

# Red & Black Notes

A Magazine of Socialist Discussion

No. 5 Spring 1998

## May 1st: A Day of Workers' Action

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 1998 the ongoing series of demonstrations known popularly in Ontario as the Days of Action, will come to St. Catharines. The city of St. Catharines is a city of 130,000, the major industry being General Motors. The action on May 1 is the first May Day shut down in North America for over a century.

The Days of Action began in London, ON in December 1995 as an attempt to derail Progressive Conservative leader Mike Harris' anti-labour and pro-business agenda. The first demonstration drew 20,000 people and saw wildcat strikes at many of the city's larger industries. A second demonstration in Hamilton three months later drew over 120,000 people, exceeded only by the 250,000 who demonstrated in Toronto in October of 1996.

Yet despite the talk of escalating strikes, culminating in a province wide shutdown, it was clear something was amiss. The mood at the London event was electric. No one quite knew what was going to happen: Would there be mass arrests? Would the city be shut down? Hamilton had a very different flavour. Much larger, but tamer. In fact on the first day of the events, a Friday, the United Steelworkers of America, who represent workers at steel giant Stelco, worked out an agreement with the company so that their members would work overtime earlier in the week and the Friday would be a holiday. No laws broken, or even stretched.

Almost as soon as the actions began, much of the talk in certain labour circles turned to winding down the actions and concentrating on what they considered to be the *real* task at hand. i.e. re-electing the New Democratic Party (NDP) at the next election. How quickly it was forgotten that the NDP had broken contracts with public sector unions, imposed user fees and governed over a host of other broken promises. Many felt that the only good thing the NDP did was to pass a no-scab law in Ontario. When Mike Harris threatened, and in fact gave six months notice he would repeal the law, union leaders warned him that they would bring the province to a halt if he touched the law. He did and two and a half years later, we're still waiting..

In St. Catharines we wonder, will the event be business as usual? Will it be merely an excuse for workers to lose a day's pay so that the unions can blow off some steam and individual leaders can re-establish their militant credentials? Or is there the possibility, however small, that this historic day on the working class calendar will inspire a greater show of strength?

Mike Harris has repeated said he knows the Ontario unions have the power to shut down the province. He remains on his course of action because he knows they won't. While there is no question that the unions want Harris removed, for many the goal is just that, and his replacement with the NDP.

Regardless of the "success" or "failure" of the St. Catharines' Day Of Action, the movement against Harris, or any of the other neo-Conservatives, including the NDP, will ultimately fail as long as the logic of the acceptance of capitalism, in any of its forms, is preserved.

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## *Some Thoughts on May Day*

The following material is from our past. When looking back over our history there are two symmetrical errors, which can be made. The first is to see the past as the repository of all the answers necessary for today. The problem with this approach is that it reduces history to a series of lessons to be learnt and that it fails to take into account changing conditions. Many organizations on the left often look to the past and a "golden" age of class struggle, but class society is not static. The second problem is, after the fashion of the post-whateverists, tends to reject everything in the past as merely history with no lessons to teach us. History's bunk said Henry Ford: The past has nothing to teach us and has no lessons to learn.

Both accounts are false. On days such as May Day, we should look back on our history, to remember and understand where we came from; however, teary-eyed nostalgia will not solve our problems. If we might add a qualifier to the famous dictum that "those who cannot learn from history are condemned to repeat it" it might be "but those who live in history will never change the present."

We present here three articles from the archives. The first, by Spanish revolutionary G. Munis was originally published in the Spanish language *Alarimo* in May 1961. The English language version is reprinted from *The Alarm*, the publication of the now defunct Focus group. Thanks to C.A. Canny for supplying the material. The second piece is an old labour song. This song, along with others can be found on Utah Phillips' CD *We Have Fed You All A Thousand Years*. The final article is American writer and socialist, Jack London's famous definition of a scab.

### **In Honour of May Day 1937**

by **G Munis.**

It was a mighty insurrection, a stormy clash of arms in Barcelona and nearly all of Catalunya; an insurrection instantly victorious, an orphaned

revolution, a revolution lost. Who, today, recalls the marvellous May Days of 1937? Only those who, understanding them, wish to see them repeated, with victory secure.

