

red & black notes

What Next?

A popular joke circulating in Iraq shortly before the start of the war had Saddam Hussein addressing a convention of the blind in Baghdad. "God willing," he proclaimed, "You will see our victory."

But if God's was on Saddam's side, it certainly wasn't evident. It should not be surprising that the most powerful military power on the planet was able to bomb its way to victory, but the lack of resistance by Saddam's forces was also a factor. US ground forces encountered fierce resistance outside of some key cities, but the much-vaulted forces of Saddam's Republican Guards and suicide squads failed to appear. Within the Iraqi population, few seemed willing to fight for the Ba'ath regime; as in the 1991 Gulf War, the sight of thousands of Iraqi conscripts refusing to fight for the oppressed old regime became a familiar sight.

For the US, the events in Iraq have been almost completely positive. It has achieved its stated policy goal of "regime change" while ignoring the objections of the UN and its erstwhile allies, through a swift, decisive military action. Yet, as a former military commander suggested, the problem ultimately was not getting to Baghdad, but what to do once you get there. And the US has seemed uncertain. Talk of a contracts for friends of the governing party aside, the US has seemed indecisive in control. As art treasures were looted, and cities burned, the US troops looked on seemingly unconcerned.

Amongst the civilian population, the mood in Iraq has been contradictory. Few mourn the passing of the sadistic Ba'ath regime, but there is uncertainty as to what will happen next; and the US army has not been hailed as a liberating army. Many are glad that Saddam and the Ba'ath are gone, or at least in hiding, but in the same breath as thanks are expressed, the same residents curse the American for the lack of electricity and running water, and not doing enough to stop looting. Clearly the situation is extremely fluid. And in such situations rapid change is possible.

continued on page 3. . .

Themes

Long overdue, as usual the new Red & Black Notes is a bit larger. In the course of its history, the issues of R&BN seem to have become bigger while appearing less frequently. The first issues were four-pages and appeared every two months. This one is over twenty pages, but is the first issue in ten months! The plan is to get back to an eight page newsletter appearing three times a year - thoughts would be appreciated.

The first section of this issue deals with the war in Iraq. Included is an editorial attempting to draw some lessons from the war and sketch some ideas as to what is likely to happen in the future. Next are two leaflets produced by Red & Black Notes which were distributed during several anti-war demonstrations in Toronto. At one demonstration shortly after the start of the war, copies of the "No War But the Class War" were found torn into small pieces - must be doing something right.

In the course of the war, R&BN participated in a small anti-war initiative. A group of people in Toronto, including supporters of the IWW, and the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists formed a small group called Class-War Toronto around the basis of No War But the Class War, producing a leaflet and marching in several anti-war. The group also sponsored two public meetings around the same theme: one in Toronto and one in Montreal. The meetings were co-sponsored by the Internationalist Workers Group; the Montreal based affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party.

The second part of this issue takes up the theme of revolutionary organization and intervention. "The Backward Worker" was written by Noel Ignatiev when he was a member of the Sojourner Truth Organization and published in the journal *Urgent Tasks*. In it, Ignatiev outlines what might be a "Jamesian" perspective for the working class.

Next is a letter, which was sent to the Grand Rapids-based *Discussion Bulletin* on the subject of council communism. The letter was prompted by a note in *DB* 115, which expressed wonder about what the council communist program might be. The reply by R&BN was published in *DB*, and has been slightly re-written for publication here.

And then a letter from our friends at Monsieur Dupont replies to the article on CLR James in the last issue of R&BN. The article by Monsieur Dupont in the last issue of R&B generated more responses than any previous issue (which is to say not that many).

This issue concludes with two reviews of books from two quite different revolutionary traditions. The first is of the ICC-published book on the Dutch German Communist Left. Originally published in French in 1990, this book is simply the best thing written on this tradition. The second review deals with Steve Wright's new book, *Storming Heaven*. The book, newly published, is both a history and a critique of the Italian autonomist tradition. The issue rounds out with the usual set of web updates and brief reviews of material from the ultra-left political sector.

RED & BLACK NOTES

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Most alarming for the US is the possibility of an anti-western Islamic government. A few days after the overthrow of Saddam, newspapers delighted in showing pictures, which showed signs proclaiming "No to Saddam, No to Bush: For a Muslim state." As in many dictatorial regimes, religious forces are the only ones which can operate with a degree of opposition (although not too much - religious leaders were regularly murdered by the Ba'ath regime).

The US does not want another Iran on its hands, and the recent saber rattling against Iran's nuclear program is simply the sub-text to this scenario. Nevertheless, religious fundamentalism would provide the US with a "justification" for a continued presence in the region. This is a dangerous game that the US is playing, but it is one that it has played before.

In the 1950s the US supported various reactionary and religious oppositions to secular forces because of the perception that the secular parties were pro-Communist. Whether or not this was the case, the fact remains that time and time again, the forces the US promoted to advance its own interests became unreliable. In this light, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin-Laden are only the most recent examples.

Moreover, the promotion of democracy was never the aim of the US intervention. Democracies, even in the flawed and limited ways they operate in the West, have never much interested the advanced capitalist powers - willing and cooperative dictatorship has always been easier to deal with.

Leaving aside the question of the post-Saddam government, the US's actions may have other consequences. The question of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq looms large, and a clash with Turkey, which contains half of the world's Kurdish population, seems unavoidable. Bush's

recent pronouncements about a Palestinian state will only serve to fuel this fire.

While geopolitical factors certainly played a part in the decision to invade Iraq, the US's action were primarily the result of economics. The stock market, the weakened dollar and the generally sluggish economy accompanied by a mounting debt bubble, all contributed to US urgency.

Although the markets were jittery before the war started, they responded positively to "shock and awe." The safeguarding of oil reserves is a positive outcome for the US, and no doubt soon, Iraq will switch back to the US dollar as its medium of exchange from the Euro. Even the sliding US dollar may become beneficial, since, as one commentator suggested, the Europeans' "invisible contribution" to the war effort.

While the US went to war to prop up its economy, it is too early to tell if this move will be successful or the political consequences it has set into motion will undo its aims; there are still some jokers in this house of cards: The US has recently announced that it will withdraw troops from Saudi Arabia, a move that rased some eyebrows. The recent bombings in Saudi Arabia and the deep unpopularity of the Saudi royal family may have compelled Saudi Arabia to remind the US that it has over a trillion dollars of holdings in US banks. Powerful leverage indeed.

Absent from most discussions is the Iraqi working class. In all of the major actions and "regimes changes" in Iraq over the last century, the powerful Iraqi proletariat has made its voice heard. To believe it will be silent in the post-Saddam period is to engage in extreme wishful thinking. And the workers re-enter the stage of history, then the US will have something with which to contend.

May 14, 2003

Down With Capitalist War! Down With Capitalist Peace!

A Plague on Both your Houses!

For many with an interest in the impending war in Iraq, the conflict is about choosing sides.

