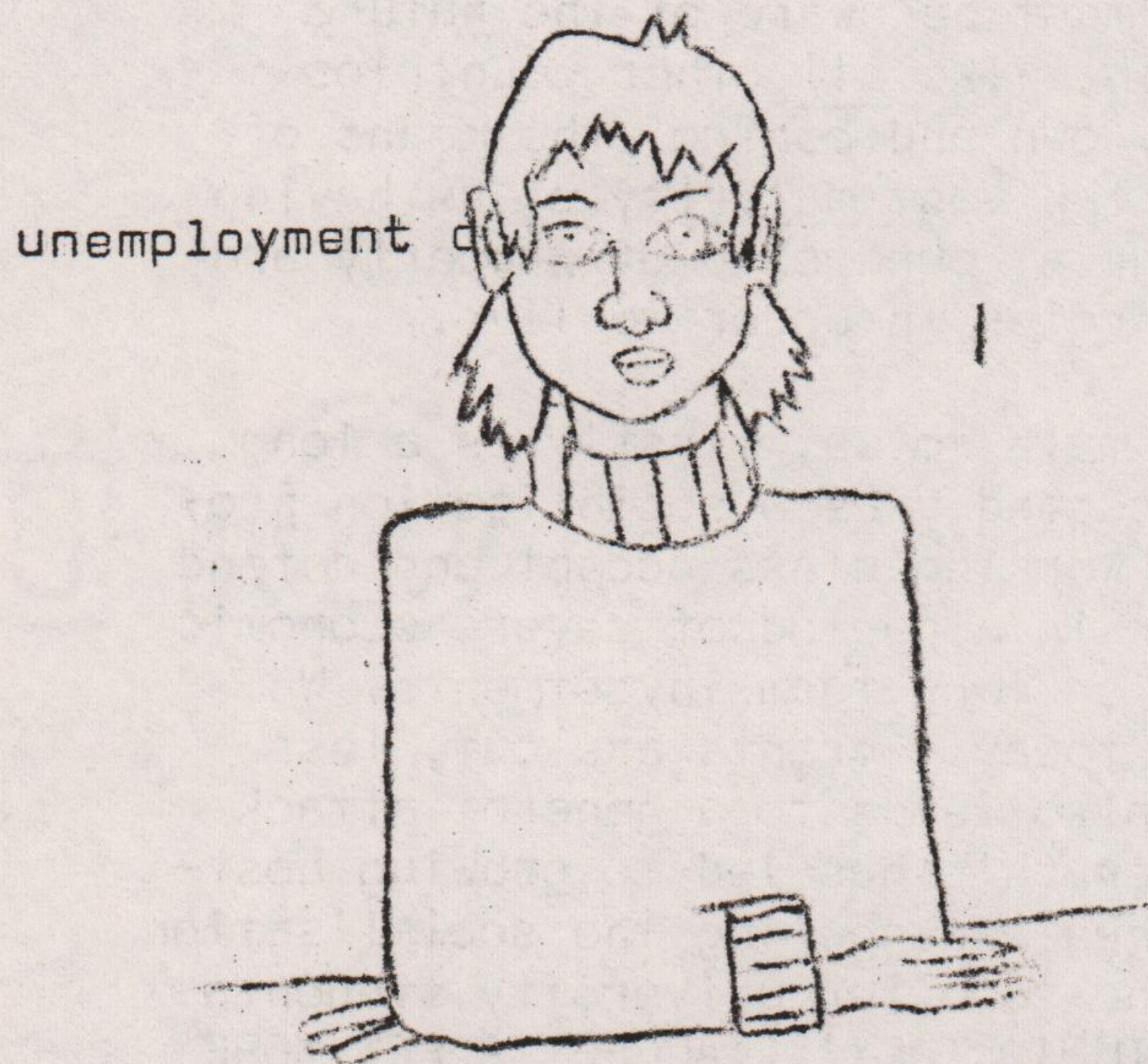
WHAT SOLUTION TO STUDENTS PROBLEMS

If there is to be any long term solution to the problems of students then they must recognise their real position in society. Together with the tendency towards stratification of the economy the nature of education

and the class position of students have changed. The complex requirements of modern industrial society have forced the state to take over the function of training specialised workers. The majority of students are in a position similar to that of apprentices -- they are objectively trainee workers. The interests of the majority of students lie with those of the vast majority of society -- the working class.

The problems facing students are a result of the class nature of society. The leftists too realise that private capitalism cannot solve our problems, but they aim only at replacing it with state capitalism through nationalisation. This means State bureaucrats replace private capitalists as the controllers of the means of production.

