

---

# REVOLUTION

---

## PAST & PRESENT.

by Tony Fleming



Leeds

10p



## Introduction

This pamphlet represents an attempt to trace the characteristics of some modern revolutions and revolutionary movements, in varying degrees of depth. As an attempt to assess common characteristics and trends, and locate the lessons we need to learn. I have deliberately not called some successful and some abortive, since the shared tragedy of one and all is that, in libertarian terms, they have failed.

All the revolutions discussed occurred in Europe, unless we regard Russia as part of Asia. This is necessary for the simple reason that the concrete conditions of Europe are manifestly those of highly developed industry. It will be pointed out that the Russian revolution occurred in a mainly rural country. We have nevertheless to take it into accounts as being primarily a revolution of the urban proletariat.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the current situations in this country, what seems to me the way forward, and an attempt to face up to exactly what is involved.

## THE FAILED REVOLUTIONS

### Paris 1871

By way of a historical summary. France's Second Empire had collapsed. The inhabitants of Paris had sustained a long siege, in the end surrendering: the Germans effectively annihilated the French. Napoleon fell, and a so-called liberal government, under Thiers, took over. The government attempted to recover some cannon from Paris. The city rose in revolt and the local bourgeoisie fled. At this point the Commune could have smashed the government, now trembling in Versailles. Bismark helpfully supplied Thiers with released prisoners-of-war. The Communards upset everyone by shooting such gentle souls as the Archbishop of Paris. Nobody was too bothered when scores of rebels were massacred. Of the bourgeoisie at least. The survivors were exiled, to be amnestied some years later. The only rebel not allowed to return was the Jacobin, Ledru-Rollin.

Marx defined the Commune as the form of the proletarian revolution, the first victory of the workers. Lenin takes up the point to focus on "the shattering of the former state power and its replacement by a new and truly democratic one" (1). Trotsky, on the other hand, true to type, states: "We can look, page by page, through history of the Commune. We will find only one lesson: there must be a strong Party leadership" (2). Engels does not only not learn this lesson: he contradicts it: for him the Commune is "the political form, at last discovered, under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour" (3). Another lesson, more meaningful for libertarians, offers itself. The social measures of the Commune were



frequently not consciously socialist. In fact the very nature of their situation "impelled them to take measures of a class character. They generated their own socialist consciousness, assisted but not dictated by conscious revolutionaries of various kinds" (4).

However, this is not sufficient. Whether or not Paris represented the first proletarian free commune we have still to offer a solution for the problem of the failure to march on Versailles. The 'solution' is perhaps contained in the behaviour of the revolutionaries in the Commune. That they did not play the wrong role, but had no analysis (or conception) of to try to destroy state involves.

Engels tells us in the introduction to the Civil War in France that, on April 16 the Commune ordered that plans for cooperative management by the workers of abandoned factories be worked out by the workers. Not only that, but a libertarian leninist tells us: "The Commune's workshops were models of proletarian democracy. The workers themselves appointed the directors, shop and bench foremen. These were subject to dismissal by the workers if relations or conditions proved unsatisfactory. Not only were wages, hours and working conditions set, above all, a factory committee met every evening to discuss the next day's work." (5).

The same author tells us that the act of the creation of the Commune was a demonstration of the real self government of the Parisian masses.

This ignores a central point, which the 'decree' from the Commune on 'workers' control' brings out. Although it represented an advance on the Great Commune, it still demonstrated a basically Jacobin ideology. First the decree, then the self-activity of the class. The fact that the consequences included steps towards workers' control, or even management, does not alter this point.

It is significant that Lenin ignores this advance in State and Revolution. But having said this we need to focus on the points he does make.

Two joined facts enter here. The first is that, for the first time, the people are in arms. The state, as the executive committee of the ruling class, no longer has a monopoly of arms. If politically a representative system remains, in terms of armed force it is the class, and not the organs of power, who rules.

This is of crucial importance. A system of representation is inevitably necessary even after the revolution. Since it is inevitable, the armed people gives us an essential defence mechanism against the degeneration of these organs. But the value of this can be overestimated. It assumes that the Class is not so conditioned into authoritarian attitudes that it automatically accepts the dictates of its representatives.

This is to some extent, but far from completely, negated by the assumption that, having won a revolution, the class is going to give up its gains. In Russia, because of the authoritarian conditioning preceding the revolution, it did precisely this.

Lenin also points to the central reality that the representatives received no more than workingmen's wages.



He links this with the political form of proletarian democracy-- "all posts (were filled by) election on the basis of universal suffrage of all concerned, subject to the right of recall at any time by the same electors" (3). In this he follows Engels to the letter.