For Bush and Blair, 'you're either with us or you're against us.' As the days go by, the US has become more brazen in its rhetoric and more willing to go it alone. US Defense Secretary recently commented, the only way for war to be averted is for Saddam Hussein to flee Iraq or be overthrown. That this comment was repeated on page 1 of the *Globe and Mail* mere inches from a story about Stalin's murder by his henchmen means subtlety too has chosen a side.

While the US's erstwhile European allies are expressing reluctance, it is only because they see the US's actions as a way to strengthen its position relative to their own through the seizure of Iraqi oil and the establishment of a semi-permanent US base in Iraq. Nevertheless, the reluctant allies will likely get on board because they fear the US will go ahead and they will be left out in the cold.

In addition to their tactical concerns, the US's usual allies fear that choosing war at this time will have further consequences. A disruption of the oil supply from the Middle East, in addition to the disruption in Venezuela will create a catastrophic "oil shock." As the hardly radical Goldman-Sachs commented, the result of a war in Iraq may be less "Desert Storm," than "a Perfect Storm."

But for the US, the issue of war with Iraq has become increasingly urgent. While few within the Bush administration argue that the war will revitalize the sagging US economy, it is precisely that economy which

is pushing the US toward war. Trillions of dollars of debt, a stock market bubble that is about to burst and a plunging US dollar, make a war to secure massive oil reserves, and a commodity which is paid for in dollars an irresistible prize. Never mind that the war will create untold devastation, what matters is the continuance of the capitalist economy.

For many who oppose, in some form or other, the US actions, it's also about choices, and choosing a more palatable option than war. For some this has meant calling on the UN to settle the crisis or the continuance of the sanctions which have already caused horrific suffering in Iraq.

Many people see the war as irrational, viewing the conflict as a clash of ego: If only the cowboy in the White House and the Butcher in Baghdad would listen to reason. Chanting 'No blood for oil,' and 'Give peace a chance,' the organizers of peace demonstrations call for ever great demonstrations that will send our rulers a message they cannot ignore.

For these activists, the solution is not war but peace: If saner heads can prevail, a military solution can be avoided. Unfortunately, the glaring error in their thinking is that war and peace are not counter-posed to each other; war and peace are merely different policies for capital to ensure its rule.

The second imperialist world war between 1939 and 1945 claimed tens of millions of lives. But the "peace" which followed it also claimed untold millions of lives across the globe, as capital has engaged in low level, and sometimes not so low level wars to preserve the imperialist "peace." It is

the peace of the grave. The only way to stop war is to uproot the entire capitalist system.

For others on the left, it's about defeating imperialism. This has led some, most notable the Trotskyists, to claim opposition to imperialism in this conflict means support to Iraq in the hope of bloodying the nose of the "main" imperialist power - Saddam Hussein, the butcher of the Iraqi workers' movement; Saddam Hussein, the former errant boy of US imperialism after the fall of the Shah; Saddam Hussein, for whom Iraqi workers should shed blood?

While sounding radical, the position is essentially a lesser evilism. The demand to defend Iraq, while attempting to distinguish between military and political support (in reality military support always entails political support), may draw some support, but few were willing to extend the logic of this position to last year's fighters against imperialism, the Taliban.

Capitalism is a world system, and the wars it generates are wars between the greater and lesser imperialist powers for the right to exploit and rule. Yesterday's national liberation movements fighting against imperialism are today's exploiters of labour and tomorrow's allies of larger imperialist powers. Saddam Hussein was once a trusted friend, Vietnam a deadly enemy. Swings and roundabouts.

We will not choose between the greater and lesser powers. "You've made worm's meat of me. A plague on both your houses." gasped Mercutio at his death at the hands of the Prince of Cats. We reject capitalist war and capitalist peace. We reject George Bush's US and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

For a world without bosses, without money,
without war and without classes,
For communism.

March 8, 2003

Resources on Iraq

A number of excellent materials about radical Iraqi history are available on-line. These are only a few:

Iraq: A Century of War and Rebellion < <http://geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/7672/iraq.html> >

The Class Struggle in Iraq: Interview with a Veteran
<<http://geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/7672/scud.html>>

Ten Days That Shock Iraq <<http://geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/7672/tendays.html>>

From the War in the Gulf, to the War at Home

No War but the Class War!

On Wednesday March 19 2003 at about 9:30 PM, the United States and its allies began a murderous assault upon Iraq. The millions in the United States and around the world, who marched against war, have seen their "message" ignored. But war is the health of the modern state. Capital can no more give up war, than it can give up exploitation. In attacking Iraq, the largest imperialist power on earth has picked on a somewhat smaller one: The big fish eat the small fish.

Whether the small fish has any teeth remains to be seen. In Afghanistan, the US had a fairly easy time in achieving their goal of ousting the Taliban, even though it failed to capture Bin Laden or senior Taliban officials. Even Bush confessed to reporter Bob Woodward, that the war in Afghanistan "was almost too good to be true." But Iraq promises to be a much more costly war for the US.

Air strikes, which terrorize the Iraqi population and destroy their cities, can only accomplish so much for the US. And the looming ground presents the spectre of heavy US casualties, which will certainly undermine support for the war at home. The last time the US sustained any significant casualties was during the Vietnam War, and the deaths of US troops in any significant number will surely resurrect those demons.

And the US risks more. The longer the war continues, the greater the disruption of oil production and the greater the possibility the global economy will sink into recession.

The Iraqi Kurds have received encouragement to rise up against Hussein and the offer of a Kurdish State has been

floated, but such a development is opposed by Turkey. Although it recently agreed to let the US use its airspace even as it moved its troops to the Iraqi border, in anticipation of a Kurdish uprising and to send a message to its own Kurdish population. If the war drags on, the deeply unpopular Arab nations of the region could well be drawn into the conflict; ironically one of Bin Laden's stated goals.

So why has the US chosen to embark on this gamble? Quite simply they have no other choice. The war has little to do with Bush's daddy, a cowboy mentality, or even September 11, and everything to do with the economy. The US economy is trembling under 31 trillion dollars of debt, and with a faltering stock market and a plummeting dollar, massive oil reserves and the possibility of a permanent US presence in the Gulf makes for an attractive prize. In short, it is the capitalist system that has brought the world to war.

And only through a break with the capitalist system can future wars be averted. Not by appeals to so-called moderate nations like Canada, which plays 'soft cop' in this conflict appealing to the United Nations to continue its starvation sanctions. Not by chanting "Vive la France." For France has its own reasons for opposing the US, and they have little to do with concern for the Iraqi people; rather, they concern the French imperialist state's position vis-à-vis the US.

To break with capitalism means to engage in class struggle: This means bringing the economy to a halt. The most powerful weapon working people have is to

withdraw labour from the capitalist system. During the war in Afghanistan, dockworkers in Nagasaki, Japan refused to load military supplies bound for the region. Train drivers, who refused to move a freight train carrying ammunition for British forces bound for the Gulf, repeated this action in Britain in January. And while only a full scale break with capitalism can create a new world, resistance can be practiced on multiple levels: absenteeism, informal work to rule actions ("go-slows"), even occupations and creative industrial repairs.

