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This is the seventh issue of our discussion journal. We hoped this issue would be produced by a group outside London, but this didn't prove possible. Hence the delay in publication, for which we apologise. The next issue will be produced outside London, and we hope LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM will come out quarterly from now on.

To keep down our costs - paper, ink etc - we have to put a price on LC for the first time.

The articles in LC reflect the views of individual contributors, and do not necessarily represent those of the group as a whole. We welcome articles from comrades so that the journal can become a constructive contribution to the development of the socialist movement.

But to achieve this, and to expand our circulation and our activities, we need more money, pending the end of commodity production. Please make all P.O.s, cheques etc payable to David Barnsdale, as London group Treasurer.

Send all correspondence, articles, financial support to the London group - R. Knight, Box 217, c/o 197 Kings Cross Rd., London WC1.

At present there are LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM groups in -

ABERDEEN c/o Sandy Blake,
Ground floor right,
51 Richmond St.,
Aberdeen

and

LONDON (us).

We have contacts in

EDINBURGH

HULL

LIVERPOOL

MANSFIELD (Notts.)

OXFORD

who can be contacted through one of the groups.

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January 1975

Growth and Socialism

One of our members was invited to a week-end Seminar on "Socialism and the Environment", organised by The Spokesman and financed by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 4-5 January 1975. The Seminar provided useful information in spite of being run by a group of left-Labour union officials and academics for a variety of Labourites and Bolsheviks. Our comrade distributed three discussion papers, of which this was one :

GROWTH AND SOCIALISM

Will there be "industrial growth" in a socialist society? I want to argue that the idea of "growth" is only useful in understanding capitalist society, whether run by private enterprise or by the State. People will make decisions in a socialist society using completely different concepts. By Socialism, I don't mean nationalisation - getting State bureaucrats to run the same rotten system - but a setup with common ownership and democratic control of the means of life by and for the whole community.

In capitalist society, goods and services are not produced to satisfy human needs, but to be sold at a profit on the world market. The bosses of each competing firm and country plough back these profits to increase the amount of industry they control. This process, called "capital accumulation", is the driving force which makes this mad world setup tick. It is measured in terms of "growth". Each government tries to make the means of production under its control grow at a faster rate than other countries. Otherwise it would go under in the international rat-race.

Within capitalism, we can win a higher standard of living (if we fight hard enough) during a period of growth than in a slump. As the system moves towards a slump, we are finding it more and more difficult to defend living standards.

Naturally people believe that growth means living in more comfort, and that failure to grow means destitution. The environmentalists who argue for "zero growth" say that the only way of saving the environment and helping underdeveloped countries is to take a big cut in our standard of living. No wonder this discourages people from being concerned about the environment! Just like the politicians and trade-union leaders who want growth, the environmentalist campaigners also believe that we must trade off material comfort against damage to the environment.

BUT MOST OF WHAT MAKES UP GROWTH IN CAPITALISM IS SOCIALLY USELESS OR DESTRUCTIVE. Most heavy industry exists to support the waste of war, the armed forces and armaments production, and the petrol-driven private motor-car, which should be replaced by electric cars, bicycles and public transport.

Then think of all the resources wasted in unproductive activities like banking, insurance, advertising, accounting, protecting business property, and most of the civil service - which can all be dispensed with in a society based on need not profit. A lot of activities would not grow at all in a Socialist society, but would be cut down or got rid of.

To feed the people of the world well, it may be necessary in a Socialist society to expand many branches of food production. But we shouldn't forget that people starve now not because the food isn't available or can't be produced, but because they can't afford to pay profitable prices for it. Food - fruit, butter, eggs, wheat - which cannot be sold at a profit is destroyed while millions starve.

Even when useful things are produced under capitalism, they are produced in a very wasteful way. Cars, fridges, televisions, shoes and countless other items are deliberately made shoddy, and spare parts deliberately not made available, so that they soon break down and have to be bought again - producing more profit. The patents for ladderless stockings, for record-player needles which last for ever, for light-bulbs which don't fuse, and other inventions are bought up to protect profits.

Also, small families doing all their housework isolated from one another involves a lot of waste. Imagine a block of 100 flats, each with its own washing machine, spin-drier and so on, being used only 1/100 of the time, and breaking down and being replaced every year or two. The amount of production, work and raw materials needed, in factories and in homes, could be cut down enormously in a sane society, at the same time as everyone is guaranteed free access to these facilities. A real improvement in the comfort and enjoyment of living for working people could be combined with responsible conservation of energy, materials and labour.

Air conditioners have been invented which clean houses automatically. Commercial building interests have suppressed a new building material which insulates so well that heating isn't needed. Nuclear fusion power could be developed and would provide inexhaustible quantities of pollution-free energy - but the work on it is under military secrecy and has been starved of funds as a result of pressure exerted by oil and coal interests. Computers, automation and cybernation could be used to monitor and satisfy human needs, instead of being wasted on keeping accounts, and guiding space-shots and nuclear missiles.

(Comment - Someone at the Seminar had worked at Harwell, an atomic research station, on fusion power. He pointed out to me the dangers of the process and the huge heat emission involved, "thermal pollution"; also that so much energy has to be put in to reach the necessary temperatures that it's not worth the trouble - a sort of perpetual motion machine problem. So we may be relying on decentralised wind, solar and geothermal energy.)

At the moment automation is a threat to us. We can only live by selling our mental and physical energies to employers, so if they automate, they do it by throwing us out of our jobs. So let's get rid of forced labour for employers - the wages system, and run our lives without bosses by free cooperation.

