

VERBATIM

"They don't make years like that anymore. If it weren't for our efforts we'd have a president today sending troops off to exotic countries like Lebanon and Grenada and bombing cities like Tripoli".

ABBIE HOFFMAN
on 1968

"The British have never had much time for socialism but they have for most of their history been instinctive collectivists, in the benign sense that they are happiest when they are acting as part of or through groups".

ALAN WATKINS

"Although Solidarity was responsible for introducing 'Paul Cardan' and Socialisme ou Barbarie to British readers in the 1960s, by entirely shunning its Marxist past yet refusing to embrace any form of the anarchist tradition, eschewing it not only in name but also in terms of historical experience or philosophy, I personally do not find it surprising that it has failed to maintain an influentially independent libertarian position and condemned itself to a peripheral existence".

DAVID GOODWAY

"Anarchists in the modern world are about the only people who do not believe in terrorism and throwing large spherical bombs".

ALEX COMFORT

MOVING ON

Human hope or mechanical despair?

From MICHAEL FRIEDJUNG, Paris:

Recent issues have been interesting. The article on China (Solidarity 18) was perceptive. However, the article on the Labour Party in the last issue appeared naive.

The problems of today, as well as the hopes of today, are linked with the collapse of nineteenth-century ideologies. The idea of predictability has taken some hard knocks in the course of the twentieth century, but it has taken a long time for this conclusion to reach left-wing politics. It is for this reason that many debates on marxism are outdated. On the other hand, marxist 'mythology' has become less and less operational over the last few years. This is not the case only in western countries such as France; even the leaderships of the main 'communist' countries can no longer repeat the old propaganda. A vacuum has been created, which often tends to be filled with old nationalist and religious ideas.

The question is, can we fill the vacuum with anything else? Ideas do have a force. People's desire to change or not to change society is not only linked to material needs; it is also linked to their philosophy and what they believe to be the purpose of their lives. People need some understanding also of their social relations with other humans, with nature as well as with their ideals. If people think they are machines in interaction with other machines, the result will certainly not be a free society.

Regards

SOLIDARITY

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Vanguardism What if the poor can help themselves?

God Unmoved Why Rushdie has not been struck by lightning



deterioration of these facilities becomes inevitable.

Individuals and governments alike find themselves shackled by beliefs and traditions shaped centuries ago and totally out of touch with the modern world. This applies to Catholicism, Orthodox Judaism, Islam, and many other beliefs held by various tribes and religious sects. People who have been brought up in the West tend to underestimate the strong involvement of some religions with politics.

In the West the battle for separation of religion from politics and from the State has been won. Nearly all religious believers accept that religious beliefs are a personal affair and must not be imposed by law upon others. By contrast, Islam is a religion concerned with establishing a social community. It is a political religion, concerned with society as much as with the individual. It opposes the principle of separation of religion from politics. It has strong views on global politics. It struggles to ensure that religious law becomes and remains state law and aspires to conduct domestic and foreign policy according to religious principles. Most Westerners are unaware of the fact that the difficult struggle to separate religion from politics has yet to be won in many Islamic societies.

Even before the Satanic Verses affair many Muslims felt under attack by Western cultural values. This may come as a surprise to most Westerners. They fail to appreciate that the spread of Western culture and values (by means of Western technology) constitutes a threat to other cultures. Islam is not just a religious belief. It is the cultural core of many societies. It provides group identity and moral guidance. People in the Third World fear that the impact of the West will cause them to lose their group identity. Some worry about the erosion of their code of morality. Many Muslims consider Western att-

itudes towards women and sex as particularly offensive. Islam upholds a view of society - and Paradise - where the male is dominant. This applies to sex, law, economics, and family life. Sexual contact between people who are not married is considered a sin, and punished as such. It is a serious offence for a man (and even more so for a woman), sometimes punished by death. Women's sexual pleasure is a taboo subject. Women's liberation may well be the most explosive social issue in Islamic countries.