If actions against the war were significant and the battle in Iraq does not go smoothly, it could provoke the kind of break down in authority in the armed forces as was seen in Vietnam: desertions, mutinies and a concern for one's own survival over that of the unit. Were these conditions to take shape, the imperialist war might well begin to resemble a civil war.

And in these conditions, begins the fight to build a new world:

A world without war, without classes, without bosses, without money

For communism
March 22, 2003

To get over the wall, we first have to get to the wall

A reply to some of the issues raised in this article and a rejoinder to "the real movement" will appear in a future issue of Red & Black Notes.

Reading your article about five years of *Red and Black Notes* has made us think about the paucity of interesting literature these days in Britain. In the 1990's, when I was doing *Proletarian Gob*, there were lots of little 'zines' about of varying theoretical quality,

but now there is hardly any stuff of any interest. This is partly due to the closure of lots of 'alternative' bookshops across Britain (for financial and exhaustion reasons rather than any plot by the State!) More importantly, economic determinations have

Pamphlets from Red & Black Notes

Gilles Dauvé - Critique of the Situationist International \$3

Gilles Dauvé - The 'Renegade' Kautsky and his Disciple Lenin (Red & Black Notes introduction) \$3

Martin Glaberman - Revolutionary Optimist \$4

ICG- A Comrade's Journey to Iraq \$3

Various - Organization and Spontaneity \$2

Order from/pay to

Red & Black Notes

been allowed free reign within the milieu without any theoretical reflection on them and very basic industrial forms of production have been absorbed and replicated by the radical milieu at the very moment of their denunciation of such forms. We mean this at the moment that anarchism decides to try to rally people for the cause of anti-globalization and anti-monopoly its own structure becomes a reflection of the ideologies it says it is fighting! Anarchism is an ideology that now clearly promotes the concept of set roles for producers (of anarchism) and consumers (of anarchism), it has become a rigid monopoly, despite all its hippy vagueness. Writers for anarchism are very few and they write for a readership that makes no response, that does not engage, the prescribed duty of the reader is to subscribe and donate cash. This does not compare favourably with the more chaotic and less closed down scene of about ten years ago where many people would be producing their own magazines and these would only be read by people who were also producing such magazines. The content was often poor but at least the structure was not anti-human. Now we see monopolizing tendencies such as AK Press/Distribution and papers that place publication dates and glossy, but boring, format over content (for example, our letters to *Freedom* could not be published for reasons of form the very idea of changing the form to accommodate our contributions was unthinkable). We're not attacking these people personally since they are working hard, they are putting the hours in, but they are not reflecting on what they are doing. They are running their wheels in a rut because it is the 'image' and 'structure' of what they call anarchism or communism that they are busy maintaining rather than helping create the space for a free development of pro-revolutionary ideas and theory that is based on their own and others' actual immediate experience. 'The market'

in Britain is now sown up by an old guard. The old guard I would say are people like the old timers in the Anarchist Federation, Class War, anarcho-syndicalists, Freedom, Aufheben, Undercurrent, the people who run things like the 'No War But The Class War' grouping, and organize the anarchist May Day fiascoes. The 'scene' is run by people who have now been around a long time, and because these people have a relatively restrictive set of reference points, their psychological make up and political blindspots are mechanically reproduced and amplified over and over again. Because of this we continually run up against the same prejudices and errors. There is, of course, a steady transfusion of 'new blood', but it is just that, a traffic of consumers who are unable to contribute anything because of the restrictive structure of the anarchy factory. We can see this phenomenon most clearly in organizations such as the British Anarchist Federation, but it exists throughout the milieu. On top of this the internet and email have detrimentally influenced the ability to engage with others. There is very little development of ideas in discussion; other than us there are few individuals or groups that actively engage using correspondence and there is much too much religious maintenance of preserved and sacred positions. We do not have our own website, we do not have our own magazine, what would be the point? We do not want to be dragged down by proprietorship; for us it is important to appear in other people's websites and magazines and we always do so by taking an article from the magazine as our starting point. Obviously there are exceptions to this (tentative) rule/observation about 'the old guard', but the truth of the significant part of the matter seems to be that theory is dead, that it is stuck in the past, and that the anarchist/communist 'scene' is a kind of exclusive racket run by and for the benefit of

people who have lost touch with reality a long time ago. The form taken by pro-revolutionary groups actively dissuades any theory that might result in the alteration of the form of the group. Theory is dead because *organizing* is the imposition of dead forms. Yes, the past shows us that the inevitably short dynamic periods of pro-revolutionary innovation always begin and end in failure, but at least, for a while, they seem to have some connection with reality. The present configuration of anarchist/communist politics is like a dead body, which no one in their right mind will want to go near. So your calls for more 'discussion of ideas' is a welcome one, even if it will probably lead nowhere. It is, to us, self-evident that every genuine contribution to revolutionary forms made by the pro-revolutionary milieu is accompanied by, or wholly embodied in, an attack on existing pro-revolutionary institutions.

Below are a couple of questions I want to raise that were provoked by your article, 'The Legacy of CLR James'. On page 9, in the last paragraph, you say that one of the 'key strengths' of the Johnsonites was their focus on the working class and 'that the working class was key to a revolution'. This is interesting, but you don't explain what they meant by the working class being 'key'. It is right, as you do, to criticize the notion that 'revolutionaries' must bring ideas to the people (which, for example, from our understanding, is the aim of the main participants on the Internationalists' Discussion List, mentioned elsewhere in the magazine). But this use of the 'working class' as a holy touchstone, as 'the key', only serves to put us in a mystical land where we know the working class is important but we never quite know why (for why we at Monsieur Dupont think the working class in particular industries is

important look again at our "Reply to 'The Real Movement'").

On the following page you do a good description of Lenin but before that, at the end of the first paragraph, there is more obliqueness. You say, "Marx noted that you make a revolution and that's how you change people. If you wait for it to happen the other way, you'll be waiting a long time". This is the heart of Marx's vagueness on this issue. What you have said ("make a revolution"), and indeed how Lenin could have interpreted what Marx said, *is that Lenin was right* he did make (well, hijacked) a revolution in order to then work on the minds of the people.

The problem, I find, with the rest of the piece is an inability to discard the ideological temptations of leadership and organization. What you perhaps might be reading into the Castoriadis and Brendel quote is that they are talking about 'revolutionary' organizations, that they are talking about a 'revolutionary' movement, but they are not talking about such things even if they thought, at the time, that they were. We all know from history that there has not been one organization that has ever been, or ever could be, actually revolutionary. Castoriadis and Brendel, here, do not make this claim for workers' organizations, but they could have tried harder, and gone on to conclude that in all events of a revolutionary nature the workers will be in opposition to 'their' existing organizations, and/or at their mercy. They are right to tell other pro-revolutionaries to desist from setting up anything that aims to herd workers towards the promised land, but they do not develop, at this point anyway, any elaboration of the tensions that will arise in periods of economic calamity.