Neither seems to understand, however, the process by which even the most democratic organs degenerate. We will inevitably return to this theme in the section on Russia

A point that Lenin, like Engels, does ignore is the federalist concept of the Commune, as made clear in its Manifesto to the French People: "The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all the localities of France, assuring to each its integral rights and to every Frenchman the full exercise of his aptitudes, as a man, a citizen, and a worker. The autonomy of the Commune will have for its limits only the equal autonomy of all other communities adhering to the contract." (6).

This is for a historical reason. Particularly with Lenin. France long before the Revolution had a decentralized structure: the Communes were precisely socio-political units in the middle ages. They had been smashed when the French monarchy centralized the State, but remained a focus of dissident ideology. This is not to say revolutionaries in France were always consistent advocates of the Communes. But at this point the historical traditions of France integrate with the experience of the Great Commune. Whether Robbespierre and his colleagues liked it or not, for a period at least even Paris itself was decentralized into a face-to-face democratic arrangement-- the sections (7).

It introduces however a problem which libertarians on the whole ignore rather than face up to. Just as the original communes developed in the middle ages, so it was precisely because they had a pre-industrial economic base that they were able to function successfully. The claim that Proudhon represents petty-bourgeois ideology is true in that his aspirations were only realizable in a pre-industrial society.

The critique of the federalist thesis does not invalidate the aim of a decentralized society: it merely demands that we place that aim within the context of a highly developed urban-industrial complex and apply it realistically. Even less does it invalidate, and in fact does not touch, the commitment to face-to-face democracy at the base.

Finally, before leaving the lessons of the Commune we have to face the problem of its nationalist component. In its historical context the Paris Commune of 1871 owed its eruption not least to the indignity of the betrayal of the national struggle by the bourgeoisie. It was part of the class nature of the revolt that it was 'patriotic' anger against betrayal by an unpatriotic ruling class. Thus the founder of French National Socialism was able to identify with the Commune against its destroyers (7). At the same time it "honoured the heroic sons of Poland by placing them at the head of the defenders of Paris" (4).

It is only now, faced with the growth of multinational capitalism, that national proletariats are forced, in their industries, to act internationally. It is vital that we consistently point to the lesson of this: that as



workers our chauvinism is against our own concrete interests, and we can no longer use nationalism, at least, as a safety valve. We need to link this to the whole question of racism and sexism, pointing out that even in the short-term only class solidarity can help us. In such situations as, for example, the lesson was made during the building strike. We can argue the pros and cons of antisexism and anti-racism in abstract (ie moral) terms till the cows come home. We have to recognize that moralism will get us nowhere- that the lesson we have to show all the time, from concrete situations, is that we can never get our freedom unless it is as a class.

Which in turn introduces another question- the issue of the class analysis. It is fine, and true, to say that everyone in our society is restricted by relationships of authority, and we have to say this. And certainly Bedaevyev is correct when he point out that the master ceases to be without his slaves, precisely because they define his existence (8).

But no ruling class has ever given up power without a struggle, and it is naive to assume that they will in the future. The general strike as an alternative to violence, as proposed for example by the Dutch pacifist Nieuwenhuis, is a purely theoretical concept. What are we supposed to do when the ruling class takes arms and attempts to smash the revolutionary movement? Lie back and take it? Passively resist? The only non-violent movement which has succeeded was Ghandi's 'liberation' of India. Leaving aside the fact he could point to the alternative, and there were violent revolutionaries and violence. He was facing a guilt ridden imperialism: would the Nazis have reacted the same way? And it was a national liberation struggle against an external power that could afford to cut its losses. In no other case has it worked. The Danes used it against the Nazis: they might have got rid of the Jews, but Denmark was about the last country to be 'liberated' from German occupation. Where does that leave pacifism?

That's just as a moral ideal. More basic is the fact that not only has no ruling class given up without a struggle, but that the workers recognize this and in every revolutionary situation have been prepared to use violence. It is all very well to say 'I want no part of it'. Not only is the pacifist strategy a loser but it cuts the revolutionary off from the class. What it does achieve is to foster confusion and illusion in those who take any notice of it and to that extent damages the revolutionary movement.

Not as part of the discussion of the Commune- the last page hasn't been -but as a myth that has to be disposed of. It is popular in the revolutionary movement to say that there are a lot of different oppressed groups, and a class analysis is out o date. The most sophisticated apologist for this position has claimed that there is now no ruling class. Even the managers are employees. ( The onlysis goes on to picture a society that is literally under the control of technology. This has its own internal dynamic which drives it forward, aand we are all



consequently alienated from our creativity, and from control over what happens to us (9).