In deciding what to produce and how much, people in Socialist society will not decide on some growth rate, and then grow all activities by that much. In making an important decision, they'll consider all possible effects of producing something :-

- How much do we want it? Could we do without it, and how?
- How much would we need or want to produce, and how would we distribute it?
- How much of what kinds of work would be required? Would we enjoy the work?
- Would too much of scarce raw materials be used up?
- What other effects will the decision have on our environment, and on how we live?

People will weigh up all such questions through a process of democratic discussion, based on the fullest easily available information. Computers and telecommunications can be used to put them in touch with information and one another when holding their discussions. It will then be up to them to make the decision of what and how much to produce, which will best meet their present and future needs, as individuals and as a community. Of course it won't be possible for everyone to be involved in every decision, but the more basic and far-reaching the effects that the decision is likely to have on people's way of life, the greater the number of people who will want and be able to take part in it - whether at local, industrial, regional, continental or world level.

So though the people of Socialist society will take all vital factors into consideration, the total quantity of industry (growth) will not be one of them. When the Workers' Councils are just beginning to organise the new system of production, some less useful branches of industry will be reduced, destroyed or converted to more useful purposes. Some branches of production will be re-organised on a new basis. Others will be expanded so that every human being in the world is adequately fed, clothed, housed and cared for. Even though the amounts produced of some things will go up, the enormous waste of capitalism will be abolished, and things will last very much longer.

No longer is there any need, taking the world as a whole, for an enormous increase in the quantity of the means of production. What we need is a new way of life, in which we can use rationally for our own benefit the means of production which we have already built up.

So we don't face hard choices between cutting living standards and destroying the environment. By using modern technology to the full in a genuine Socialist society we can at the same time

- cut out most pollution, conserve raw materials sensibly, and enjoy a healthier and more beautiful environment ;
- reduce greatly the amount of hard and boring work which we have to do, and control our own working lives ;
- make freely available enough high-quality goods and services to live in comfort and security throughout the whole world.

Let's have our cake and eat it! It can be done, but if we leave it too long to get together for a Socialist revolution, we won't have the cake left at all. Why not?

(P.S. I've changed and added bits as I've typed this, so it's not exactly the same leaflet as I handed out.)

NOTES ON RUSSIAN SOCIETY AND STATE CAPITALISM

Analyses of modern Russian society fall into four categories. Similar considerations apply to Mao's China, East Europe, Cuba etc.

1. Russia as a classless society;
2. Russia as an "ordinary" capitalist society;
3. Russia as a special new type of capitalist society - State capitalism;
4. Russia as a non-capitalist class society - bureaucratic society.

I am arguing that the last two both reflect aspects of reality, and must be synthesised.

1. Russia as a classless society is still by far the most common view, shared by everyone outside the "ultra-left". The official Soviet view has been that Russia, since a working class revolution in 1917, passed through a period of working class supremacy (dictatorship of the proletariat), then built Socialism (considered a lower stage of the classless society), and is now making the transition to Communism (the supposed higher stage). This is the view of fellow-travellers in the West and Third World, and also of most opponents of the Russian regime, who attack it as an example (typical or distorted) of Socialism. For example, the charge that the regime destroys individuality assumes that this is the result of an egalitarian society rather than of a class society.

A variant of the classless-society theory is the orthodox Trotskyist idea of the degenerated or deformed workers' State, with a ruling bureaucratic "caste", which allegedly does not own the means of production and so is not a class.

2. Russia is clearly not Socialist/Communist in the real sense of the words. But neither is it a capitalist society on the model of Marx's "Capital", in which the means of production are owned by different capitalists (individuals, corporations, trusts) who compete in a free (more or less) market to buy labour power and sell commodities at a profit, thus accumulating capital in rivalry with one another. The delusion that this state of affairs prevails in Russia is probably held only by some members of The Socialist Party of Great Britain.

3. The theory that Russia is State capitalist is held in more or less vague terms by most members of the SPGB, by "neo-Trotskyists" like the International Socialists, and by anarcho-communists like the Association of Anarchist Workers (sorry - Anarchist Workers Association, used to be the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists).

In its most explicit forms, the theory takes account of the fact that the Russian State and Party bureaucracy collectively controls the means of production (bureaucratic ownership) in order to accumulate the State capital, in competition with non-Russian capitals. An essential part of this process is the production of commodities for sale on the world market. State capitalism is a further development of monopoly capitalism, in which an entire national State becomes a giant corporation. The large, but subordinate, private sector in Russia is neglected for simplicity.

Western bourgeois theorists and traditional Trotskyists such as the International Marxist Group attack the concept of State capitalism, on the grounds that production within Russia is not determined by an internal market, but is a command economy controlled by bureaucrats. These criticisms are based on a misunderstanding, possibly deliberate. "State capitalism" does not mean that there are market relations among separate capitals within Russia. It means that such relations exist between the national capital as a whole, united by the State, and other capitals in the world.

But the use of the statement "Russian society is State capitalism" implies that Russia, taken in isolation, is a special kind of capitalism - whereas the capitalist aspect of Russia can only be understood in the context of world capitalism. The problem is the anachronistic ideology of nationalism, shared by so many "marxists", according to which different countries have different social systems, with international connections seen as secondary. We must escape from nationalism to see world capitalism as a whole, with the competing States and firms as constituent parts.

"State capitalism" as a description must be understood as shorthand not for "a new kind of capitalist society they have in Russia", but for "a State-controlled unit of world capitalism" - a State capital. The rulers of Russia do not by themselves constitute a "Russian capitalist class", since this implies capitalist relations among themselves. But collectively they are a part of the world capitalist class.

Consider a giant multinational concern like Fords or ICI. Different top managers do not relate to one another as competing capitalists, but as officials who cooperate (more or less) in collectively running Fords or ICI capital in competition with other capitals, e.g. the Russian State. If an ideology had arisen which claimed that different multinational corporations had different social systems which explain their rivalry, then we might be arguing the exact class nature of ICI or IBM in the same way as we do that of Russia or China. If we reluctantly admit the usefulness in some contexts of speaking about a specifically Russian, or ICI-ish, social system, then these separated systems are not capitalist but hierarchical or bureaucratic. Their internal relations are those of control by a bureaucratic, not a capitalist, class.