Family honour is a dominant value in Islamic societies. Its burden is carried mainly by the woman. A philandering man could be forgiven, because his act is not considered a serious stain on the honourable reputation of his family, but a woman's extramarital sex is considered intolerable, shaming of her entire family, and is unforgiveable. As Islam upholds these notions anything which challenges them constitutes a threat to the faith. Any view which tolerates extramarital sex (and fails to see it as a moral or legal offence) is considered 'corrupt', 'immoral', and an attack on the one and only 'righteous' attitude. Hence the feeling of many Muslims that 'the Crusades are not over'.

The Third World is keen to acquire Western technology. But it has been totally unaware of the fact that in doing so it imports a cultural Trojan Horse. Governments and individuals want the inventions of the West. These inventions are the products of science. But science itself is a product of a particular philosophy which leaves to God, at best, the role of the starting kicker-off. An individual can buy the products of science and ignore the philosophy. A society cannot. The maintenance of modern technology on a social scale requires widespread technological and scientific education which is inextricably linked to implicit philosophical principles. These

principles are incompatible with religious dogmas. For example, the principle of testing a theory (or a belief) by means of repeatable experiments is bound to downgrade beliefs which can never be tested by experiment.

Islamic civilization is defending itself against the impact of Western civilisation. It feels attacked and is indeed under attack, even though the West is not mounting any conscious attack on its beliefs and has no intention of doing so. It is the inventions of the West (which the Islamic world so desires) that constitute the cultural threat. A society which desires the fruits of Western civilisation cannot ignore its philosophical seeds. These seeds are 'culturo-active'. They radiate a different set of principles, values and beliefs. The Amish sect in the USA knew this and decided to isolate itself completely from all modern technology. A sect can do so, but a state cannot, particularly when it faces the possibility of armed conflict with another state. It is not merely TV, radio, aeroplanes and rockets which undermine traditional theistic beliefs; every product of science used on a social scale is a cultural agent contributing to the breakdown of traditional beliefs. All traditional cultures, beliefs, and morals - including those of the West itself - are undermined by modern technology.

Some of the responses of Iran's clergy to the legalistic attitude of Western governments in the Satanic Verses affair display symptoms of paranoia. Those in authority in Iran cannot grasp that no Western government can remain indifferent to a public incitement by the leading figure in a foreign country to assassinate one of their citizens or to burn bookshops selling a particular book. These people genuinely believe that there is a planned, co-ordinated, and well organised conspiracy by Western powers against Islam, and that Salman Rushdie's book is part of it.

Western analysts, on the other hand, are blinkered by their belief that religious and cultural anxieties are a mere pretext whereas 'power politics' are the 'real' issue. They interpret the Islamic response exclusively as manipulative moves in the political power game in the Islamic world. This too is a 'plot theory'. Both sides interpret the other's motives according to their own. The possibility that the other side could have a genuinely different notion of existence threatens them with the relativisation of their own notion.

There is an undeniable spiritual crisis in most societies today. The efforts to cling to traditional beliefs is one of its manifestations. The aggressive response of some beliefs is, in historical terms, a defensive move. An attempt to hang on to certainties which have served for many years is only to be expected. Though understandable, it is a useless effort. The inventions of modern science create actual social conditions (and confront humanity with problems) which have never existed before. Any belief systems (including secular ones) which fail to adapt to new conditions become irrelevant to people who live under totally new conditions. Adaptation means change, and change generates an on-going crisis of belief. Failure to adapt means isolation, stagnation and irrelevance. Groups who can't, or won't, change end as sects.