This is precisely the same error that assumes, because there is no ruling class legally in Russia, there is no ruling class at all. It therefore has to be defined as a ruling strata. Djilas, whatever his shortcomings, and they are many (see for example his Ghandian effort *The Unperfect Society*), was correct on this point. The issue is not whether the power of a ruling class is in law; a ruling class as such is defined ultimately as having control of the means of production. The Russian bureaucracy- the managerial and political bureaucracy are well integrated- forms a ruling class in precisely the same way as the American managerial class does. Both have control of the means of production. In theory the state controls them in Russia, and the state is the expression of the will of the people. The accurate parallel is nationalized industry in this country. In America the shareholder allegedly controls the means of production. Protesting anti-apartheid liberals to the contrary, the shareholder is effectively helpless (for the scattered few who don't believe it, try *The Ensnared Shareholder*.) It may be argued that in fact the shareholder retains the power but does not use it: all dictatorship depends on acquiescence. The only time the voice of the shareholder becomes important is when the board is split. The anti-apartheid lobby, if they do have any effect, have it because the firms are worried that the effect on public relations, other investments, and their profits being affected. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the shareholder has more power than the Russian worker.

This is precisely because, under mixed and free enterprise capitalism, so-called, the organs of ruling class power are not fully integrated. If we define the state as the executive committee of the ruling class, we can say that only in state capitalism are the interests of the ruling class integrated. To the extent that capitalism is still competitive, the executive committee must remain above, and at times opposed to, the sectional interest groups within the ruling class. The development of monopoly capitalism, though transitionally producing conflict between the state and private enterprise (eg the American government trying to trust bust IBM as an international computer monopoly, without any real success) inevitably ends with the defeat of the executive committee, because it is being guided by outdated ideology.

In a nutshell, we are entering a phase of bureaucratic capitalism. In other words, a form of capitalism which is well past the entrepreneurial variety. We have reached the state where the higher 'echelons' of the bureaucracy form a new ruling class, precisely because they effectively control the means of production. This doesn't mean nothing else matters: what it does mean is that the one thing the ruling class cannot surrender control of is the means of production.

It is unlikely that it will surrender control of, for example, housing, whether Estates or private tenancies, but not impossible. It is unlikely, though less so, that



it will allow the destruction of sexism and racism. It is impossible for it to surrender control of industry.

Cardan was right in his analysis here, but it is doubtful whether in fact the result is necessarily, as he at least implies, the breaking up of the working class into increasing numbers of mutually antagonistic strata (10). In fact, with the increasing prevalence of the sense of powerlessness, and the increasing reality of the spread of, for example, the production line to the office- the typing pool, we stand more and more chance of getting just the situation Marx predicted. With the revision that the crunch is not falling wealth, but falling power. We do not get an increasing material gulf between the classes, but an increasing gulf between who controls and who is controlled.

In this context the definition of the working class as those who work machines and labour in factories, always a vulgarization, is obviously bankrupt. The clerk and the technician are just as much workers. It is an exaggeration to claim the technicians are now the key (11), but I take the point.

Apologies for the heaviness of this, but it is essential the point is made.

### Russia 1917 on

In February 1917 the Russian Empire collapsed and the Tsar abdicated, leaving behind factions ranging from the proto-fascist Black Hundreds (absolute monarchist, anti-semitic, peasants against industrial workers), through the Cadets (constitutional monarchists, sympathetic to the British arrangement, the party of big business); the Social Revolutionaries (Kerensky as Right-wing Labour, through the peasant social-democrats, to the Left SRs, who formed a coalition with the Bolsheviks briefly after October, and the Maximalists, who were anarchists. The Social Democratic Labour Party included the Social-Democrat mensheviks, who adhered to the Constituent Assembly and wanted to carry on the war, and the bolsheviks, who advocated class war, an immediate move into socialism (the Mensheviks believed it was necessary to pass through capitalism), and in the end sorted themselves out to favour "All Power to the Soviets". (12). The anarchists ranged from the irrelevant Tolstoyans to the more important anarcho syndicalists and Maknovists in the Ukraine.

Three strands show through the period from March to October. The first is the decline of bourgeoisie power. The Provisional Government, prosecuting a war nobody wanted, dependent on the support of a peasantry who formed an army in the process of disintegrating, ultimately and in fact the expression of the will of an underdeveloped bourgeoisie, building a coalition on these two bases. Resorting to a military coup- the Kornilov affair -when the going got rough and sealing its own fate in the process.