4. The Solidarity group, James Burnham ("The Managerial Revolution"), and the Polish dissidents Kuron and Modzelewski ("Open Letter to the Party") are among those who see Russia as a new non-capitalist form of class society, with a managerial or bureaucratic ruling class - bureaucratic collectivism, totalitarian society etc.

This concept accounts for important aspects of the internal structure of State capital, while neglecting its place in world capitalism. Thus it includes what the concept "State capitalism" excludes, and excludes what "State capitalism" includes. The Solidarity group is so exclusively obsessed with bureaucratic relationships (order-givers and order-takers) that they jettison the socialist attack on capitalist market relations, which they appear to wish to conserve in their market "socialism" of competing "Workers Councils". (Maybe Solidarity will progress away from this.)

To what extent does the bureaucratic internal structure generate aims different from "rational" profit-making capitalist aims? During the period of autarky (relative isolation from the world market so as to protect developing industry) the capitalist pressures are not those of immediate competition, but only the long-term need to accumulate capital in order to compete, both commercially and militarily, later on. This allows bureaucratic distortions like the destruction of skilled manpower in purges and the imposition of impossible targets in plans, which are irrational from the viewpoint of capitalist profit.

As Russia becomes a great capitalist power and autarky is reduced, such distortions become intolerable - thus destalinisation. The schemes of Liberman, Sik etc ("market socialism") aim to make the constituent enterprises of the State capital more responsible to the overall profitability of the national economy by rewarding their managers (and workers?) for their contribution to the national profit.

This is a form of internal accounting. It does not introduce internal competition in the capitalist sense (compare accounting between Ford factories, say) but gears the operation of the parts of the concern more closely to the profit requirement of the whole. It does, however, involve a transfer of power from the central political bureaucracy to the decentralised managerial section of the privileged class. The centralists who resist economic reform in Russia thus represent the purely bureaucratic aspect of the economy, while the reformers represent its capitalist aspect.

Further points

The Contradictions of State Capitalism

The Socialist programme is a product of the internal contradictions of capitalist society, between the forces of production, rotten-ripe for a cooperative society which can use them rationally, and the restrictive and wasteful relations of production. If capitalism were a basically stable system which could resolve its contradictions, then Socialism would be utopian - that is, just an idea of a better society rather than the way by which the working class can solve the pressing problems of their situation and fulfil their human needs.

Theorists of bureaucratic or managerial society like Burnham and Orwell fear that the emergence of bureaucratic society stabilises social relations, reducing Socialism to a utopia. Trotsky also saw this as a possibility - see "Solidarity" vol. 7 no. 11. This neglects the contradictions of world capitalism, which influence the national bureaucratic sub-system more and more, and which State control cannot eliminate.

However, even if somehow a world State were introduced - an integral State "capital" which is no longer a capital with the end of competition, but a world bureaucratic order, as discussed by Bukharin - we have evidence from Russia etc that bureaucratic relations also generate social conflicts, waste of resources and so on. Socialism is the only social order which suits advanced productive technology. Thus bureaucratic relations of production are no less in contradiction with the forces of production than capitalist relations. Class struggle would only take different forms.

DRAFT STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The following statement was agreed as a draft for discussion by members from Aberdeen, Hull and London, on 19th January 1975. Please send all comments and suggested revisions to Aberdeen Group.

Modern society is dominated by a minority, the capitalist class, which controls the means of producing and distributing wealth (such as factories, laboratories, telecommunications) as individual, corporate and state property. Those excluded from such control are the working class, who are forced to sell their mental and physical energies to the capitalist class for wages and salaries in order to live; and also such oppressed groups as peasants.

The capitalist class is divided into rival companies, trusts, nations, and blocks. These compete in selling goods and services, produced by exploiting the working class, at a profit on the world market. The purpose of production for each company, nation etc. is to accumulate its capital (means of production) by the realisation of profit. Capitalist competition generates enormous waste, environmental damage crises and wars.

Since about the turn of the century, when capitalism came to dominate the whole world, it has been a dangerously obsolete system of society. This is because the technology and productive resources have been developed which provide a material basis for a freer way of life, whilst the oppressions and conflicts of capitalism hold back social progress, and threaten human survival with nuclear destruction and destruction of the environment.

Countries such as Russia and China, in which the means of production are collectively controlled by the state bureaucracy, are not socialist but State capitalist. State capitalism is the dominant trend in the concentration of capital into fewer and ~~fewer~~ larger units.

Against the requirements of the capitalist class, workers try to defend or advance their standards and conditions of life, to express and assert their needs as human beings, and to weaken capitalist control of themselves and the means of production. There is no valid division between 'defensive' and revolutionary working class struggle. Just as people can engage in the conflict over wages and find confidence and understanding from their experience which can lead them to question the system more generally, the prospect of a communist society gives confidence to those consciously involved in challenging the system as a whole. This class struggle includes all areas of social life—employment, education, the community, the family, the conflict of ideas, personal relationships etc.

In communist society the means of production, and, social affairs in general, are democratically controlled by the whole people to satisfy the human needs of the community. This involves production for use instead of for profit, and the abolition of the wages system, national frontiers and the coercive state.

Because capitalism is a world system, revolutionary change to the new society must occur on a world scale. The change can only be made by the conscious, autonomous, democratic organisation and self activity of the majority of the working class and peasantry in all areas of social life. Probably the most important form of organisation will be directly democratic councils of revolvable workplace and neighbourhood delegates.