The examples of the North and South American Indians, the Japanese, the Jews, the African tribal cultures and the Eskimos all indicate that there are only two alternatives for traditional cultures in the modern world: isolation or assimilation. Any other way is a palliative, postponing the inevitable choice. All attempts to establish states based on traditional laws in the contemporary world are doomed. They are defensive attempts to preserve identities which are losing their

validity, and merely prolong the process of assimilation by a few decades. They often force the traditional cultures to adopt measures which discredit them in the eyes of their own adherents. Moreover, internal schisms within regimes based on traditional cultures are inevitable, adding confusion to loss of credibility. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that unlike a century ago, the West today cannot offer any meaningful substitute for beliefs which have become untenable. There is a spiritual void at the centre of Western civilisation. Moreover, Western philosophy, too, and even the philosophical foundations of theoretical science are themselves in a crisis. It is not an attractive situation for many Westerners either. But adherence to unconvincing beliefs is an act of self-deception which is even less attractive.

Islam was, originally, progressive in comparison with other creeds prevailing in Arabia at the time of its foundation. It is still concerned, more than other creeds, with the life of the community rather than the individual. It aspires to create a community based on social justice. One of the religious duties of the believer is the relief of the poor. However, it has never undergone a reformation, nor was there an ideological movement with a critique of Islam. Little has changed in Islam since the days of Muhammed. Given the current crisis of Western culture (which has ceased to inspire, spiritually, many of its own members) one can sympathise with the plight of Muslims who see their own culture undermined without any positive alternative to replace it.

Ayatollah Khomeini's victory in Iran and the declaration of an Islamic republic came as a total surprise to most Westerners, including academic specialists in the USA, USSR and Europe. A few have become wise after the event. Most have not. Marxists in particular (including Iranian marxists)

grossly underestimated Islam's political significance. They forgot Marx's observation that the critique of religion is the starting point of all social critique. They avoided a confrontation in the cultural domain, and devoted themselves to economic and political issues, refraining from making a critique of Islam for fear of antagonising the mass of the population.

Their thinking was - and still is - dominated by economic and political categories. They considered the cultural and spiritual issues as marginal elements of 'the superstructure'. But the Islamic leadership addressed itself to the cultural anxieties of the population, to its fear of losing its identity, to its rejection of Western culture and morality. The cultural campaign of Islam for preservation of traditional identity and morality was not challenged by the left. It was challenged by the Shah. When the Shah was defeated it was also the defeat of the Western values he had tried to impose. The victory of Khomeini meant that all atheist ideologies like socialism or marxism became targets for destruction. The subsequent massacre of the left in Iran was a foregone conclusion.

It is of the utmost urgency for the left in Islamic societies to provide a historical interpretation of Islam. This task is forced upon them by the ideological resurgence of Islam. In the absence of a historical interpretation of religion people will accept a religious interpretation of history. There can be no vacuum in this area, even when people are unaware of the fact that they accept - implicitly - one interpretation or another. When matters come to a head this metaphysical controversy is settled by the sword (as some Muslims openly declare). Many Iranian marxists discovered this truth too late in front of the religious firing squads.

Modern science undermines all traditional religions. No wonder that many believers feel fragile and defensive. However, some beliefs are more fragile than others. The fragility of Islam is demonstrated by the response to Rushdie's book. The vehement public outrage of many believers, especially the threats of physical violence, requires some analysis. A belief which needs laws, threats or violence to protect it from criticism, doubt or ridicule, is insecure and weak. Resorting to authority, loyalty, coercion, or punishment (in defence of any belief) reveals weakness, not strength. This applies to any creed, philosophy or dogma, including secular ones. Stalin's decision to kill Trotsky revealed his inability to produce ideas to counter Trotsky's. If you feel threatened by an idea and cannot defend yourself by a counter idea you may try to eliminate the author or the book, but it never works. An idea can only be defeated by another idea. Killing an author or banning books amounts in the long run to self-defamation. Book-burning has been practised by many religions and regimes; it never did away with an idea and degraded its perpetrators. When Trotsky was finally assassinated on Stalin's orders, it seemed - to shortsighted observers - as if Stalin had won. One need not be a prophet (or a trotskyist) to know that when the facts in the Stalin/Trotsky controversy are fully revealed Stalin will turn out to be the villain and Trotsky the martyr.