The second, and in the long term the most important, was the Soviets. It has been argued that, in contrast with both the factory committees and the French



Communes, the Soviets were highly authoritarian, that in fact they were hierarchical power structures which directly paralleled the institutions of bourgeois power (13). It is essential therefore to place them also in context. The prototype for the Soviets was in fact Petrograd in 1905, where they really erupted spontaneously as a committee of representatives from different factories, and so forth. As such they went completely unnoticed, even by Trotsky, who had been one of the leaders. Certainly not by Lenin. Once transformed to a national form of organization, however, the Soviets were faced with a concrete problem that simply had not entered into the experience of the Commune. They did not just occur in one city, but across the length and breadth of an entire Empire. In a nutshell, unlike the Commune, the Soviets were faced practically with the problem of centralism vs decentralism. This in a country with no real memories of anything but a centralised state.

So that in fact the Soviets, as spontaneous forms of organization, necessarily involved no learning from previous experience. There was no analysis on the issue of centralism outside the intelligentsia. To the extent that one arose, it did so in the concrete situation of the conflict between the autonomous factory committees and the central Soviet. And in this context only the anarcho-syndicalists were able to put forward a coherent alternative. No other revolutionary tendency disagreed with centralism *per se* anyway. Not just because of Marx, but because of the historical conditions of the country. In other words, spontaneous organization is not enough.

Marx is right when he distinguishes between utopian and 'scientific' socialism. The former is the attempt to present a form when it has not arisen from history: the latter is recognizing the historical form of proletarian power and focussing on it (14). The striking thing is that he himself did not practice it, again and again, like Engels, returning to the illusions of parliamentary democracy. This repeats itself through the history of Leninism as well as Social-Democracy. After the defeat of the European revolution in the early twenties every Communist Party turned to the strategy of Social-Democracy. It is no accident that everyone of them has become Social-Democratic, and plays a counter-revolutionary role. This inevitable degeneration, correctly predicted by Bordiga as well as Pankhurst, even outside the anarchist movement, which has always recognized it, implicitly or explicitly, has to be assessed, a question we will return to in the context of Spain.

If we say that spontaneous organization is not enough, this is not to say that it is not the basis. What is necessary is that as revolutionaries we consistently point to the dangers with particular developments of organization. It is the thesis of this pamphlet, as will emerge, that the workers' council is the spontaneous form of proletarian democracy. Which has the potential both to excessive centralization and decentralization. In this context, another point. The March (or February) Revolution involved the collapse not merely of Tsarism but of the state apparatus. The centre of the revolution was in Petrograd. So that just in terms of the concrete



situation it was not suprising. Once again the shortcomings of purely spontaneous organization. Unless we point out the lessons from the beginning, history will repeat itself.

The factory committees provide the third strand. They had been erupting since the first days of the revolution and continued to grow. Once again as the spontaneous attempt of the rank-and-file to organize themselves at their workplace and take control of it. These in due course also came mainly under the control of the Bolsheviks. Just as anarchists have downgraded the Soviets, so they have tended to fetishize the factory committees. The point has to be made again. It is not enough in a highly complex technological society to talk about decentralization. In fact, as has been pointed out before, what we need is a balance between the two. Pretty obviously the Soviets didn't have this (though we need to remember that there were local Soviets as well as a national one). But neither, essentially, did the factory committees.

The factory committees provided in fact a battleground. As early as January 1918 the lines were drawn up. The anarcho-syndicalist Maximov presented the case as follows. The unions corresponded to the economic conditions of Tsarism, and therefore couldn't take on a role of economic organization. The factory committees could and should do just this. "The aim of the proletariat was to coordinate all activity, all local interest, to create a centre but not a centre of decrees and ordinances but a centre of regulation, of guidance- and only through such a centre to organize the industrial life of the country." The Congress voted to transform the committees into union organs. The higher organs of control would organize finance.

However, the text provided by Brinton, from which this is taken (15) is not wholly clear. Thus one of the decisions quoted is that workers in individual factories could not decide on "issues touching upon the existence of the enterprise". If this is euphamistic he should have said so. If it means simply that workers could not close down their factories off their own backs, then this does not contradict the Maximov position. And what does Maximov mean by regulation?

To press on.

At the June Congress of factory committees Lenin appears to contradict the decisions of January. The factory committees must not concern themselves with purely technical and economic questions: they must become "the basic state nuclei of the ruling class" (16). In March the government had already introduced one-man management on the railways. In other words, whatever the verbal statements of Lenin, the practice was the eroding of the factory committees.