(continued foot page 23)

European workers since 1905 (see LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM No.6). As a result of our activities we were eventually expelled from the SPGB by a vote of approximately 152 to 42. We now form part of a new political grouping which is in the process of developing its own coherent political theory.

W.R. are perhaps partly justified in their "attack" on us in so far as our reference to them as "sectarian" in our last issue was not backed up by a very lengthy analysis. Nevertheless we did criticise them as fellow socialists since we have the same objective as W.R. and also have many basic ideas in common. Despite this W.R. refuses to recognise us as their comrades in a common struggle and to this extent prove their sectarianism.

We hope to keep LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM going as a discussion journal, and in this issue we are publishing further criticisms of W.R.'s approach, though we do not necessarily agree with them all as a group.

Mike Ballard.

other publications

pamphlets

TWO SOCIALIST SHORT STORIES.

3p + postage

The Sam Packer story, by W. Walters
Balmurdie, by Tom Hubbard

MARX'S EARLY WRITINGS.

3p + postage

A few copies of LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM 6 are still available, free but please send 4½p stamp for postage. Articles mainly on Workers Councils. Sorry - all earlier issues out of print.

NOTE: We hope to be bringing out a more propagandist paper in the near future. For further details and enquiries about subscriptions etc. write to Aberdeen Group.

DRAFT STATEMENT CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE.

A genuine socialist group does not try to manipulate or gain power over workers, but works to democratise both itself and other working class organisations and activity. It does not propagate socialism as a doctrine, but tries to clarify the connection of and unite fragmented struggles with one another and with the socialist objective. It works against barriers to a free society based on sex, homosexuality, occupation, education, nationality, race and age, both within itself and in the working class as a whole.

a letter

We have received a very interesting letter from a member of the Socialist group For Ourselves (P.O. Box 754, Berkeley, California 94701, USA). This extract is an individual response to us, and does not necessarily reflect the views of everyone in the group.

In general, I liked your Journal, particularly the fact that it was an expression of dialogue and not a mere megaphone for an already-determined set of "positions" to be broadcast to the eager ears of the proletariat, a la World Revolution. I especially enjoyed the articles by Bob Miller and David Barnsdale for their criticism of "councilism" as an ideology and their understanding of the dialectic of the form and content of the communist revolution. The criticism of WR in the lead article was also good. One phrase from it has stuck in my mind and led me to do a lot of thinking:

"This is the view of romantics who ... see workers as a sort of latent elemental force rather than as human beings."

Precisely, comrades! I think this view originates not only in "separation from the working class" but in the particular conditions under which communist theory was preserved and defended by small groups during the long Thermidor after 1923. Seeing the class en masse integrated into capitalism via the Communist Parties, the Social Democracy and the Trade Unions, it is not surprising that these inheritors of the old ultra-left tradition should come in time to view the working class in such an abstract and apocalyptic way, which is really a new version of kautskyism - the proletariat as the tiger which must be ridden by the party, which injects it with "theory" and "positions" at the crucial moment. It is also not surprising that Internationalism/R.I./W.R./ Accion Proletaria have backslid into such idiocies as talking about "the generalisation of wage-labour before its abolition" as the lower stage of communist society, and even proposing a "negotiating State" "controlled" by the councils. Tell me the difference between this and Lenin in State and Revolution and I'll send you a cigar!

However, I tend to draw slightly different conclusions from this critique than you do. I agree with WR that no majority (or even close to majority) organisations of the class are possible any longer outside of the onset of a generalised and thoroughgoing revolt. I think that since 1914 it has really been impossible for class-in-itself and class-for-itself tendencies to coexist in the same organisation, because the class can no longer unite around any program but the program of its own abolition as a class. All increases in the standard of survival of one sector of the class globally speaking have been, since 1914, at the expense of another sector. This is true both within national economies and outside and between them.

What this means in strategic terms is that the communist "party" will be until the moment of revolution itself a minority organisation - not a tiny sect, but an omniculturalised (see our text Too Little, Too Late?) international organisation of thousands or tens of thousands of revolutionary proletarians, agitating, arguing, exchanging information

and analysis, overthrowing both internally and externally the conditioning which facilitates the old social relations and which these relations in turn perpetuate.

I think the key to understanding what is wrong both with "Leninism" (a term which needs historical clarification among communists) and nearly all anarchism is what Marx meant when he talked about "the real movement which abolishes the present state of things" (The German Ideology Part I). That is, the contradictions of capitalism themselves generate a movement, a tendency, which is indeed latent in every proletarian, and which surfaces as the attempt to overthrow capitalist relations and establish communist ones. This is not some idea of an "elemental force" - on the contrary, it asserts the real unity of theory and practice. The reason WR are forced to see workers as an "elemental force" is because they don't understand that there is a qualitative break between the movement of the class-in-itself and a class for Capital, the movement to improve conditions for this or that sector and to regulate the price of labour-power, and the communist movement itself. WR imagines that a simple quantitative escalation of demand struggles will be "forced" to become revolutionary in order to win, because capitalism can no longer grant these demands. Alas for WR, history since 1914 has dashed this fond hope again and again, notably in Germany between 1923 and 1933, when demand struggles failed again and again, and the workers, far from becoming revolutionary, abandoned the KPD and the Social Democracy in droves only to become Nazis! Wilhelm Reich understood many of the reasons for this, but he didn't understand capitalist social relations very well in many important respects.

We might say, then, that the class-in-itself movement is engendered by the contradiction between the interest of capitalism as a whole, which is to pay for labour-power at its value and to expand the reproduction of the whole system, and the interest of any given capital, which is to drive down the price of labour-power in order to maximise profit. The communist movement, on the other hand, is engendered by deeper contradictions, namely, the contradictions between the objective socialisation of production and the heteronomy of the world market, between socialised labour and privatised commodity consumption, between the relations of production (wage-labour and value-relations in general) and the productive forces (needs and creativity of the producers), between use-value and value.