The spiritual strength of a belief depends on the motivation of the believers. If this motivation is based on fear or anxiety, on conditioning, loyalty of any kind, submission to any authority, or on suspension of one's own criticisms, then the believer will be very vulnerable to criticism or ridicule. There is an inherent weakness in any belief based on such considerations, and no threats against blasphemers can strengthen it. God is not upset by blasphemy - believ-

ers are. Believers who are outraged by blasphemy are defending themselves, not their God.

Conversely, if the belief is the result not of conditioning, fear or loyalty, but of inner, positive conviction, it will not feel itself threatened by ridicule or blasphemy. It will not need laws, punishment or violence against blasphemers, critics or reformers. The ancient Greeks and Romans already knew that an outraged response only revealed one's own weakness: "You are angry, Jupiter, hence you must be wrong".

The Islamic responses to Rushdie's book have created a new situation. It is no longer possible to keep silent about Islam. Socialists and atheist nationalists in Islamic societies have mostly held back from a cultural critique of religion. The Satanic Verses affair makes a continuation of this stance

Oscar Zarate



untenable. Islam has declared a cultural war on atheism. Atheist silence on Islam implies surrender and a step down the road to religious executions. It is now imperative to start a campaign of cultural critique of religion within Islamic societies.

A cultural critique of religion does not imply distortion, ridicule or abuse. What is required is a historical interpretation of the belief and of its origins, an accurate account of its main features and of its crises within its historical context, an analysis of its dogma, texts and internal contradictions. It requires factual information about its founders, based on archaeological and textual research. It requires a social and psychological analysis of its moral code, sexual attitudes, phantasies of paradise, taboos and notions of sin and of evil. Finally, it requires studies of similarities with and differences from other faiths. Factualisation must replace deification and demonisation.

A cultural critique never produces immediate results. It takes a generation or two before its effects are felt. But if one fails to make a start one cannot expect any results. Since Islam is not particularly tolerant towards its critics (especially those from within its own ranks) it takes a lot of courage to produce a critique. No wonder critics are so few. But what alternative is there?

Salman Rushdie rendered Islamic civilisation a historical service. Whether he intended it or not, he has started a process, a cultural controversy which - like a nuclear chain-reaction - cannot be stopped. This process, long overdue, required a suitable historical situation and a sensitive, knowledgeable, courageous insider to start it going. It cannot be stopped now. Rushdie's assassination would only make things worse for Islam. Islam

is stained by the threat alone; if the threat is carried out Islam will be stained in the eyes of most people on this planet, including many Muslims. The internal conflicts within Islam will reach an unprecedented pitch. Needless to say, all future Islamic incantations about the compassion and mercifulness of Allah will sound like one of Satan's jokes. If Islam needs to defend itself let it do so positively, by attracting people to its advantages, not by scaring them, by winning over the minds of its critics, not by assassinating them.

The left in Islamic societies is, unfortunately, wary of starting a cultural confrontation with Islam. Initiating such a critique (in addition to the political struggles against reactionary rulers) is extremely difficult. The trouble is that the left has also considered such a task irrelevant. The Iranian left has paid with its life for its silence on the religious issue during the Shah's time. Many argued that religion was a marginal issue, others that it was tactically wrong to start a cultural struggle against enemies of the Shah. Tactically this may have made sense at the time; but can one now ignore the full consequences demonstrated by the Iranian experience?

Those who believe in the existence of Allah must also believe in the existence of Satan. Who is afraid of Satan? Only those who believe in him. If - according to their belief - Satan exists and is so powerful, how can they be sure that the voice which tells them to fight him is not his own? Those who do not share this belief ought to follow Rushdie. They should publicise their own view about Satan, about those who believe in his existence, and about the origins and consequences of the belief itself. They may not avoid the fire beyond death, but they may, perhaps, avoid the fire this side of it.