The Left Communists provided an opposition to this, but only after they had lost their foothold in the corridors of power over the Brest-Litovsk treaty. By then the rot had set in and they were fighting a rearguard action. Now they started insisting socialism would be the



creation of the working class or it would in fact be state capitalism. A Leningrad Party Conference demanded that the Left Communists cease their organizational existence, and before long the Leninists had won over most of the Leftists. The battle continued as Lenin advocated labour discipline and highly paid specialists. The Left opposed piece rates and Taylorism and advocated a workers administration from above and below, and managed to win the demand for two-thirds workers on management boards, only to have it inverted at Lenin's insistence. (15). It is all very well for Serge to say that Lenin abided by majority decisions. Even the evidence he points to, on the Brest-Litovsk treaty, shows that Lenin, when defeated, kept on pushing until he won. He never accepted defeat. (17). And it is not irrelevant that attempts should be made to annihilate the Left Communists as a group- precisely because they were a very real threat. Alas, like too many Marxists, they had omitted to build up a solid base: so they didn't have a chance.

By the time we get to the Workers' Opposition the battlefield has changed. Where in 1918 it had been the Bolsheviks backing the trades unions against the factory committees as organs of economic organization; now it is the Opposition defending the trades unions against the state.

Perhaps Lenin did not really support the Bolshevik thesis that the trades unions would inevitably become transformed into organs of the socialist state. The Mensheviks insisted the state, as representing peasants as well as workers, could not only represent the workers. In 1921, in the trade union controversy, Lenin put forward very similar ideas: since the state was a "workers' state with bureaucratic deformations" the workers needed a defence against it.

Trotsky opposed this with the cliché that, since it was a workers' state, the workers had nothing to fear. Labour had to be militarized, with the trades union as the means of disciplining it. Its leadership had created a crisis by not stimulating the right "production atmosphere. The same Trotsky advocated the virtues of one-man management. Yet there are still militants around who call themselves Trotskyists and quote him on the need for internal democracy within the Party. The Calvinists also were democrats when they were in a minority! (And to think I was a Trotskyist once- the shame of it...)

The Left Communists also pointed to the tendency of factories to become autonomous and separate, and correctly saw this as the result of Leninist conservatism. The decree on Workers' Control immediately after October did not turn the factories over to workers' management; nor did it nationalize industry. It simply substantially increased the power of the workers on the factory floor. In a lot of places it was simply an acknowledgement of a fact, but at the same time we have to admit factory committees increased vastly after it. We have to point out, on the other hand, that in a lot of places bosses fled and the workers took over the factories.

Which gives me the opportunity to discuss what has been called 'market syndicalism', of which Yugoslavia,



in theory at least, is the living example. When I say market syndicalism I mean an economy where the workers run the factories competitively. The Algerian attempt at autogestion seems to have been based on this thesis. It also seems to be the position Guerin takes up, though he explicitly sees a balance of cooperation and competition. He dates the concept from Proudhon. The argument rests on the problems a coordinated economy has of balancing centralism and decentralism. What he omits to note is that, since market syndicalism allows for the supply and demand ration to be balanced by the free play of the market, precisely the same forces operate as in a market capitalist economy. Which is the increasing monopolization of control over production, and with it the threat of unemployment and the rest of it. In other words, though on the face of it an easy way out, in fact it leads us back to square one. This doesn't seem to occur to Guerin at all. (17). What about the worker-owned experiments in France which ended with the initial group employing new labour? Or what about the kibbutz, which now not only employ labour but against all their founding principles Arab labour as well, without having any qualms about it (18)? Obviously it is the fact the kibbutz exist within the context of Israeli capitalism that has speeded this process up. But capitalism did arise in the first place, and the development of wage labour seems to have stemmed from failure to compete. The unsuccessful farmer trades in his farm and has to start working. For someone else.

In a nutshell, we have to face the challenge of achieving a balance between centralism and decentralism. There is no easy let out.

So far I have omitted a discussion of the role of the Bolshevik Party in the Revolution. Not only does this need to be analysed: we have also to assess what role a revolutionary organization should have played.

The Bolshevik party split from the Mensheviks on the principle of membership. Lenin wanted a centralist organization. After 1905 he called for the mass recruitment of members of the working class. But Tsarist repression made a tight-knit group once again inevitable. The point that is missed is precisely that this facilitated a regression to the authoritarian elitism of What Is To Be Done? In 1917 the Bolsheviks began to become a mass party, but it was unable to get rid of its substitutionist ideology. It is simply not true that Lenin saw clearly he had to break with vanguardism and to recognize that the expression of workers power was precisely through the Societs. This kind of position may have emerged in The April Theses, which had to be published as an individual statement, and in State and Revolution, though this was ambiguous. It was neither Lenin's practice nor that of the party. The simple fact is that the Bolsheviks only abandoned illusions about the Constituent Assembly when it



was clear they'd get nothing like a majority in it. And that the Bolshevik government progressed relentlessly precisely to a centralist state without a democratic component. The Party, as the advanced section of the class, could stand in for the class: the backward sections lacked revolutionary consciousness and therefore had to be corrected.