These latter contradictions have reached a far more advanced stage than they had in the '30s, precisely because of the "solutions" developed by the capitalist class which enabled them to end the Depression with World War II (great solution, huh?) and initiate an era of the most monstrously deformed and anti-human "prosperity" at the expense of the workers and peasants of the "Third World". It is now clear to more and more of our class that the world is literally coming to an end, that none of the old ways will do any more, that there is no future in capitalism, however reformed or modified. This is not merely the crisis of capitalism, but the crisis of all prehistory, all forms of class society.

This last is an awareness which I feel is generally lacking in your publications, at least what I've seen of them so far. Along with this lack is another - I don't see any attempt to analyse the present crisis, to understand the forces which are pitching us into a new depression and very likely into World War III. This lack seems to lead in turn to a certain formalism, an excessive concern with organisation and structures like delegation and so forth. I am very sensitive to this tendency because my own organisation has until recently been

definitely susceptible to it! I am, actually, rather surprised that you published Terry Liddle's article at all, except possibly as a kind of negative example, an example of what monstrous contradictions and confusions "councilist" formalism leads to. You make some good criticisms of Liddle's article, true, but I don't think you get to the root of what's wrong with it - namely, the lack of understanding of the difference between capitalist and communist social relations. Liddle really sounds as if he wants councils to manage the existing world, the existing type of production, as if "councils" were an end in themselves and not simply a regrettably necessary means of overcoming the separations imposed by the capitalist ordering of social space. We will need councils because Capital has broken production down into enterprises, separated production from consumption geographically and socially, and has tended more and more to shape production in a way for which communist society can have no possible use (e.g. auto production, armaments, large areas of packaging and "service" industries, and the bureaucracy).

Capitalism socialised production, but only part-way. It is the task of the councils to complete this socialisation via communist (non-commodity) relations, by breaking down the separations between enterprises, neighbourhoods, countries etc organisationally so as to be able to do it concretely, that is, by transforming the whole "layout" of society. The councils will be superseded by new forms of organisation that we can only guess at, because they will emerge from a world that we cannot even imagine in any detail, a world shaped by the imperative of "the full and free development of each individual" (Marx, Communist Manifesto). The lead article understands this point well enough, come to think of it: but Liddle doesn't and I'm not at all sure Newell does either, since he seems to like Bookchin so much. I'm puzzled that he can reconcile Bookchinism with the "familiarity" he claims with the work of Marx and Engels. Bookchin explicitly wants to go back to autarky, which is quite impossible. Otherwise, most of Newell's article is fairly sensible, and illuminating at times.

In conclusion, I think you should be cautious about how you "relate communism to a continuous trend in the class struggle". The question is - which continuous trend? There is the struggle of the class-in-itself for better conditions, which by itself has nothing to do with communism. Only when in the course of these struggles does a communist tendency emerge, a tendency to transform social relations, to begin communising, is there a link between communism and the class struggle. The communist movement is not always present, and we must know when it is not and say so. To do otherwise is to fall back into Leftism.

WORTH READING

The History of the Mahknovite Movement -- P. Archinov
The Unknown Revolution -- Voline.
Marxism and Freedom -- Raya Dunayevskaya
Acceptance of Authority -- Stanley Milgram (psychological experiments)
Mao Unrehearsed -- Stuart Schram (secret speeches)
Meet Your Friendly Social System -- Peter Laurie
Low Intensity Operations -- Bdr. F. Kitson (use of Army in defeating civil disobedience, strikes, and insurgency)

"World Revolution" —

Luxemburg + Lenin

Since the May events in France in 1968 there has been a revival of groups advocating the establishing of Socialism (correctly understood as a world-wide, frontierless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society) through the action of workers councils. The group largely responsible for re-publishing these ideas is undoubtedly the Situationists, though other small groups, which have survived since the 1920's, also played a part. Whatever the reason, recent years have seen the re-emergence of groups actually standing for socialism, and rejecting as state capitalist any vision of future society which retains the state, wages system, etc.

One of these groups in Britain is 'World Revolution', the first issue of whose journal was published in May 1974. An examination of their statement of "perspectives" will enable the weaknesses as well as the advances of their position to be brought out.

WR clearly understand socialism (or communism) in the same sense as Marx did. The proletariat, they say, must

"attack the real source of capitalist exploitation - the law of value - by smashing wage labour, production for profit and all the expressions thereof (banks, money, frontiers) and commence production for use and the free distribution of all goods, subject only to rationing in case of any temporary shortages" (p.16)

Capitalism, they say, ended its historically progressive phase "with the creation of a technological basis which could abolish scarcity and of an international proletariat capable of overthrowing world capitalism" (p.3) This phase ended with the 1914/18 world slaughter, itself a bloody demonstration that capitalism was entering its period of decline or "decadence".

So far, so good, but WR attach a fundamental importance to their concept of capitalist decadence. Indeed they would seem to want to make it the mark that distinguishes them from all other groups.

For them capitalist decadence is essentially a question of the capitalist class no longer being able to find markets on which to sell their goods at a profit. On this point WR follow the mistaken views of Rosa Luxemburg:

"As Rosa Luxemburg showed, surplus value cannot be realised within the context of a purely capitalist economy" (p.4)

This is just not so. As Marx showed, surplus value could indeed be realised within a purely capitalist economy, i.e. an economy composed exclusively of capitalists and wage workers without any third, non-capitalist elements to constitute an external market for the goods produced by the wage workers. Luxemburg's argument against Marx in her Accumulation of Capital is based on an elementary theoretical error. Without going into too much detail, her mistake was to completely ignore new capitalist investment when working out the total effective demand (or market) under capitalism. For her, the market for the net annual product was composed just of the demand of workers and capitalists for consumer goods. Thus while the product was made up of the wages of the workers and the surplus value of the capitalists, the market for it, within pure capitalism, was made up by the wages of the workers plus the element of surplus value consumed by the capitalists. The rest of the surplus value, the greater part in fact, destined for re-investment, could not be "realised", i.e. could find no market. According to this reasoning capitalism had to find external markets. Eventually however

these external markets would be saturated. At that point capitalism would begin to collapse; the era of capitalist decadence would have dawned.