You say, "I don't want to suggest that the working class does not need organization. In fact, organization and the ability to stop production are the key

strengths of the working class". These are such loaded and impenetrable sentences. For us pro-revolutionaries it should be (but usually isn't) clear that the important, essential, or key, part of the working class is that which can halt production. Without production being halted nothing happens, there can be no revolution, there can be no communism. But what do you mean when you preface this statement with the assertion that 'organization' is also a 'key strength', is 'needed'? You are not (we hope!) simply bowing to Castoriadis' and Brendel's 'authority' (they said it so it must be right). What sort of organization are you talking about? Are you talking about workers organized in unions? Are you talking about political parties? Are you talking about workers organized in 'revolutionary' armies? Are you talking about the temporary organizations that emerge during strikes or insurrectional events? Are you talking about various and fleeting means of self-defence? When you say that you "don't want to suggest that the working class does not need organization" you are not defining what you mean by 'organization', even when you talk about 'organic leaderships'.

But we must go further than this and look at just what we are implying when we talk about the working class having 'strengths' at all. When we start to talk about the (amorphous) working class having general worthy characteristics then we are walking into very dubious terrain. The working class are not good, honest and salt of the earth. People who think the working class has innate cultural, social and political ethical characteristics (and this includes many anarchists and communists) must surely not want them to lose these characteristics by ceasing to be the exploited class. Anyone who says they love the working class is either an idiot, a tyrant or a tyrant in waiting. The working class, if we are to talk about it as a unit, if it has

'strength' only has the strength of a lumbering blind beast, this is what our bosses are aware of and this is why they control us in particular ways (carrots and sticks). They are aware that if they lose control then this beast may sweep them all away in its blind attempts at self-defense (only in the commotion of casting the bosses aside will the beast be able to open its eyes and begin to decide how to live).

It is not a 'strength' of the working class that it is able to halt production, it is merely a fact. If we talk about working class strengths then we may be encouraged to try to appeal to their good side, we may say to the amorphous working class (through our unread leaflets) that they 'hold the strength', or whatever, to stop the capitalist economy so they must wise up and get to it. But, oh misery, they don't listen to us, and we are left with only one course of action, to try to get the numbers of people who subscribe to anarchism or communism to rise, the essential workers won't listen but maybe others will? Maybe, if we try hard, we will be able to kick start a movement that will reach some critical number and then we can have a revolution, for it is often said by tired old pro-revolutionary hacks that it is only a movement, imbued, of course, with worthy characteristics, that can destroy capital. This seems to be the sad and a-historical plan of every group and individual in this political milieu from formal recruiting anarchist organizations to the core of informal networks such as *Echanges et Mouvement*. Here, incidentally, we are back at the question of putting carts before horses, which we explained in our 'Reply...'

So let's drop our fixation with 'working class organization', which for many is merely another term for 'movement'. The revolutionary 'organization' (that is, strategies and tactics for their defence) that workers will be involved in will *only* appear after production

has been halted, *it cannot happen before*. Before this point only *other* forms of worker (or people) organization can appear or exist, things like unions, clubs, or informal or formal political parties.

There is a theoretical brick wall that the anarchist and communist milieu refuse to confront, this refusal makes them intellectually weak and causes them to be the tools of authority, this brick wall is the fact that **EVENTS WILL SHAPE PEOPLE'S CONSCIOUSNESS; EVENTS WILL MAKE PEOPLE ACT; CONSCIOUSNESS IS DETERMINED BY THE MATERIAL STRUCTURE OF OUR LIVES; MASS CHANGES IN CONSCIOUSNESS COME AFTER CHANGES IN THE MATERIAL BASE OF SOCIETY.** If communism ever appears it can only do so after the collapse of capitalism, communism is not a movement, or a question of organization, it is only a vague description of a possible way of life for humankind. Communism comes after revolution, and revolution will not be made by any of us. Our inevitable and necessary failure as pro-revolutionaries is written on this wall, just as is our failure, and our parents' failure, to live fully as human beings. Against the missionary and dishonest optimism of pro-revolutionaries we posit a basic nihilism.

Monsieur Dupont

Ultra-left on the web

A few new "ultra-left" web sites have appeared in the last year. most of these can be accessed from the links page on the Red & Black Notes web site.

Internal Faction of the ICC

A recent split from the ICC. The site is mostly in French, but with some English content.

<http://membres.lycos.fr/buttelincommuniste>

Kamunist Kranti

The communist group from India now has a web page, which includes their most recent pamphlets

<http://www.anti-capital.net/kk/index.html>

Revolt Against an Age of Plenty

A UK site with some articles not available elsewhere on the web, including stuff by Melancholic Troglodytes.

<http://www.onetel.net.uk/~davewelton/>

Robin Goodfellow

The descendants, if that's the right word, the Communisme ou Civilization group. Mostly French material, but with a couple of articles in English.

<http://www.multimania.com/rgood>

Subversive Texts

An amazing sites with hundreds of articles and pamphlets spanning ultra-left and anarchist groups.

http://www.endpage.org/Archives/Subversive_Texts

A letter to the Discussion Bulletin

DB no. 115, noted that *Red & Black Notes'* self-identification as a council communist newsletter, raised "the question of just what council communism is, since nothing in the contents of this issue would suggest a council communist program as such" The point is not to advocate "no program", but to understand the options and choices facing by pro-revolutionaries.

In practical terms, there is little difference between council communist organizations and other so-called revolutionary groups, but only in terms of political views and aspiration. For all their talk of the "crisis of leadership" most revolutionary groups, including the Leninists, are tiny sects without influence or membership. Those Leninist groups, which have achieved a degree of importance, tend to function like their larger social-democratic cousins.

Those interested in a detailed history of the council communist tendency would do well to consult Phillipe Bourrinet's excellent book *The Dutch and German Communist Left* published by the ICC in 2001. (Bourrinet has published a revised version of this book, which is available at the *Left Wing Communism* web site[see review this issue]). Additionally, the latest issue of *Aufheben* contains an article entitled "Beyond the Ultra-left?" which attempts to assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of the current.

The earliest use of the term council communism seems to have been by small groups which had split from the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) in the early 1920s. While the KAPD differed with the Bolsheviks and the Communist Party of Germany on many tactical and political issues, its conception of the party still had

points in common (although they sought to provide guidance to the class rather than the explicit role of leadership) This goal was summed up by Herman Gorter as building a party, "as hard as steel, but as clear as glass." The KAPD also maintained a separate workplace organization, the General Workers' Union of Germany (AAUD). The early splits from the KAPD including Otto Rühle, saw no reason to maintain this distinction - Rühle's post-KAPD organization was the German General Workers' League-Unity Organization (AAUD-E).