The proletarians fought en masse, as one, without previous orders or organization. They fired on the Muscovites who had already betrayed the Spanish communist revolution and who protected themselves with the Civil and Assault guards. Having won only hours after the beginning of the insurrection, the proletariat was forced to abandon the struggle thanks to the insistent campaign of the CNT to which the majority of the insurrectionists belonged.

The field was left open to the Muscovite party which unleashed against the revolutionaries a repression equal to Franco's. The revolution was definitively defeated, and with that, the Civil war was lost. The insurrection of Berlin in 1953, and Poland and Hungary in 1956, had a superior antecedent in the May Days of 1937.

But they are wrong who see the insurrection in Budapest as a conscious expression of the tasks of the workers in the face of the Russian counterrevolution. The best that could have been done by Nagy and the intellectuals of the Petofi circle, Stalinist by education, was to be seen in the work of their Polish colleague Gomulka. In the insurrection of the Catalan proletariat in 1937 there was neither the slightest Stalinist influence, even dissident, nor was there a shadow of nationalism nor a hint of bourgeois democracy.

It was plain and simply, the rebellion of the proletariat against Stalinism as the representative of the state-capitalist counterrevolution. Something that should have been done, for example, by the Cuban proletariat, against Fidel Castro.

The May Days represent the most conscious and beautiful action ever undertaken by humanity: the masses attacking with gunfire the last and best-disguised centre of exploitation. Salute to the May Days! Let us repeat them again, decisively and worldwide!

## **We Have Fed You all A Thousand Years** (Author unknown; music by Von Liebich)

We have fed you all for a thousand years and you hail us still unfed,  
Though there's never a dollar of all your wealth but marks the workers' dead.  
We have yielded our best to give you the rest and you lie on crimson wool.  
Then if blood be the price of all your wealth, Good God! We have paid in full!



There is never a mine blown skyward now but we're buried alive for you.  
There is never a wreck drifts shoreward now but we are its ghastly crew.  
Go reckon our dead by the forges red and the factories where we spin.  
If blood be the price of your cursed wealth, Good God! We have paid it in!

We have fed you all for a thousand years - for that was our doom, you know,  
From the days when you chained us in your fields to the strike a week ago.  
You have taken our lives, and our babies and wives, and we're told it's your legal share  
But if blood be the price of your lawful wealth, Good God! We bought it fair!

### **Definition of a Scab** By Jack London

After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful stuff left with which he made a SCAB.

A SCAB is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a waterlogged brain, and a combination backbone made of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts he carries a tumor of rotten principles.

When a SCAB comes down the street men turn their backs and angels weep in heaven, and the devil shuts the gates of hell to keep him out. No man has a right to SCAB as there is a pool of water deep enough to drown his body in, or a rope long enough to hang his carcass with. Judas Iscariot was a gentleman compared to a SCAB. For betraying his master he had the character to hang himself. A SCAB hasn't.

Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Judas Iscariot sold his Savior for thirty pieces of silver. Benedict Arnold sold his country for a promise of a commission in the British Army. The modern strike breaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children and his fellow-men for an unfulfilled promise from his employer, trust or corporation.

Esau was a traitor to himself, Judas Iscariot was a traitor to his Lord, Benedict Arnold was a traitor to his country.

**A STRIKE BREAKER IS A TRAITOR TO HIS GOD, HIS COUNTRY, HIS FAMILY AND THE WORKING CLASS**



## *Communism in France*

The split of Socialisme ou Barbarie in 1958 was about organization. After the de Gaulle coup d'état in May 58, there was an influx of members into S ou B. These are mainly students fighting against the Algerian war because of the draft. The number of members jumped up suddenly from less than 20 to more than 100. The problems of organization that had previously been discussed almost constantly became a practical problem and not simply theoretical speculation in a narrow circle. This problem was closely connected to a political analysis with two contradictory positions (this opposition never appeared publicly in the review, but could be seen in the internal bulletins): on one hand a majority followed, for a short period, Chaulieu (Cornelius Castoriadis) in foreseeing a workers' revolt against the "fascism" of de Gaulle; on the other hand the minority said that de Gaulle was there to solve the problems of French capitalism and to end the Algerian war.