WR uncritically endorse this mistaken analysis. In fact the part of the surplus value re-invested also, as it were, creates its own market in the form of a demand for producer (as opposed to consumer) goods. The market under capitalism is not just made up of consumer demand, as Luxembourg believed, but of consumer demand plus investment. Her mistake in fact puts her, from the point of view of Marxian economics, on a par with the various currency crank schools which flourish during depressions.

To say that in theory capitalism could survive as a pure system is not to say that it ever has. External^{on} capitalist markets have obviously allowed capitalism to expand faster than it would have done if it had to rely on its own internal market; indeed it could be argued that capitalism would never have got off the ground but for the existence of external markets. Nor is it to say that production and market demand under capitalism are always equal in the short run and that the accumulation of capital is, or could be, a smooth crisis-free process (crisis are caused by other factors than a supposed permanent underconsumption; by a fall in the rate of profit provoked by various factors, particularly over-accumulation but also, at times over-production of consumer goods). It is simply to say that people like Luxembourg and WR overstate their case.

The fact that capitalism is not in a permanent crisis of underconsumption due to the saturation of external markets does not in the least detract from the fact that since about the time of the first world slaughter capitalism has fulfilled its "historic" task of paving the way for socialism/communism and has therefor become a reactionary, decadent system.

In any event, if Luxembourgs analysis were correct, capitalism should have completely collapsed years ago. WR explains its survival in terms of waste, both physical destruction (as in wars) and the production of socially useless objects (such as arms). They appear not to know that Luxembourg herself rejected the argument that arms spending could save capitalism from collapse on the grounds that arms spending was financed at the expense of working class consumption. This is in fact not so (it is essentially a charge on the surplus value of the capitalist class), but at least she recognised that once she conceded that capitalists could bring about, what from her point of view, was an expansion of the internal market in this sort of way then she undermined her whole theory. WR are not quite so consistent. They cling to a collapse-of-capitalism type theory because they depend on this big slump to generate the majority socialist consciousness they hold to be necessary before socialism can be established. Without such a crisis, they believe, and the increased physical poverty this brings, the working class will not be forced to overthrow capitalism.

This theory allows WR to, in effect, sit back and wait for the collapse of capitalism, in the meantime publishing abstract theoretical articles (some of high quality admittedly) and pouring scorn on the tentative attempts of groups of workers to fight back against the system. They even use the old argument against industrial action on the wages front, long ago demolished by Marx in Value, Price and Profit, (1865) that a wage increase for one group of workers involves a wage decrease for another:

"if some part of the class at certain times can fight for and get a wage increase or some such 'reform', the historic bankruptcy of capitalism demands that this be eroded or taken away immediately either from those same workers or other sections of the class through inflation, higher productivity quotas, overtime or taxation" (p.11)

Certainly the wages struggle is essentially a defensive rearguard action against the downward pressures exerted under capitalism. But this struggle is vital for workers to be capable of launching any wider movement.

This in fact is the whole point. The working class acquire the Knowledge,

confidence and ability to carry out the socialist revolution, not as a sort of automatic reaction to a big slump, but as a result of their experience of struggle under capitalism. Socialist consciousness will be the outcome of working class struggle against capitalism, as it becomes more and more conscious of what it is; a struggle to assert social control over the means of production in the interests of the whole community.

WR's too narrow conception of who are the working class has already been criticised. For them the working class is composed only of those directly engaged in productive labour; other wage and salary earners have an interest in ending capitalism but the pressures on them to act against it are not so immediate as those of productive workers. Hence they see the latter as being the spearhead or "vanguard" of the revolution. Even so WR concede that the other groups will also form "councils" and play a part, through them, in overthrowing capitalism. The working class according to the Marxian view however, is composed of all those who, excluded from ownership and control of the means of production, are forced to sell their mental and physical energies for a wage or salary in order to live. In the industrialised parts of the world, the great majority of the population are working class in this sense and all parts of them have an equal role to play, through democratic self-organisation, in the socialist revolution.

A further point that casts doubt on whether WR really has an adequate conception of the socialist revolution as a conscious majority revolution is their attitude to the bolshevik party and their coup of Oct 1917. The bolshevik coup is described as "one of the highest moments of the proletarian revolution" (p.7) and the bolshevik party at that time as "a proletarian organisation" (p.14). Actually this nonsense is quite at variance with the logic of the rest of their theory and is to be explained in terms of opportunism: WR in Britain wants to pursue the same line as the French group Revolution Internationale, which dogmatically insists on this view of Lenin and the bolsheviks. But it should be clear now that both in theory and practice, the bolshevik party was right from the start committed to the state capitalist industrialisation of Russia; for does not Lenin's distinction between vanguard and masses, leaders and led etc, reflect and prefigure the division of society into a privileged and an exploited class? Any illusions on this point must be ruthlessly opposed.

But to be fair, WR's conception of the revolution is quite different from Lenin's. According to them, in the crisis the workers will form councils, on a geographical as well as an industrial basis, which will come to challenge defeat the bourgeois state machine. Political power will then have passed into the hands of the working class, organised in armed workers councils. This rule of the armed workers councils they describe as the dictatorship of the proletariat, whose task they see as immediately to destroy the wages system, the market, money, etc.