Within a few years the KAPD and the organizations it inspired were tiny sects. Basing themselves on the revolutionary wave that began at the end of the war, they could only disappear when the wave receded. The most important organization to emerge from this period was the Dutch grouping, the Groups of International Communists (GIK). Founded in 1927, the GIK identified itself as council communist (ratekommunist), and as such its orientation was markedly different from Leninist organizations. Rather than churning out thick manifestos calling for the working class to rally around their banner, the council communist groups attempted to analyze capitalist society and in particular the mechanisms by which capital contained and recuperated struggle. For those readers fluent in French, *Echanges et Mouvement* has published an account of the GIK's activity written by Cajo Brendel, along with some essays by Pannekoek (a few copies are still available from *Red & Black Notes*).

As opposed to the Trotskyists and other leftists, who despite a fixation on betrayals and misleaders of the working class, saw the unions as basically working

class organizations, the council communists saw them as being capitalist institutions. Likewise the political party and electoral system. (This should not be surprising since in the twenties Rühle had famously noted "the revolution would not be a party affair.") Rather than attempting to capture these institutions, the council communists looked for signs in working class resistance to capital that went around them and developed new methods wildcats, sit-down strikes and the establishment of workers councils were all seen as the future of struggle. Above all, council communists have looked to the self-activity of the working class as being the key to the transformation of society, rather than laying a course for workers to follow.

As to what a council communist organization does, I hesitate to lay down an authoritative role. The French group *Echanges et Mouvement* publishes a regular bulletin documenting workers struggles, as well as a theoretical magazine and pamphlets. Other groups influenced by council communism publish theoretical material and intervene into the class struggle where possible, and debating with others in the process. This magazine contains several perspectives as to the role of a communist organization.

The Backward Workers

This article by Noel Ignatiev appeared in the US magazine *Urgent Tasks* #11, Spring 1981.

In a medium-sized metalworking plant in the Midwest, it is time for the annual election of union stewards. In one department, the man who has been the steward for many terms and who now faces for the first time in recent memory an opposition candidate not selected by himself campaigns by telling the workers he represents, "Listen, you know we've got things pretty good over here. They let us eat in the department, they let us take breaks and wash up early, and so forth. If we elect some hothead who starts filing grievances, all that will go out the window."

He is returned to office in a close vote.

In another department a militant, reputed to be a "radical," who has served several terms as a steward, is defeated by one vote in his bid for re-election. Several of the workers - some who voted for him and some who voted against him - give the same reason for their decision: "the company doesn't like him."

Do the above examples demonstrate passivity and backwardness, as most of the left would contend? Let's look at a case where the workers chose the opposite course.

In the blast furnace division of one of the country's largest steel mills, the workers oust the committeeman who has held the post for decades and elect a young black man who has campaigned on a promise of militant struggle. The new committeeman, who is a socialist and, what is more, an honest man, takes office and begins to carry out his program. - no more swapping grievances, no more hand-shake agreements, etc. Almost at once conditions in the division go to hell, as the company retaliates by abolishing early quit time, sleeping on the midnight turn and other little arrangements the workers have managed to establish over the years. Within six months the workers are grumbling that the deterioration in working conditions

is the committeeman's fault, and he is complaining bitterly of their "backwardness" and "lack of appreciation." In the next election he is turned out and a conservative is put in his place.

The three examples cited above illustrate the point that workers always have good reasons for doing what they do. This statement, which seems so obvious on first hearing, stands directly opposed to the view, widespread on the Left in one variation or another, that the problem of the workers' movement is one of leadership.

In none of the three cases cited above, which are representative of the kinds of choices ordinarily offered to workers, can it be demonstrated that the workers made the wrong decision. I wish to go further than this simple observation of fact, to the general thesis that *when a significant body of workers or members of an oppressed group is offered a choice between several possibilities which they perceive as realistic, they always make the right choice.*

Although, I have attempted to formulate my thesis as carefully as possible, it is absolutely certain to be misinterpreted, so I shall try to clarify what I mean and what I do not mean. I do not mean that a group of workers in a struggle cannot make a mistake in picking the date of a strike, charging a police line, etc.; such an assertion trivializes my argument. Nor do I mean that, apart from tactical slips, workers always act in a manner designed to advance their class interests; if that were the case, capitalism would no longer exist.

The *Communist Manifesto* says that, under capitalism, the worker is "compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." Compelled to face - it is this total attachment to reality, which is the main psychological characteristic of the exploited class, that I am exploring in my thesis.

By their actions people shape the future. Workers as a class, unlike revolutionary intellectuals (and the latter not as much as they would like to believe), do not choose between various futures based solely on what is desirable. A weighty factor in their calculations is what they consider possible.

Consider the American slaves before the Civil War. An observer travelling the US South in 1858 looking for signs of imminent rebellion would not have found them. The slaves, except for the exceptional individuals who escaped, seemed if not content at least resigned to their situation and strove to make it as tolerable as they could. Even when the Civil War broke out they did not immediately respond; as DuBois points out, they waited and watched. Yet in 1863 they launched a general strike which broke the back of the Confederacy, bridging to an end the system of slavery.

What was the new element that transformed the Afro-American bonded population from slaves whom their masters felt safe in leaving in the care of the elderly and unarmed women while they went off to fight into militant combatants whose disregard for life itself astonished all observers at the battles of Port Hudson, Fort Wagner, Nashville and Petersburg? It was not the exhortations of the abolitionists, since these had always been present and the slaves were always aware of them. Nor could it be the vanguard actions of a few bold individuals; upwards of three hundred documented rebellions and plots, the last major one before John Brown having taken place in 1831, had failed to spark a general uprising. The *new* element could only be the real war, which prevented the slaveholders from bringing the full weight of their repressive apparatus to bear on the slaves. It was the perception of this new reality by the slaves that carried their resistance to a new stage. The time they spent waiting and watching to make sure the war would not be quickly terminated through negotiations was as essential to the slaves' self-realization as were the previous years spent in mastering a new language, developing a community, gaining a knowledge of the terrain and experimenting with various forms of resistance, including strikes,

sabotage, flight and armed revolt. It should be understood that I am not denying the value of exhortation and bold action by vanguard groups; I am attempting to examine the context in which these ingredients have an effect.

It is evident that the slaves' perception of the futility of a general uprising before the Civil War and the usefulness of one after the War began was accurate. Is it always the case that the oppressed perceive with such scientific precision the possibilities of such a situation?

The spectacle of the European Jews going off peacefully to the gas chambers and organizing the delivery of their own quotas for the death camps has amazed all. What was the alternative? As a people they held no position in industry, agriculture or territory that could have provided them with a base of power. They had no tradition in the use of arms and no access to arms had they known how to use them. Because of their place as petty traders they were despised by the masses of people in the places where they resided. It is possible that had they attempted mass violent resistance (or mass suicide as Gandhi recommended) the result would have been their extermination to the last soul. As it was, they paid a heavy price, but the Jews as a people survived (1)

Men do not fight back out of desperation. (Nor do women: most cases of mothers' reckless courage in defence of their children can be shown to have a rational basis.) There never comes a time when people have no choice but to resist oppression. As Bernard Shaw puts it:

“ Man will suffer himself to be degraded until his vileness becomes so loathsome to his oppressors that they themselves are forced to reform it.”