More than just his master's voice



Camera Press

A new edition of 'What Is To Be Done?', Lenin's notorious bible of vanguard politics, prompts ROBIN BLICK to probe the tract's central notion: that the oppressed are incapable of liberating themselves

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? is venerated by leninists, and notorious among libertarians, as the bible of vanguard politics. Its central proposition is that oppressed and exploited people are incapable of visualising and achieving the means for their own liberation. Neither Marx nor Engels produced an equivalent of What Is To Be Done?, or what might

be considered its companion volume, One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back, written by the same author two years later in 1904. However, what they did write on this subject (which frequently contrasted favourably with what they did in practice) provided little sustenance to Lenin in his quest for an 'orthodox' authority on which to base his own blueprint for a party dominated by 'professional revol-

utionaries' and guided theoretically by the marxist intelligentsia. It is necessary at this point to let Lenin speak for himself:

"The history of all countries shows us that the working class exclusively by its own efforts is able to develop only trade union consciousness... the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads it to subordination to bourgeois ideology... Hence our task... is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working class from this spontaneous, trade unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary social-democracy..." (all emphases in original).

As a corrective to the spontaneous action of the workers, Lenin advanced "the only serious organisational principle for the active figures of our movement... the strictest selection of members and the training of professional revolutionaries". One obvious feature of this scheme springs to mind - that it almost explicitly rejects the hitherto 'orthodox' marxist view of the modern class struggle as being between two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In Lenin's model, a third force enters the arena, the party, which in its turn is the creation of an intermediate grouping, the intelligentsia, and is staffed by another, the 'professional revolutionaries' (the germ-cell of the post-revolution ruling bureaucracy). The question is, what basis is there in the writings of Marx and Engels for Lenin's ideas on party and class relations?

In words, if not in deeds, Marx and Engels frequently advanced views on the party and class question far removed from those of

PICTURE ON PREVIOUS PAGE: Lenin records his voice on his own recording machine, in the Kremlin on 29 March 1919.

Lenin and his followers, arguing that "the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority". We should record here that the anti-elitism of this passage from The Communist Manifesto was further emphasised 40 years after its initial publication by Engels' insertion of the words "self-conscious" in the edition of 1888 (Marx had died five years before). Was Engels making emphatic a point that he feared had not been taken? Yet the authors of the Manifesto had already made clear enough their objections to what we now term vanguard politics. In the same tract, back in 1848, they criticised earlier communist systems in terms no different from those used by libertarians today in their polemic against leninism.

One major shortcoming of Robert Service's introduction to the new Penguin edition of What Is To Be Done? is that it fails to situate Lenin's theories, either within the history of manipulative politics, or even within the context of the then prevailing marxist tradition. Manipulative politics must surely be as old as recorded history itself - Plato's Republic being the first classic codification, whilst Machiavelli's The Prince recasts some of their assumptions and application in a period much closer in spirit to the modern era of class struggle and genuine revolutions. The final transition to our times is accomplished in theory by Rousseau's doctrine of the 'General Will', under which a recalcitrant part of 'the people' can be 'forced to be free' even against its will, and in action by the Jacobins, the first of the modern vanguards, with their reign of terror over real people, in the name of an abstract 'people' that did not know what was good for it.

Lenin's sensitivity to the prototypical role of the Jacobins is

highly instructive. He detects (and he is not mistaken) a special group at work, neither of the classic property-owning bourgeoisie, nor of the lowest social classes, least of all the proto-proletariat. In the conventional scheme of things, the Jacobins act as the dynamic 'substitute' for the main strata of the bourgeoisie, uprooting feudalism and clearing the way (though this is not their intention) for the unfettered development of capitalism. Thus their rule is fated to be both brutal and short - but above all, progressive.

What commentators have missed is that Lenin did not really share this view of the Jacobins. To him, they acted as substitutes and leaders, not for the bourgeoisie, but the working class and poor generally. In 1906 he described the Jacobin tyranny (two-thirds of whose 6,000 victims of the terror were workers and peasants) as a "dictatorship of the lower classes".