Like many such groups WR is dogmatically anti-parliamentary, insisting that at no stage and under no circumstances should the democratically organised working class ever contest elections or send delegates to the elective institutions of the bourgeois state. The fact is that today we cannot predict, and should not try to predict, the exact course of the future socialist revolution. It is sufficient to insist that it must be a conscious, majority, political affair, leaving it up to the working class itself to settle particular tactics in the light of the particular circumstances that exist at the time.

A. CONTRIBUTOR.

World Revolution reply

Contrary to the assertions of LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM which has seen fit to attack us in the article signed by Steven Stefan in No.6 of the magazine ("The Need for a Revolutionary Movement") we in World Revolution do not hold that we are the bearers of some eternal and unchanging truth lying outside the class struggle. Almost as soon as we had published our political platform our continuing dialogue with fractions and individuals in our general tendency made us aware of a number of inadequate and imprecise formulations in the platform and in a wider sense we are perfectly aware that a "final" elaboration of the communist programme is impossible because the communist programme is an expression of the living movement of proletariat in the class struggle and any group that holds that it possesses the final answer at any stage automatically leaves the movement and becomes an obstacle to it.

As a part - we think a vital part - of that movement we welcome any principled criticism from comrades who want to make a contribution to its overall development. Unfortunately there is nothing principled in the way L.C. attacks us in No.6. Instead you have recourse to the familiar technique of giving an entirely false picture of our politics without any quotations from our actual texts, and then attacking us from the point of view of that false picture. Not one serious political criticism is offered. Instead we have a series of dogmatic assertions without any analysis, any example, any attempt at historical understanding. Worst of all our "sectarianism" is compared to that of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. This is the height of dishonesty. We have on several occasions made public our complete opposition to the S.P.G.B., but to our knowledge some if not all of the members of L.C. are members, however dissident of the S.P.G.B., an organisation full of nice well meaning people no doubt, but a completely degenerate bourgeois organisation which can only play a counter-revolutionary role within the working class, especially through its endless propagation of the parliamentary and 'democratic' fraud. Before bracketing us, or any other communist group which has elaborated a revolutionary critique of parliamentarianism, with the S.P.G.B. you should make your own relationship to that reactionary group quite clear in front of the working class as a whole.

We will attempt to deal with the points raised in your "critique" even though some of the attacks you make on us are so distorted and incoherent that they can hardly be answered in their own terms.

First of all we are not quite the isolated bunch of fanatics you present us as, though you would be right in presenting our general political tendency as being completely outside what you generously accept as part of the "revolutionary movement" (57 varieties of 'libertarians', SPGB, 'womens', 'gays' and students liberation, shop stewards, etc.). In addition to Internationalism our specific tendency includes Revolution Internationale in France, Internacionalismo in Venezuela and Accion Proletaria in Spain; and there are a number of communist groups whom we relate to as part of the same general tendency, such as Workers Voice, Revolutionary Perspectives and others. In attacking us you are attacking the whole communist tendency, of which we cannot consider you a part while you continue to play the confusionist role you are playing now. We are indeed an international tendency, a secretion of the international waves of class struggle since 1968 and 'our' positions have become more and more widespread since then.

It is true that we assert that no 'permanent organisation by workers in their own interests is now possible under capitalism'. The whole experience of the working class this century is that every attempt to organise itself whether through parties, soviets, or rank and file strike committees is faced with the choice of either a total confrontation with the system or being co-opted into the totalitarian apparatus of capitalism. The Left Communists of the early twenties, especially the KAPD, believed it was possible for general organisations of the class to exist on a more-or-less permanent basis within, but against, capitalism. But the decomposition of the factory organisations they advocated proved them wrong. Since then, again and again organisations which were genuine secretions of the workers in struggle have been recuperated by capital once the original struggle has died down: whether workers councils and factory committees in Poland and Hungary 'legalized' by the state, or the base committees which emerged in factories and neighbourhoods in the Italian Struggles of '69, and today serve only as vehicles for the leftist manipulators. The only organisations of the class which have survived permanently this century have been small political groups who have remained committed to the communist programme.

You do not attempt to analyse why it is that workers' organisations are being continually co-opted. Instead of locating this process against the objective background of capitalist decadence and permanent counter-revolution, you merely advocate the creation of new permanent organisations, one after the other, just as the Trotskyists go through endless attempts to 'capture' the unions without ever understanding (because they are a fraction of capital) why the working class cannot capture the unions, even though the Trotskyists might succeed here and there.

You pompously accuse us of being 'unable to relate communism to any continuous trend in the class struggle' of failing 'to expose the connection of the communist aim with the existing struggle of the working class to assert their human needs within capitalism'.

On the contrary, it is you who fail to make this connection. You want to see the working class go through endless attempts to organise itself on a permanent basis without explaining why capital cannot tolerate any autonomous organisation of the class this century. You fail to explain that it is precisely because workers cannot assert their human needs under capitalism that communism is an absolute necessity for the proletariat. We are communists not for fun but because only by making the communist revolution can the proletariat really defend its most elementary interests.

That is why our task is not ~~academic~~ theoretical abstraction but to play a part within the class struggle, to help develop and generalise its revolutionary potential, to explain its present limitations and overall goals. When workers in struggle continuously come up against unions, leftists, etc, we communists can only help to clarify the real nature of these organisations, i.e. as factions of capital which the class will have to destroy. When the working class time and again comes up against the impossibility of winning any real reforms from capital today we have to relate this to the historical bankruptcy of capitalism and the urgent necessity of the communist revolution.