Two months later, Chaulieu adopted this position but, on the way he managed to push the minority out of the group using the army of new recruits who wanted "to fight" to build the new organization in traditional structures, thinking that, at last it would be the basis for a new development of the group. We can see that the "wrong" analysis manipulating the "mass" was then paving the road to the party. The two proposed structures were not compatible:

- the majority following Chaulieu wanted to create cells which would meet from time to time in a general assembly to define the group's policy and to elect a political board which would have the function to implement the adopted policy. The members would have had to defend the position of the majority in public and to follow it even if they disagreed. Disagreements would have to be contained inside the group as a whole or in the cells.

- the minority wanted to promote autonomous workers cells where all problems would be discussed, even the general line discussed

in general assemblies. Everybody could express his own ideas at any moment and through any means. It should be said that neither the majority nor minority followed what they were looking for on paper.

Socialisme ou Barbarie was active up to the end of the Algerian war (1962) and then started a slow decline. This decline began after the split of Pouvoir Ouvrier, when Chaulieu openly dropped Marxism, and the group disappeared in 1967 after a totally wrong political statement on the impossibility of a general movement in France.

The ILO was formed with the members that had been obliged to leave Socialisme ou Barbarie, (mainly students and intellectuals). In order to follow their ideas, they organized regular workers' meetings with workers who had a militant extra syndicalist practice in their work place. Initially these meetings were called the "Inter-factory Committee." Little by little these meetings became more important than the ILO meetings and in 1962 the ILO group disappeared and the other committee was transformed into the ICO. The structure of the ICO was a practical structure rather than a political or theoretical structure. In a certain way it was what the ILO dreamed of building when it split from Socialisme ou Barbarie: Most of the participants of the regular meetings were informal militants of informal factory groups. The ICO paper reported the situation and struggles in each factory according to the regular meeting reports and there was a kind of consensus around autonomous activity rather than a political statement. Participants were from various origins, anarchists, Marxists, or non-aligned militants, but linked by a strong feeling about class struggle. Interest in other struggles in France and abroad developed with more contacts, and from time to time in more general discussions, but the group, though slowly growing, stayed small up until 1968. In 1968 a lot of people, again mostly students, became connected with the ICO. The ICO became a kind of federation of small groups scattered all over the country. During the 15-day May General Strike, everybody was strongly involved in the struggle at his place of work and everybody then agreed not to act like a group "organizing the

workers” but to encourage autonomy wherever he was.

After 1968, the character of the ICO had completely changed. The group had become more of a political organization with perhaps several hundred loose participants. The workers were a minority and voted with their feet as the discussions were moving very far from their struggles. Several tendencies were fighting to lead the ICO toward a specific orientation and after four years it burst into several pieces.

One of these pieces was Echanges. It was again different of what we had seen previously. Echanges was built to try and maintain the close international links created during the previous period in several European countries (mainly through international meetings). This was the reason why from the start Echanges had an edition in English and was based more on England rather than France, and more on individuals in each country connected with, an informal circle of supporters. Now after more than twenty years Echanges is more centered on France, with a small group meeting regularly mainly to discuss politics in general, struggles and the content of the bulletin. Two years ago, on the proposal of an American comrade we started a short news bulletin which appears every two months, with a print run of up to 3000 copies. It is distributed free and seems to be the start of a new basis of relations again all over the country. The experience of the past twenty years has taught us practically what some theoretical discussions had put on the table: there is presently no room for the kind of traditional organization for which many people are still looking. For the time going “organization” is more a kind of network in which everybody, or some affective groups, defines at any moment their participation in a struggle or in a publishing activity and the connection between others doing the same thing. We don't think or don't know if it will be a permanent thing and if something else will appear. We think that in this important question, we have to follow ( knowing exactly what we don't want as workers), but not to

precede, to learn and to tell what we have understood and not to teach.