Lenin's almost romantic idealisation of the Jacobins obscures their social composition and hence contradictory relationship with the major classes of the French Revolution. Overwhelmingly, like Lenin's own cadres, from the intelligentsia, the Jacobins were able initially to ally themselves with the 'street' against the truly bourgeois factions - notably the Girondins - and then disengage themselves from their plebeian allies once the moderate republicans had been driven from power. The price of this strategy was, of course, their rapid political isolation and removal - the so-called 'Thermidor' of July 1794. Leninists of every stripe gloss over this manipulative relationship between the Jacobins and the Parisian sans-culottes, something that Marx and Engels refused to do.

In conclusion, it is worthwhile to touch on an issue understandably neglected by the sundry offshoots

of leninism. None of them has seriously addressed itself to this question, which surely requires an answer: how is it that having made such a root and branch (for a marxist) critique of leninism in his pamphlet 'Our Political Tasks' (1904), Trotsky could then make his peace with Lenin in 1917? Who had changed his mind - Lenin or Trotsky? Or had they engaged in what leninists deride as an 'unprincipled fusion'? A clue - but no more - to the mystery is to be found in Trotsky's last work, his unfinished biography of Stalin. In dealing with the birth of Bolshevism in the years after 1903, Trotsky lets slip this little aside on his own polemic against What Is To Be Done?: "In the pamphlet 'Our Political Tasks', which contains not a little that is immature and erroneous in my criticism of Lenin, there are, however, pages which present a fairly accurate characterisation of the cast of thought of the 'committeemen' of those days." Thus he separates Lenin from his own creation, the Bolshevik machine. But more than this, he makes the false claim that Lenin "subsequently acknowledged the biased nature, and therefore the erroneousness, of his theory."

What Lenin actually said at the Second Party Congress in 1903 when taxed over the novelty of the ideas expressed in his book on party organisation, was that the contentious parts of its text had been "wrenched from the context", that the dispute with the 'Economists' had been "presented in an absolutely false light." All that he had done, Lenin explained, was "straighten matters out" by "pulling in the other direction", and he promised he would do so again in the future should the need arise. At least Lenin could not be accused of inconsistency in this. The same cannot be said of Trotsky.

● What Is To Be Done? by V I Lenin is published, with a new introduction by Robert Service, by Penguin Books, price £3.95.

POLITICAL PRIORITIES

Tackling the solution but not the problem

From NINO STAFFA, London:

I find Solidarity Journal a stimulating read, but I'm very worried about what I see as a very thin line between the standard libertarian socialist position and a reactionary one. There is a tendency for libertarians to concentrate their attacks on left-wing parties and organisations precisely because they are an easier target and as a consequence ignore the nastier reality of right-wing and Conservative parties. In Solidarity's case it leads to attacks on the obvious lunacies of eastern-bloc countries whilst the very points being made about the USSR and its imitators could also be made about Britain, but rarely are.

The very good article in issue 19 on Gorbachev's reforms, for instance, makes the point that these 'reforms' amount to an increasingly aggressive managerial middle class putting themselves into a position of power in order to safeguard their privileges while at the same time making the working class pay for the mess which they created in the first place. It was also suggested that this managerial middle class is a heavy burden for the working class to support, given that they don't actually produce anything but still pay themselves relatively higher salaries and award themselves a number of privileges.

Now, while I agree with this analysis, I feel that most, if not

all, of the points made apply equally to Britain in 1989. The thirty-two London Boroughs employ something like a quarter of a million while-collar staff between them, and each of these authorities command budgets way above those of any European counterpart. Not only do the majority of these white-collar employees perform non-productive functions (personnel, legal, etc.) but it is also quite common to find people in senior positions who can hardly read and write and are unable to understand even basic statistics. Ironically, while the left is currently reassessing its relationship to the middle class, the right-wing think tanks of the Tory party (for example see the Adam Smith Institute's latest proposals on local government reform) are investigating ways in which the burden of a largely unproductive middle class can be lessened while limiting the possible damage to their interests.