We are completely opposed to the transcendental disdain which groups like the SPGB have for the daily struggles of the class and stress the necessity for the class to struggle in the most militant and independent manner possible and to learn from its experiences. Our specific task as communists is to relate the historical experience of the class, its own global theoretical understanding, to the day to day experience of the class; not to accept the atomised and diffused limitations of that day to day 'reality' but to help in the process whereby the proletariat unifies beyond and against those limitations. Because the only weapon the proletariat has is its ability to act with a conscious understanding

of its enemies and goals, the role of revolutionaries is primarily to help accelerate the growth of revolutionary consciousness; and it can only do that through intervening in the class with the highest possible degree of clarity. Any political group which disdains the search for clarity, and puts forward bits and pieces of the communist programme while continuing to spread the most appalling illusions about parliament, unions, etc., is only helping to spread confusion. This surely the most pernicious and dangerous thing about LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM; it mixes up counter revolutionary ideologies with isolated aspects of communism justifying it all with the familiar apology of the Left: 'we must not become cut-off from the "movement".' And indeed as part of the libertarian confusionist, 'alternative' left you are by no means cut-off from their movement.

WORLD REVOLUTION does not see its role as 'jumping in' with its theoretical clarity at the time of revolutionary crisis, though we hold that a major crisis is an indispensable precondition for revolution. It would be absurd to pretend that 'we' are going to activate the revolution in that sense. We do, however, consider that the crisis will force the working class to organise not only in councils but also to create a real communist party whose aim is not to 'take power' in the Leninist sense but to defend the communist programme within the working class, to act as the theoretical vanguard of the communist movement. This party will be a secretion of the class, and existing communist factions like W.R. will play a vital role in its formation. But we are not the party and we denounce anybody who claims that 'they are the party' at this stage of the class struggle.

You say that W.R. do 'not really consider themselves part of the working class' and have a romantic view of workers' ability to erupt into struggle. But precisely because we do consider ourselves to be part of the revolutionary class, we are confident that the revolutionary character of the class will be splendidly demonstrated by the class itself and that it will be none other than those workers who are 'normally' atomised and apathetic under capitalism who will become 'the vanguard of the revolution' - just as it is those same workers who have been at the forefront of the wildcat strikes and uprisings of the last few years. Moreover it is another misrepresentation to imply that W.R. holds that these workers 'in the normal course of events cannot defend their interests'. In a historic sense it is true that the working class cannot defend its interest under capitalism anymore and must destroy it. But at the same time the class does struggle, always, to defend itself and it organises those struggles in whatever way is necessary. What we are saying is that it must organise outside and against the unions and that it subsequently dissolves the organisations it creates in the heat of the struggle these new organs will play the same anti-working class role as unions. But the capacity for self-organisation of the class is permanent and inexhaustible, otherwise the proletariat would not be the revolutionary class.

Your comments on our vision of revolution are almost too grotesque to be dealt with at all. You imply that we are for a small elite, a ('pre-First International') Jacobin sect seizing power. This is a disgraceful distortion of our position. We have clearly stated our utter hostility to all forms of substitutionism, to any elite taking power 'on behalf of' the class. We have insisted that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself; that the form of the proletarian dictatorship is the total power of the workers councils, that communism is the creation of a whole social movement. In another article you quote from our comrades in INTERNATIONALISM in an approving way:

"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 institutionalised structures within capitalism without surrendering their form and content.' (INTERNATIONALISM No.2.). We re-affirm that workers' councils only exist at times of revolutionary crisis. This is not 'apocalyptic'. It is a sober appraisal of reality. We cannot, as the libertarians and libbers want to do, build communist 'forms' under capitalism. On the contrary every permanent organisation today, no matter how democratic in form (shop stewards, tenants associations, etc.) will become obstacles to the formation of workers councils and to the communist transformation. Every such organisation that exists today is part of the vast pile of rubbish which the workerscouncils will have to sweep away.

Revolution is a complete break with old habits and practices, a total onslaught on the whole of present day society. Similarly, when an individual becomes a revolutionary he must make a complete break with his whole political past. There is no continuity between the Left, whether in its openly state capitalist form or its libertarian appendages (ORA etc) - and the revolutionary movement. This is recognised not only by W.R. but by our whole general tendency. L.C. wants to play around with communist ideas while attempting to bridge the gulf which separates communism and Leftism. Because there is a class line between the two, that 'bridge' is nothing but a way of crossing class lines, and that is what L.C. is doing with its adhesion to the SPGB, its parliamentarianism and unionist mystification, its support for 'lib' movements and so on.

You can either go on playing this role - 'the extreme Left of the Left' or break completely with the whole Leftist cesspool, accepting all the consequences that go with it - commitment, a certain inevitable isolation, and so on. We don't say this because of our 'sectarian' or purist attitudes. Sectarianism only has meaning between members of the same movement. We are no more being sectarian in denouncing unions, stewards, leftists etc., than when we attack Heath, or Nixon, or Mao. We do not denounce other working class, communist, organisations. We do not denounce the proletariat. Our enemy is capital. Until such time as you understand the difference between the revolutionary class and its enemies we cannot consider you to be part of our movement and must continue to oppose you politically even though we are willing to discuss with individuals who are seriously interested in making a serious commitment to revolutionary politics.

WORLD REVOLUTION July 1974.

a reply

First, let's get clear our relationship with the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Those of us who prior to this edition of LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM had been responsible for the publication were a distinct "faction" inside the SPGB. We were opposed in particular to that organisations divorce of socialist politics from the everyday life of its members and the working class in general, and to its crude Parliamentarianism. We did not, like WORLD REVOLUTION virtually predict that workers would never, or could never make any use of Parliament, but we did firmly commit ourselves to the view that socialism could only be established by the conscious democratic self-organisation of the working class in all areas of social activity. In line with this view emphasis was placed on councils of revocable delegates based on the workplace and neighbourhood as the most likely form arising from the historical experience of