HS  
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### *Red & Black Notes on the Move*

This issue is the fifth issue of **Red & Black Notes** produced. This May Day is also our one year anniversary. Last year **R&BN** began as a leaflet for May Day and grew into the modest project you see before you. The first five issues have been produced in Alberta, Canada. Beginning with issue number six **Red & Black Notes** will be relocating to Ontario. Mail for the newsletter should be sent to

PO Box 47643  
939 Lawrence Avenue East  
Don Mills, ON  
M3C 3S7  
Canada

Mail sent to the old PO Box will be forwarded provided it is addressed to the name of the newsletter. Mail addressed simply to the box will be returned. The current e-mail address is operational until the end of July 98, although a replacement will be set up in Ontario shortly.



## *The Scum of the Earth*

The term strikebreaker has traditionally been applied to those workers who continue to work during a strike or who are hired to cross picket lines during the dispute. (See Jack London's definition of a scab, above) But what of those who serve as part of the state? The following article is reprinted from a UAW's periodical called **Ammo**. While we do not agree with all of the formulations in this short account we believe it to be something to remember. The new version of the Pinkerton detective agency is called Vance International Companies. Vance is one of the largest strike breaking companies in the US. To date they have been involved in over 380 strikes and have battled mine workers in the coal fields of Virginia, newspaper workers in Detroit and Caterpillar workers. Canadian readers may be interested to learn that Vance has recently opened an office in Toronto, ON. Perhaps the only surprise is that it was Ontario rather than Alberta, meaning that Mike Harris's government offers an atmosphere even more conducive to strike-breakers than even Ralph Klein's.

Nineteenth century robber baron Jay Gould once boasted: "I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half." For over a hundred years, goons have fought against unions as we struggled for better wages and working conditions. Allan Pinkerton, founder of the guard agency that bears his name, turned strikebreaking into a business.

In 1889 at Homestead, Pennsylvania, Andrew Carnegie moved to break the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, the strongest trade union the country had ever seen. Carnegie proposed a 25-per-cent wage reduction and individual bargaining. Carnegie was forced to back down, but three years later, he came back ready to fight. Henry Clay Frick, the chairman of Carnegie Steel, ordered construction of a great fence, twelve feet high and three miles long and topped with barbed wire around the works. Three inch holes were bored every twenty-five feet. Then Frick requested

300 guards from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency.

Pinkerton had 2,000 active agents and 30,000 reserves - more than the standing army of the US at that time and had intervened in seventy major labour disputes. On July 5, a union sentry came rushing into Homestead shouting, "The Pinkertons are coming." Soon workers and their families - 10,00 people in all - poured down to the river front to greet the Pinkertons. In the battle that followed, forty strikers were shot and nine killed. Among the Pinkertons, twenty were shot and several died. Many of the guards had been hired under false pretenses and had been shipped to Homestead against their wills - often at gunpoint - Finally, they hauled up the white flag to surrender.

But the union victory was short-lived. Eventually the governor of Pennsylvania sent 8,000 National Guardsman to patrol the plant. Seven strike leaders were indicated for murder, conspiracy and aggravated riot though no jury ever found a striker guilty on any charge. With the strike crushed, the industrialists imposed the wage cuts. From 1892 to 1907 the daily earnings of highly skilled plate-mill workers shrank by one-fifth while their hours increased from eight to twelve.

Pinkertons showed up at all the major labour battles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the railroad strikes, the coal battles in the West, the 1886 strike at McCormick Reaper in Chicago. After Pinkerton came his sons and grandsons and then Jim Farley, "King of the Strikebreakers." In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Pearl Bergoff became the nation's leading strikebreaker. His exploits are chronicled in the book **I Break Strikes** by Edward Levinson who explained the whole sordid business.

These strikebreakers often had long criminal records. In his expose Levinson listed the criminal types found in Bergoff's army: pickpockets, robbers, manslaughterers, kidnappers, drug addicts and murderers. Of all the tasks given to Bergoff's hirelings, none was more devastating than the role of agent provocateur. Agents, posing as workers, would incite strikers to violence to pave the way for court injunctions and the imprisonment of union leaders

[in the case of Vance, their agents have committed the violence themselves, such as torching company property]. "They were the scum of the earth," testified Robert Bruce, a member of the US Secret Service. "There is not one out of ten that would not commit murder."



## *Knocked Down But Getting Up Again*

This time last year few people outside of a certain music community had heard of Chumbawamba. Yet in the fall of 1997 it was almost impossible to turn on the TV or radio without hearing the refrain from "Tubthumping"

"I get knocked down but I get up again,  
you're never gonna keep me down."