Of course the havoc produced by the civil war was a factor. It was not an explanation. We can equally well point to the contradiction of an attempt to have a proletarian revolution in a peasant nation. And the very real disasters the Marxist analysis led to. Fanon's description of the relationship between the urban and rural Algerians- the former as relatively well-off and Social-Democrat, the latter as poor and insurrectionist (19) fits precisely, in reverse, the attitude of the Bolsheviks. They were effectively anti-peasant to a large extent because of their Marxist analysis. Hence the War Communism which led to requisitioning and a real war situation between the peasants and the workers. This effectively meant the impossibility of a development of peasant communism and so the retreat of the NEP. Not that this solved the problem. It was left to Stalin to cope with an unnecessarily created class of rich peasants: which he did by hamfisted 'collectivization'. The failure of this in turn has led to a repeat of individual ownership. Whatever the shortcomings of the Ukrainian anarchists (eg their anti-urbanism), they did demonstrate that the peasants were not intrinsically reactionary.

Trotsky, in his thesis on substitutionism, in his more perceptive days, pointed to the inevitable progressive development of a Leader dictatorship (20). Rosa Luxemburg had repeated the theme (21). Yet Sedgewick can still argue that it wasn't the key, even if rather pathetically (22). It is no doubt true there are various strands in the Party on 1917-18, including everything from parliamentarianism, pacifism at one end to near-anarchism at the other. But the basic framework and attitude of the leadership remained the same. It was this that ultimately destroyed the revolution.

So what is the solution?

The history of revolutionary groupings shows that once they become mass organizations they degenerate. Since it is essential we retain an intransigent revolutionary point of view, and need organization to be effective, it is clear that we need a tight-knit revolutionary grouping. To prevent it becoming substitutionist or centralist it is vital it is both intensely democratic and that it is clear that it is not an organization for seizing state power. The Situationist distinction makes the point- a hard grouping whose effect is achieved because its ideas are in everybody's heads. In other words, at no time must the revolutionary grouping attempt to capture mass organizations: its role is getting across ideas, initiating struggles but always, at the earliest possible moment, ensuring that it does not stand in for the class. Since the earliest possible moment is capable of distortion, and in fact wrong, we should be saying 'from the beginning'. It is naive to believe that



even with all this there is no risk of degenerating. As long as we try to be effective in a pre-revolutionary situation- ie get our ideas across -we cannot behave as if the revolution had already happened.

I have deliberately, though artificially, left the explosion of sexual liberation till this point.

In December 1917 the patriarchal family and sexual inequality were legally brought to an end. All over Russia, even in peasant villages, the opportunity was grasped.

But how?

With massive ambivalence, fear and guilt.

Of course the puritan prejudices and repressions of the old guard Bolsheviks, Lenin chief among them, didn't help. This facet has been explained as the result of years of professional revolutionism, trekking from place to place, working non stop, and the rest of it. With no life at all as human beings. Consequently tight into the mould of making a virtue out of necessity

But whereas legalization of the factory committees merely triggered their expansion, it is arguable that with the family law played much more of a catalyst role.

It is significant that it was 1920 that the regression back to patriarchal forms began. This time direct government (ie Bolshevik) policy. Why?

The spontaneous pressure for sexual equality came from the working class and clearly not from the peasantry. As such it would have been minimal on a national scale but significant in the Bolshevik party, precisely as it became a mass party.

In 1920 the Left Communists had been and gone. The Workers' Opposition was launched that year and attracting precisely the proletarian militants.

It was the year before Kronstadt, when the process that began with a secret police substituting for people's courts culminated in the Party smashing the adherents of the very slogan which had carried them to power, "All Power to the Soviets": both the demands of the rebels and the response of the Bolsheviks summing up the degeneration of the revolutionary movement. Agonized Leftists went on to the ice to shoot down the men who they knew were really right (23).

It was no accident that the writer of Family and Communism should also have been one of the leaders of the Workers' Opposition.(24).

What was nothing less than incredible was the total failure, in spite of this, of either side to consciously recognize the relationship between the two. "Only a small minority of revolutionaries saw a conscious sexual revolution as an essential component of social change". (25).

The truth in all this is that, though sexism is not an essential part of capitalism; and although the point of power in a socialist revolution is control of the means of production; sexism provides its own class dynamic; its own authoritarianism. And it therefore essential that revolutionaries consciously smash it.



## Turin 1920

The factory councils in Turin were a development of the internal committees. But we need to place the whole sequence in its historical context.