It is also easier to attack job creation by and for Labour Party officials while ignoring the far richer pickings of Tory privatisers who just happen to award expensive contracts to companies of which they are directors. The 15 pence cemeteries sale scandal is yet another of the many instances of high Tory corruption which goes unpunished and even ignored by the vast majority of the British public.

Quite often, I feel, libertarians partake in a great deal of wishful thinking when it comes to analysis of what is happening in the Eastern bloc. The Gorbachev article suggested that working class attempts at self-management are breaking out all over the USSR. Armenia and Azerbaijan are mentioned, but not the inter-communal violence based upon nationalistic aspirations.

Also, in the cases of both the USSR and Poland we see various attempts by different groups to get hold of resources which would otherwise be denied them by the State. I think it imperative in these cases to distinguish between 'self-management' and 'black-marketeering', because the latter can only ever be exploitation of people in hardship. A large amount of material resources are sent to the Church in Poland by supporters of Solidarnosc in the West, and a recent television programme, ('Where Christianity has a Cutting Edge'), showed the local parish in a Polish housing estate which was gathering clothing, medicines and food from Western contributors and giving them to 'people in need'.

One woman, who claimed that she and her family boycotted all State institutions - including food queues - claimed that she got everything she needed from the local parish distribution centre. In her bag were medicines for her 'auntie', tins of baby food for her 'grandchildren', other items for her 'cousins', and so on. She wasn't the one in need, but all her 'relatives' were, and she still managed to feed her family despite their 'boycott'.

The Catholic Church has had centuries of experience of organising Catholic alternatives to the political status quo until her institutions become the status quo themselves. But these initiatives often backfire on the Church since 'co-operative methods of political and economic management, although influenced and initiated by the Church, change the lives of the people and eventually the Church, however reluctantly this may come about. I would like to think that this is a likely outcome in Poland today, but we must also bear in mind that nationalism and the desire for Western consumerism (of which many Poles have first-hand experience) may also result in a regime which is just as bad as the present one.

My main concern about the line of reasoning adopted by libertarians is the likelihood that they themselves are committing a fundamental 'trotskyite' error. Just as trotskyite groups believe that by exposing the traditional parties of the left as 'class traitors' the working class will flock to their banners like so many revolutionary sheep, so many libertarians seem to believe that if groups like Solidarity expose the errors, the violence, the hypocrisy of the marxist and leninist left, the working classes will organise themselves into 'self-managed' revolutionary cells. What is often forgotten is that the working classes have other choices: they can carry on sitting in front of the TV, they can carry on voting for Thatcher, they can become fascists, (or all three at once).

Yours

SOLIDARITY

Such, such were the joys

From B L SPENSER, Coventry:

John King's request (Letters, Solidarity 16) for a Solidarity retrospective could be timely, with most of the traditional left in disarray, Labour Listening, Chesterfield Conferencing, what must be the last throes of British trotskyism, and the Communist Party trying to sell Marx-o-Fax to middle class milletantes. What was it about Solidarity in the sixties that attracted and influenced many revolutionaries and many struggles, far beyond the relatively small number of committed 'Solidarists'? Is there anything to be learned from the early analysis, position and perceptions of Solidarity that can usefully be applied to the problems of the late 1980s?

Of course, people came to Solidarity from a variety of backgrounds; pissed-off ex-trots, peaceniks who saw beyond the simplicity of ban-the-bomb pacifism, industrial militants kicking over the constraints of conventional forms of struggle, anarchists who wanted a more coherent political philosophy than 'Smash the State', etc, etc. Solidarity, however, was more than just another sect or left grouping; there was a style, an attitude, a 'wave length', which went beyond the detail of the analysis, beyond the historical and empirical content of the magazine material.