Nor are people so constructed as to permit total consciousness of their oppression to exist alongside total despair at ending it. The combination leads to extinction, as happened to numerous native American peoples for whom life unfree was unthinkable.

For civilized peoples, that is, those who have come to treasure existence for its own sake and have lost all sense of the value of life, there is a connection between what is possible and what is tolerable. To survive, they invent mechanisms for blocking the reality from their consciousness. There are always consolations, if not in this world, then in the next. One can easily imagine galley slaves on a Roman ship comforting themselves with the knowledge that fresh air was one of their job benefits! (2)

When a relatively rapid deterioration of conditions cracks the effectiveness of the denial mechanism at a time when no way out has yet become apparent, there follows the appearance, on a mass scale, symptoms of mental illness. Such is the case in the US today. (3)

Now what does all of this have to do with politics? Just this: it is an attempt to explain why the most common approach of the Left to workers doesn't work and can't work. Of all the dogma that pervades the Left, the most pervasive is the dogma of the backwardness of the working class.

The underlying assumption of most Left strategies is that workers move from reform to revolution. This assumption is present regardless of the differences over what is the best reform issue, how much propaganda for revolution should be mixed in with the reform struggle, etc. The starting point is always the reform movement, the struggle for partial aims, through which workers will come to realize the need for revolutionary change. The task becomes enlisting workers in the reform movement.

Do those who operate in the way described above ever question their basic assumptions? Do they really believe that US workers are unable to see that there are demands which are unmet and that these demands are, at least in part, winnable through collective action? The problem is

not that US workers don't know these things; if they appear not to know them, it is because they choose not to know them.

US workers are uneasy about the totality of their lives and their relations with their kind. They know, whether or not they ever put it in these terms, that their fundamental condition is not addressed in a programme for better cost-of-living allowance, bidding procedures and dental coverage. Such things whether or lost, will not transform the reality of their lives (4) Why should ordinary workers leave the privacy of their homes and their diversions and take the emotional risk of participating in struggle in which they have to trust other people and which is liable to raise hopes that will be disappointed - for some trivial demand that will leave them more or less as they have? Realistic people will not follow such a course, and the workers are, above all, realistic.

In a passage immediately following the one I quoted above (from *Man and Superman*) Don Juan, who is undoubtedly speaking for Shaw, goes on to speak of "the most surprising part of the whole business that you can make any of these cowards brave by simply putting an idea into his head." The character observes that "men never really overcome fear until they imagine they are fighting to further a universal purpose - fighting for an idea, as they call it."

And he sums up his argument thus: "this creature Man, who in his own selfish affairs is a coward to the backbone, will fight for an idea like a hero. He may be abject as a citizen; but he is dangerous as a fanatic. He can only be enslaved whilst he is spiritually weak enough to listen to reason. I tell you gentlemen, if you can show a man a piece of what he now calls God's work to do, and what he will later call by many new names, you can make him entirely reckless of the consequences to himself personally."

Think of the greatest mass movement in our times. Does anyone really think that, when Black sit-in strikers sat at a lunch counter while lit cigarettes were ground out in the back of their necks, they were doing it for a cup of coffee. Or that the southern Black masses faced electric cattle prods, high pressure water hoses and the rest in order to gain the right to vote, as if they did not know how little that right brought to their cousins in Watts, Harlem and Chicago's South Side?

When Black people marched down the dusty roads singing "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round," it was a new world they sought. Their determination and willingness to sacrifice derived from the realization that the particular issue which engaged them at the moment, through the struggle itself, was an expression of their efforts to give birth to this new world. (Indeed, it was the genius of Martin Luther King, and the secret of his place in the hearts of Black people, that he was able, in spite of his political weaknesses, to give voice to the mass vision, dream if you will, of a new world.)

The starting point in defining a revolutionary struggle is not the content of the specific demands put forward by the participants, but their coming to awareness, often in the course of the struggle itself, that the fact of their self-activity is more important than whether or not they win or lose on the immediate issue.

In an article published in *Urgent Tasks* no. 9, Lee Holstein pointed out that, "Revolutionary consciousness cannot be taught - even by the most masterful of teachers. It can be encouraged, pointed out, distinguished from bourgeois consciousness, but it cannot be taught. It does not progress in a linear fashion, from one stage to another in higher and higher and higher levels of grasping Marxist theory. It rises to the surface in action which is a break with routine, and then submerges."

We are not dealing with easy questions here. The link between the struggle and the vision is not formal but organic. It is not expressed primarily in the articulation of the socialist goal (some Left groups keep permanently set in type a paragraph explaining the need for socialism, which they paste onto the end of every article they publish). Nor are we speaking of the practice of some Left groups of issuing hysterical appeals for revolutionary struggle. The link is expressed in the way the struggle itself develops as a realization of the new society.

In the article cited above, Lee Holstein argues that, "every instance of working class self-activity is a break with the trade union struggle. Every break with the trade union struggle is a break with bourgeois hegemony. The workers, in these instances, jump out of the capitalist framework, rejecting its validity and legitimacy. In these instances the working class becomes autonomous of capital and acts for itself. This is revolutionary working class self-activity."⁽⁵⁾

The task for revolutionaries is to seek out those instances of the break with bourgeois hegemony and clarify their implications, link them together institutionally and counterpose them to the prevailing patterns of behaviour and institutions. This task has theoretical, political and organizational aspects, and no one can claim to have achieved more than a beginning. However far the journey may take us, the first step must be the recognition that revolutionary class consciousness is not the expansion of reformist class consciousness but its negation, and that while it is true that the working class only manifests its development in the struggle for partial reforms, the deeper truth is that reforms are a by-product of revolutionary struggle.

Notes

¹ To demonstrate to the world that they are not at all the "peculiar people" and that under different circumstances they are as capable of bellicose action as any other human tribe.

² Humour is double-edged; in some circumstances it makes oppression bearable, in others unbearable. Consider the following characteristic tales:

A black man was walking on the streets of Chicago, cursing to himself. God speaks to him and asks what the matter is. "The white folks took my land and ran me out of Mississippi, comes the reply. "Do you have a gun?" asks God. "You know I do," says the black man. "Do you know how to use it?" "Yes." "Well then," says God, "I want you to take your gun and go down to Mississippi and kill that white man who is on your land and take your land back." "Will you go with me God?" asks the black man. "As far as Memphis," says God.

A poor Jew is surprised to hear God addressing him one day. God tells him he can have anything he wants just for the asking. At first the poor Jew doesn't believe it is god talking to him, but he is finally convinced. "Anything at all?" he asks skeptically. "Anything!" comes the thundering response. "Well then, please God, if it's not too much trouble, could I please have every morning a hot roll with butter?"