Italy was going through an economic crisis: rapid inflation turned the workers towards revolution and the petit-bourgeoisie, on fixed incomes, flocked towards fascism. Turin's industrialists prepared for the showdown and founded their Confederation of Industry. It was the industrialists who seized their chance to launch a counter-offensive. The April strike was a fundamental battle about who would control the factories. The bosses versus the factory councils. In spite of massive support, it was clear after three weeks the battle was lost. The strike itself had lasted eleven days. The PSI refused to back it: it was confined to Piedmont; the industrialists were prepared and set the battleground. And the general strike as a tactic is useless. The struggle was isolated by the Socialist Party precisely because most of them opposed the concept of the factory council anyway. Ordine Nuovo remained the only voice of the thesis.

The September occupations started off in Milan. The *fiom* trade union opted for working-to-rule. Alfa-Romeo launched a lock out. The workers occupied at least 280 factories in the area as a reply. It was a case reformist trade unionists being stuck with a confrontation they didn't want in the least. Turin workers in turn occupied their metallurgical plants, and shortly afterwards nearly all Italian heavy industry. It was a work-in controlled by the workers that demanded a spreading to gain the raw materials necessary for continued production. The illusion that this in itself constituted a revolution was widespread. The factory councils, and not the trades unions, ran the factories. The peasantry started occupying land, led by Christian Democrat militants! The workers never faced the simple fact that either they "must take power or the occupation would die a natural death." Therefore they accepted a compromise which stated acceptance of workers control by the industrialists. Within a year all the gains were eroded. The final law was a sellout. And fascism started making massive gains. Embittered, Gramsci surrendered faith in the class and adopted a hard leninist position. Which led in due course to the parliamentarianism of the PCI, for which Gramsci fought, against the abstentionism of Bordiga.

The defeat of the occupation constituted the defeat of the working class revolutionary movement for a very long time to come. Up till now in fact. Inevitably the ruling class, having lost faith in liberalism, resorted to the creation of a fascist state. (24).

First, as libertarians, we have to analyse the position of the PSI reformists, of Ordine Nuovo, and of the anarchists.

The position of Bordiga was that the Communists had first to seize state power. Soviets and factory councils would follow. We can safely ignore his.



Equally, the reformists always opposed the factory councils on very similar grounds to the Menshevik Bolshevik coalition against the committees in Russia.

It is significant that the position of Ordine Nuovo on the factory councils was very similar to that of Maximov. Not only did Gramsci reject the trades unions but also the Party. Both arose in a historical period dominated by capitalism, functioning as competitive forms, the unions economically, the Party politically. The trade union identified a man as a wage-earner and fought in those terms: the council focussed on man as producer. "The council tends, because of its revolutionary spontaneity, to unleash the class war at any time; the union, because of its bureaucratic form, tends to prevent the class war from ever being unleashed". The Party, as a form of liberal democracy, inevitably declines with the collapse of capitalism. The only way it could avoid this was by encouraging a strong council movement. The Party is a sectional, voluntary organization: the council is an organ of actual and potential control of production. (24a).

The anarchists had two responses. The first was that they were less idealistic about the factory councils, and pointed out that in a nonrevolutionary period these too could become organs of class collaboration. Less important was the defence of the Italian Syndicalist Union. (17a).

We have to ask whether in fact the anarchist uncertainties were justified. As practically the councils in Italy grew out of the internal committees, so ideologically they owed something at least to the shop steward movement in this country. To some extent this has now been coopted by the trades unions, but the fact remains that they continue in the main to represent a rank-and-file force against both management and Unions. More important is the fact that the shop steward is frequently independent of the rank-and-file: this is in Unions which have integrated the shop stewards committee. However, with the repeated conflicts between shopfloor and bosses/Unions the coopting of the steward merely creates a temporary confusion which has to be overcome.

The shop steward is the least capable of cooption. The Union bureaucracy's success in recruiting them to its apparatus merely makes a fresh independent rank-and-file organization on the particular shop floor necessary. More to the point is the problem that the steward frequently reflects and echoes the prejudices of the worker. This is inevitable in a pre-revolutionary period. It connects to the problem of raising consciousness.

Herein an organizational problem. Should members of a revolutionary groupuscule become shop-stewards. Yes. With the function of using it both to demonstrate the validity of libertarian communism, and of activating the class as self-organizing. On a practical level, it is bringing about regular, highly democratic, shop meetings, and constantly pushing issues of control.

This is the key. We have to link shopfloor democracy with issues of control and management- issues of power.



## Spain and the Civil War

On July 19, 1936, workers all over Spain smashed the military uprising. In a few areas Franco managed to gain a foothold, from which to wage his war. The next day a redundant state power in Catalonia grovelled to survive, and the 'influential militants', all members of the FAI, sold out. In due course the state power rallied, the Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias being replaced by the Anarchists entered the Catalanian Generalitat, and then the national government of Largo Caballero. The government was supported by people like Montseny and Olivier when they smashed workers' management in Barcelona, when they replaced the militias by the so-called Popular Army, organized as a rigid army.