There was humour, much frowned on by the trad left. Levity, somehow, didn't fit with the seriousness required by those who saw themselves as the Alternative Leadership-in-Waiting (for a Labour defeat or victory or the next working-class struggle they could tail-end). There was an irreverence; no subject, no person, no institution (or so it seemed) was immune from criticism (to attack and make fun of such figures as Canon Collins or Peggy Duff of CND was not the fashion within the Peaces Movement).

There was always a serious side, an attention to detail and a willingness to look at subjects through new eyes, all written in (usually) plain English. Early Solidarists not only knew their oats, they knew where some of the bodies were buried. The debate between Solidarity and the International Socialists in Soho Square after the publication of Modern Capitalism and Revolution was typical: the main speaker for IS began by agreeing with everything Paul Cardan (Cornelius Castoriadis) had said, causing much confusion and histrionics in the IS camp; there was an academic debate on translations of different editions of marxist tomes, and near-fisticuffs when Paul Foot called Solidarists 'scabs' (Solidarity had criticised trade

unions; anti-trade unionists are scabs; therefore Solidarists are scabs! No logician he.) Solidarity's pamphlets were respected throughout the movement and gave rise to much, often secret, debate within many left groups. Many struggles during this period were given a tone, colour and tenor, directly or indirectly, by Solidarity's influence and ideas.

There was, no doubt, much of this sort of alternative and subversive thinking going on at the time, and whether Solidarity was a prime originator or merely a mirror is of no moment. Solidarity was consciously attempting to find different ways of seeing things: looking outside simple economic industrial struggles, ignoring (in the main) the political rituals of elections and examining alternative forms of decision-taking; analysing basic traditional concepts such as 'class', 'work', 'revolution', 'socialism', etc.; exposing the myths and lies of those who laid claim to a divine right of historical knowledge, and reinforcing the human right of people to determine their own destiny. There were gaps, of course: very little analysis of the impetus behind anti-colonial struggles beyond throwing out the revolutionary baby with the hierarchical marxist leadership bathwater; and a tendency to accept almost all non-traditional or alternative struggles as of equal value - what we termed 'swampism' infected the body Solidarity too. Of course no one should expect Solidarity (or individual supporters) to have all the questions to all the answers.

The seeds did spread far and wide: the universities, Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, the early Civil Rights and People's Democracy movements in Northern Ireland, the squatting struggles in London and elsewhere, but the ideas were often diluted or distorted. Perhaps we weren't prepared for the backlash, and most of us don't have infinite

energy; some burnt out, others drifted into lifestyle-politics, careers, or both. And of course the enemy - that wily beast capital - can adapt and mutate, incorporate new ideas in order to recuperate from near-fatal illness, leaving people with memories and mortgages.

In 1988 it is easier to see where the creation of our future history will not be determined; it won't be in parochial and sectional disputes to defend the right of people to work in dying industries, nor in the occasional fights by relatively well-off groups such as school-teachers or Jaguar workers for a fairer i.e. bigger, share of the cake. But capitalism and that other old devil history do conspire to throw up situations in which the powerless, in the realisation of their powerlessness, manifest their collective power; a small example being the lorry drivers on cross-Channel runs, pissed off with being pissed about by all and sundry, forming international, democratic non-bureaucratic committees and blockading the ports and ferries. Elsewhere, ecological and environmental issues can throw up extra- and non-parliamentary action... with the realisation, post-Chernobyl, that everywhere is someone's back yard. The growing (I hope) distrust of scientists and politicians, the security services' dirty-tricks revelations (Wright, Wallace, et al) all bear out parts of the Solidarity thesis, and perhaps a sustained a direct campaign against the poll tax could excite the body politic in the near future (after all, who wants to pay for the right not to vote?).

A word of warning: maybe we have been looking at the world too long through our own particular 'way of seeing' - keep the shit detector turning. An abiding memory of Solidarity conferences is the assembled Solids gyrating with the sound system belting out that Who refrain: "Won't get fooled again!"

Best wishes

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