Yet those within the radical community knew a secret about Chumbawamba: They were avowed anarchists whose ten year history had its roots in the squatters' movement in Leeds, England. Like earlier bands such as Crass, Chumbawamba have a long history of activism and social commentary ("One By One" on the album **Tubthumper** deals with the Liverpool dockers' strike for whom Chumbawamba had performed several benefits). Now the world had gone mad! An anarchist band with a number one hit record and on big capitalist record label EMI to boot! The cries of "sellout" were deafening. Are Chumbawamba sellouts? Rather than get into hairsplitting discussion of whether Chumbawamba are "punk" enough (**Maximum Rock & Roll** stopped reviewing their records years ago), I think it's better to judge people by what they do. A sellout to me is someone who trades on their status as outsiders in order to promote and enrich themselves. If Chumbawamba end up pushing GAP pocket-T's

maybe there's an argument, but this development seems unlikely (Nike offered them large sums for the use of "Tubthumping" - they declined and made fun of Nike on **Top of the Tops**). If you trade on fame and accomplish something worthwhile who am I to criticize? While I was mulling these things over I was delighted to read of the band's actions at the British music awards: Dumping a pitcher of ice water over the Deputy British Prime Minister, and reminding him of his inactions around the Liverpool dockers' strike. Who among us hasn't wanted to do that?

In March of this year striking print workers from Detroit toured North America to raise public awareness of their struggle. As luck would have it Chumbawamba's North American tour crossed with the Detroit tour in Calgary.

I contacted the band and they readily agreed to allow the strikers to have a table at the concert. (Animal rights groups, Winnipeg - ABC, and Anti-Racist Action also put on information tables). The band was photographed with Dennis Nazelli, from the Detroit strike, in front of the Detroit Strikers' banner for a story for the **Detroit Sunday Journal**. (The story and photograph appeared in the April 12 1998 edition) Before the band took the stage Dennis was given the opportunity to speak to the crowd. In response to Dennis' request for a verdict on the crimes of Gannet and Knight-Ridder against working people, the 800-strong audience responded with a deafening "GUILTY!"

During the encore the band encouraged people to donate their spare change to people collecting for the strikers as they left the hall. Almost \$200 was raised for the strike.

Sell-outs? Give me more sell outs like Chumbawamba then.

Neil Fettes.





## *Some Worthwhile Projects*

**Unpopular Books** sent us some of their recent pamphlets. Titles include "Milicias: Rooted in White Supremacy," articles by PART and Luther Blissett; "The Revolution is Not a Masonic Affair" by Boris Nicholaesky; and a reprint of Pour une Intervention Communiste's excellent 1977 article "On Workers' Autonomy." Costs run from \$2 to \$7. Write to Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Street, London, E8 2NS, UK.

**Larry Gambone** has recently published the third issue of **Anytime Now**, with features on "neo-syndicalism" Daniel De Leon and anarchism, and some brief reviews. \$1 from Affinity Place, Argenta, BC, V0G 1B0, Canada. Larry's **Red Lion Press** has also recently published a slim pamphlet entitled **Saint Che**, which goes some ways to demystifying the Che cult. We're not experts on Che, but the pamphlet is certainly thought provoking. \$2 from Box 174, Montreal, QC, H3K 3B9, Canada (Don't mention **Red Lion Press** on the envelope).

**Auto-Narchy** is a pamphlet published by **A. Orr** on the subject of the new society, made possible by applying electronic communication to decision making. Orr writes "this pamphlet proposes a leap into a democracy so participatory as to make all former political systems look like so many variants of dictatorship." No mailing address on this piece, but it is available on-line at:

<http://www.autoarchy.org.il>

**The Barking Dog** is a rank and file newsletter produced by Caroline Lund at the notorious NUMMI auto plant in California. Interesting tales from the floor. Issue #4 has two excellent articles on "Don't Buy 'Buy American'" on why nationalism is poison, and "The Right to Pee." We usually receive our copies via e-mail. Contact Caroline Lund at [lundshep@igc.apc.org](mailto:lundshep@igc.apc.org)

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