The remark common among U.S. proletarians, "the hours sure fly by when you're having a good time," was undoubtedly heard on the pyramids.

³ To forestall the critic who points out the evident contradiction between my referring to the workers' total attachment to reality and their elaborate mechanisms for denying reality - what the worker sees realistically is that portion of the world that touches on him and that he can do something about. For the rest, the worker's head is as likely to be filled with ignorance and nonsense as anyone else's. I have known people who believed the world was flat and who nevertheless knew to the minute how long it took to drive from Chicago to Detroit and what was the best route to take. It is a matter of what Hegel calls the first level of thought, empiricism,

everyday common sense. I recall one conversation, at which I sat as a silent and pained observer, in which a Leftist was propounding to a worker his opinions on world affairs. The Leftist declared that he had "opposed" the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. The worker quickly asked him, with a wink to me, "How did you oppose it?" The Leftist responded, without the slightest embarrassment or awareness that he was being mocked, that he had spoken out against it, etc. The inability of the Left to distinguish between various levels of thought is responsible for a lot of hand wringing, for instance, over the influence of the Catholic Church in Poland. The fact is that in no country - not in Poland, the US or Iran - does the problem lie in the influence of religion over workers' actions, in the sense they decide what to do based on its counsel. If workers support or do not support the Church or any other institution, it is because it says or does not say what they want to hear. The problem lies in their perception of what is possible and necessary

4. This generalization does not apply to farm workers, hospital workers and others who do not take for granted the minimum necessary for survival

5. This writer goes further than I would, at least without clarification, when she writes that, "This type of activity - revolutionary self-activity - does not *develop* revolutionary class-consciousness. It *is* revolutionary class-consciousness" Still, she is closer to reality than those who contemplate the working class and see only its hind end.

Review: The Dutch and German Communist Left: A contribution to the history of the revolutionary movement

There is no doubt that Phillippe Bourrinet undertook a difficult task, when he wrote a book on a topic, which has been mostly omitted by mainstream historiography and even distorted and concealed by the Stalinist historians of the workers' movement. Despite this, he showed amazing effort when putting up this extensive work, which leans heavily on primary sources of information. In fact, the book represents an outstanding combination of revolutionary spirit and academic accurateness.

Bourrinet begins his writing by discussing Marxism in Holland in the second half of 19th century. From this country, a specific tendency appeared which crossed paths with the strong German social-democratic movement. No later than the first decade of the 20th century, embodied by the personalities of Dutch Anton Pannekoek and Polish Rosa Luxembour, even though both

were at the time living in Germany, this tendency was constituted in the course of polemics on the mass strike against Karl Kautsky. Significant for this tendency were trust in the self-emancipatory capabilities of proletariat, endorsement of extra-parliamentary tactics and emphasis on the role of class consciousness, which especially Pannekoek interpreted through the lenses of Joseph Dietzgen's ideas.

This tradition had laid the basis for what was to be called left communism later. Its partisans proved revolutionary coherence in test of the WWI. After the Bolsheviks led the October revolution in Russia they were undeniable a resounding force amongst the working masses (especially in Germany), standing independently of Bolshevik current. As such, they were soon excluded (or it might be as well said, that they left) from the Third International, when it became an instrument of promoting the

interests of the Russian state rather than the proletarian movement.

After this, the author pays his attention mostly to the development of KAPD, a party, which regrouped many communist workers in Germany, where the revolutionary wave retreated through 1923. One of the interesting moments of its history was the formation of Communist Workers' International, a rather voluntary project backed up by Dutch Hermann Gorter. Bourrinet then continues to examine the German Unionen movement, which was in some part influenced by Otto Rühle's anti-organizational ideas.

In 1927, the Group of International Communists was formed in Holland, marking clearly the final crystallization of the council communist tendency, which based itself on the experiences of working class self-organization in the workers' councils, most notable during Russian and German revolution. Bourrinet traces its history, its relationship with KAPD and the problems it had to face in 1930's, when Nazism triumphed in Germany, and Franco succeeded in Spain. The influence of council communism declined in reciprocal proportion to the victory of counter-revolutionary forces.

Groups of council communist, scattered across Europe, and grouped around Paul Mattick in the USA, experienced the final blow with the outbreak of WWII, and remained merely as isolated little groups. Only in Holland did some Trotskyist organizations evolve towards council communism and during the war gave birth to The Communistenbond Spartacus, which in Europe carried council communist ideas into the post-war period. These ideas played a considerable role in the ultra-left milieu, especially in the time of 1968 revolts, but Bourrinet does not go as far as that and only briefly outlines the echo of council

communism in the second half of 20th century.

This compelling story is not easy reading though, and one should not expect it to be simple propaganda piece. Actually, Phillipe Bourrinet focuses more on the development of ideas, concepts and theories rather than on train of events. And he chooses such issues, which are still crucial for any revolutionary current - issues of the struggle for economic demands, intervention, the national question, organization, etc., which helps him to clearly situate the Dutch and German communist left within the framework of revolutionary movement.

Such approach seems to be very helpful, however, Bourrinet sometimes ends up "analyzing analyses" and his own view tends to preponderate over the subject matter, so that the "history" turns into plain theoretical reflection. Such a thing, of course, is not bad by itself, even though the lack of space left to reader for her own interpretation might be a bit dismal. Still the author is fair to his readers and his value judgments are easily distinguishable from the rest of the text. He openly admits in the postface, that by no means did he try to reserve himself from evaluating the examined issues.

Throughout the book there are some evident tendencies of the author, with which I would have some methodological disagreements. So, for example, Bourrinet strictly draws a line between what he calls "the Dutch and German communist left" and on the other hand what he calls "council communism" or with more negative connotation "councilism". Such distinction, however, seems to me to be way too made-up. Often, Bourrinet reproaches council communism for throwing overboard the experience of the Russian proletariat. True, council communists analyzed Russian revolution as bourgeois in nature, but I am

not aware that they would also refuse the struggle of Russian workers en bloc; they only remained very cautious about universality of these experiences and remained aware of their narrow limits.

Nevertheless, it is upon everyone to judge for themselves, because the book is definitely worth reading. With the devotion put in writing it, Philippe Bourrinet's work indeed represents a "contribution" to the history of the workers' movement.

The book has already its own history. In English, it can be obtained through the ICC for \$21. The author himself distributes

a French version, and an English version will be published in 2002-2003 by Brill in the Netherlands, with some additional texts.

Kurt Weisskopf / July 2002

Note: To contact the ICC in North America write to PO Box 288, New York, NY, 10018-0288, USA. Philippe Bourrinet may be contacted though the Left Wing Communism web site

Review: Storming Heaven

One of the many drawbacks of English being the de facto lingua franca is that English speakers do not as urgently feel the need to learn a second language as others. In effect, this can have the disadvantage of cutting off of entire traditions. Case in point, Italy. While Gramsci's writings have long been made available in English, and diluted through the academy, other vastly richer traditions have been long neglected. The Italian left communists, and Bordiga in particular, have scarcely any material available in English; likewise the autonomist tradition. How fortunate then to have Steve Wright's new book, *Storming Heaven*, which is the first, comprehensive, English language book on the development of the Italian workerist tradition.