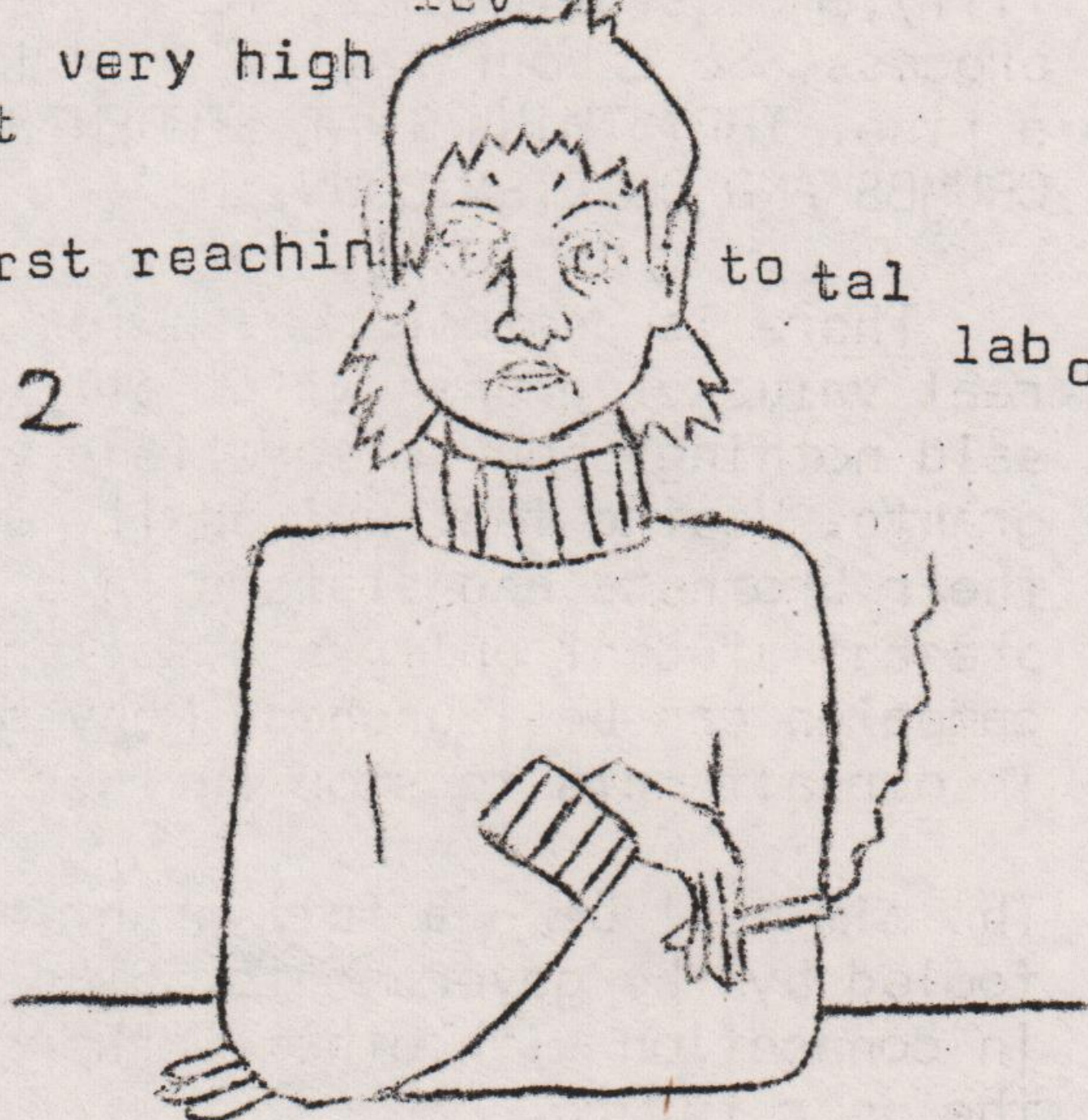
Workers must still sell their energies to live -- the basic relationship of capitalism,



THE LECTURE by Sheila.

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wage-labour and capital, is maintained. They therefore reveal themselves as the last defenders of capitalism.

What students and the whole working class movement needs is a genuine revolutionary perspective - the abolition of the wages system and of class society. Production and the other social affairs must be controlled democratically by the whole people for the satisfaction of human needs. This would involve the abolition of students as a separate category in society - education would be a continuous process in which everyone is involved, not just the training of a semi-privileged elite.

NOTES

The above leaflet was issued by us on the 12th May for the N.U.S. Grants campaign demo. We think that subsequent events have shown its analyses to be fundamentally correct.

This is the first article to appear in our journal on the subject of students. The others were:-

'Students - a review of a C.P. pamphlet /issue No.4'

'Grants - What Now? - a leaflet issued by our Aberdeen comrades / issue No. 5.'

We have yet to come across a good detailed revolutionary libertarian analysis of students. Most students militants are either politically apathetic or adopt a leninist view of themselves as a vanguard and/or paper sellers outside factory gates. Clearly a libertarian analysis is required. In an effort to achieve this we would like to initiate a discussion on students in our journal. We invite comrades to send us articles on this subject, we will forward them to the group editing the next issue.

"MARKED FOR LIFE", A.Powell and B.Butterworth -

By discouraging students from co-operating with each other the assessment system inhibits a prime virtue of civilised society - that of mutual aid. By isolating people from each other in a highly formative stage in their lives, and encouraging them to regard their work as a private and measurable achievement, it enforces or reinforces the view that different people deserve different rewards in life. If it were made clear that we owe a large (tho' not precisely measurable) proportion of our knowledge and ideas to the people around us in society, and that our own contribution to society, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ similarly defies measurement, many more people than now might wonder why our wages and job opportunities should be precisely differentiated from those of other people. The process of grading at universities seems, therefore, to be not only an attempt to select people for different strata in society, but also, in its effect, to be a psychological preparation for accepting a stratified society.

- 'a criticism of assessment in universities'
for copies write, A.Powell, Institute of Classical
Studies, 31/4 Gordon Square, London WC1.