Before examining that statement, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the word "workerist." In the English language, and especially because of the influence of Leninism, "workerist" is simply used a political swear word. In his battles with the "Economists" in Russia, Lenin used this term for some of his opponents who he argued merely tailed the existing working class. More broadly, this tendency has meant

an uncritical worshiping of the working class and excusing its faults. Still, when much of the left worships uncritically at non-proletarian temples, perhaps this is not the worst crime.

Is this what is meant in Wright's text? Actually no, in the Italian context, the meaning of workerism is quite different. Workerism looks at the working class as central to the idea of revolution. *Storming Heaven* then, is both a history of the development of this tradition and a critical evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, including those of the social factory and the mass worker.

Wright's narrative begins in the 1950's where the Italian Communist Party (PCI) stood as the largest political formation in Italy, although through the efforts of the US and Christian democrats, it was excluded from governmental power. That the PCI was no threat to capital seems to have been overlooked - after all, it had provided its service to capital in the post war period by mobilizing to hold back working class struggles. Throughout the 1950s, the PCI looked to working class participation in the efforts of reconstructing Italy with the

expectation that they would share in the benefits.

In this climate of accommodation with capital, intellectuals within both the PCI and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), in greater and lesser degrees broke from the orthodoxy of their parties in rejecting aspects of Leninism, and striving toward an authentic Marxist method of inquiry. A key motivation was the efforts in workers' research such as the workers inquiry employed by Marx in the 1880s. It is worth here considering the international aspect to this movement. Danilo Montaldi, of the *Quandini Rossi* (Red Notes) journal, was deeply influenced by a diary in the pages of the French journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* by autoworker Daniel Mothe. Prior to Mothe's diary, *S ou B* had published a similar document, *The American Worker* by the Johnson-Forest tendency

Quandini Rossi was launched in 1961 by Raniero Panzieri, but a later split in 1964 gave birth to *Classe Operaia* (Working Class), beginning in Wright's words "the classic phase of workerism." This phase was characterized by three central ideas: an emphasis on the wage struggle, identification of the working class and the immediate process of production, and the working class as the driving force in capitalist society.

It has become fashionable to state that class is a disappearing concept and that the importance of the factory worker has declined, the workerists approached this question in a different way. Mario Tronti wrote that "the fate of the worker become the fate of society as a whole" since the factory was only the concentrated form of social relations within capitalist society. In other words, the factory model was extended out beyond to the gates, to the idea of the social factory. But while the autonomists seemed to privilege the factory worker, if society was a "social factory" it followed

that all struggles were struggles against capital. It is this latter point that some influenced by this trend were to develop. It also marks a contrast with the early council communist theorists like Otto Rühle, who argued that a worker is only a worker at work; at other times the worker is utterly bourgeois.

Class consciousness therefore, was not seen as something imported by a Leninist or social democratic organization. Mario Tronti saw class consciousness, not as the result of individual experience or even as the cumulative effect but rather as an aggregate where the whole formed something rather different from the sum of the parts. It was in struggle that the worker acquired consciousness as a part of the struggle. Despite the difference with Rühle, this idea is common to many of the descendants of the council communist tradition.

Wright's book ends with the collapse of workerism. The counter-assault by the Italian state, using the issue of the Red Brigades as the pretext for increased repression, forced a retreat and reorganization and end to the mass phase of the autonomist movement. Which leaves open a broader question: if it is the working class which drives capital, rather than seeing workers are merely reacting, where does this leave the movement in periods of defeat?

Steve Wright's book is valuable on many levels. It provides an account of a tendency not well known in English. It also critically addresses the strengths and weaknesses of this current. In the current period of new interest in autonomist ideas, *Storming Heaven* deserves to be widely read.

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Some Worthwhile Projects

Against Sleep and Nightmare, the Situationist influenced magazine has just published its seventh issue. The postal address is not operative at the moment, however, the journal can be reached at <againstsleepandnightmare@yahoo.com>

The good people at AK Press continue to (re)publish some great titles. Two new ones of note: Anton Pannekoek's *Workers Councils* is now available for \$15 (US). long difficult to come by (my copy is a photocopy of the four-part edition Echanges published a few years back). A newer edition is *A New World In our Hearts* (\$11.95) a collection of articles from the now-defunct Love & Rage group, centering on anarchism and organization, race and the national question. The 2003 catalogue is almost 200 pages thick and contains these and thousands more items. 674-A 23rd St., Oakland, CA 94612, USA

Antagonism Press' latest publication is "Olive Drab Rebels," The pamphlet contains two articles, on revolts within the US army during the Vietnam War, Kevin Keating's "Harass the Brass" and Matthew Rinaldi's "The Olive Drab Rebels" Military Organizing During the Vietnam Era." Available from BM Makhno, London, WC1N 3XX, UK. Free, but contributions would be nice.

The 11th issue of *Aufheben* is now available. The magazine contains a long article on class re-composition in Argentina, as well as an exchange with Theorie Communist, "Beyond the Ultra Left?" c/o Brighten & Hove Unemployed Workers Centre, P.O. Box 2536, Rottingdean, Brighton, BN2 6LX, UK. £3.

Communicating Vessels is a publication from Portland, ME. The issues received contained a mixture of original material, and reprints from Dauvé, the

Situationist International and others. Issue 8 has a thoughtful critique of Pannekoek's Workers' Councils. c/o Mutual Aid Portland, P.O. Box 7328, Portland, ME, 04112, USA. No price, but donations gratefully accepted

The Discussion Bulletin has announced it will cease publication this summer. Published in Grand Rapids since the early 1980's featuring discussions and debates within the "non-market socialist" sector. Back issues can be obtained for \$1 a copy from PO Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI, 49501, USA.

The new issue of *Internationalist Notes*, the magazine of IBRP supporters in north America, has just published the second issue in its new series. The new issue has a very interesting article a now lost strike in Rouyn-Noranda, Also of note is an article about the history of the Iraqi Communist Party. c/o RS CP 173, Succ. C, Montreal, Canada H2L 4K1. \$1

Perry Sanders of the Chicago Revolutionary Network published his autobiography *The Making of a Real socialist* last year. The publication, which he describes as "short book or a long pamphlet" covers decades of political life including his involvement in Vietnam Veterans Against the War / Winter Soldier Organization, and his eventual break with Maoism and Leninism. A good read despite sharing rather too many personal details for my taste, and a frightening abundance of typos (more even than this newsletter!). P.O. Box 578042, Chicago, IL, 60657-8042, USA. \$5

The Troploin group has published the third issue of its newsletter given over to an essay entitled "Love of Labour? Love of Labour Lost? And Then . . ." Write to Aredhis, B.P. 20306, 60203 Compiègne Cedex, France.