Richards analyses this as the simple reality that power corrupts. Thus the position of power made the FAI ministers identify with its interests and its survival against all the things that as anarchist militants they were supposed to believe in. He concludes that the militant should not identify with the mass movement, the syndicalist union, that the class will create its own organs of power, and the role of the anarchist is, apparently, to be intransigent. He offers no organizational solution, and in fact implicitly puts the view that any revolutionary grouping is dangerous by its very nature. (25).

The CNT as a long-standing trade union had become increasingly reformist. The FAI was founded to smash the reformist control. And to take over the Union. It's basic thesis seems to be roughly the original leninist one, of democratic centralism. It was born of a realization of the trade union consciousness of much of the membership and made the classic error of convincing people enough to vote for them, but not enough to effectively stimulate the self-activity of the class. In other words, it played the same role within the CNT that the Bolsheviks played within the Soviets. Their position involved no concept of being a catalyst and a seemingly clear one of being an elite. Its historical origins was distrust of the class. When the class moved, as always, way ahead of the conscious revolutionaries, the fear and distrust of the masses become a vehicle for slogans that boiled down to 'don't rock the boat or we'll lose the war'; when in fact the war was lost precisely because the revolution did not take place.

At this point we can thrash out the question of the syndicalist trades union, as a form of base-power revolutionary unionism which aims to become the form of the post-revolutionary society. It was not only in Spain that the syndicalist union became reformist: in the more gentle pastures of Sweden the Sveriges Arbetares Central is now a trade union, with no revolutionary perspective at all. No doubt the CNT would have travelled the same path if there was not a continuous political and social crisis forcing a revolutionary awareness on to members of it. The striking thing is that throughout its history it was in a highly repressive and/or critical environment and yet it became reformist. (6).

Which amply supports the thesis of Ordine Nuovo.



But, comes back the stern reply, the syndicalist union is more integrated, and therefore more capable of smashing the state. As a pure revolutionary form, if we disconnect from the myth of the general strike, this is theoretically true. But precisely because it is historically part of capitalism, arising from it and acting within it, it is as a real entity demonstrated by its past that it cannot smash the state. Just as the Italians failed to see that occupying was not enough; so in practice the 'influential militants' sold out, the factories were briefly run by self-managing committees, only to be annihilated by a state which was able to revive exactly because the revolutionaries had no perspective for destroying the apparatus of bourgeoisie power.

Once again the basic lesson has to be a close revolutionary group that activates the class towards the destroying of capitalism and its replacement by proletarian democracy. To stimulate the class to become aware that it can do just this, and that it does not have to depend on leaders.

To conclude, another point springs to mind. I said earlier on that sexism and racism are not necessarily smashed by a class revolution. The attitude of the FAI leaders- Montseny springs to mind - towards Franco's use of the Moors was both racist and self-defeating. At no point did the CNT consider attempting to subvert the Moroccan troops in their own homeland, which would have been very easy by identifying with their right to national self-determination.

This leads into the issue of nationalism, and the question of what position libertarians should be taking up.

"There is no nationalism in general; rather there is revolutionary nationalism and reactionary nationalism. In applauding imperialism, Marx was a reactionary nationalist, and in defending the right of every people to be free, Bakunin was a revolutionary nationalist." Lenin accepted the Bakuninist thesis on the nationalities question in Russia, just as the Third International took up a firmly anti-imperialist position, at least until Stalin had to come to a rapprochement with the West. At the end of it all we see the PCF deputies in the French Assembly voting the government money to smash the Viet Minh. By that time Russia had long since become part of the white block: its behaviour during the war was the culmination of this as it came to terms with capitalism (27). (28).

Anti-imperialism by definition fits into the camp of revolutionary nationalism, but this ignores its reverse face. The Mau Mau were anti-imperialist: they were equally for Kikuyu tribal domination of Kenya. The politics of free Africa are very much the politics of tribalism. Equally we have the uncomfortable problem of the fascist Action Francaise, which flirted with syndicalism in the Cercle Proudhon, adoptingly consistent anti-imperialist position. At the same time it looked to domination of Europe as a sphere of influence (7). How are we to relate to this? Numerous of the fascist



groupings in the thirties were separatist: the Ustachy, who still plague Yugoslavia are Croat separatists. Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party, may have a Left Social-Democrat platform: it is still not without its racists. Can we call these groupings 'revolutionary nationalist'? Clearly the whole issue needs a much tighter analysis.

One way out would be purist internationalism. It is clear the struggle is essentially one between international monopoly capital and the international working class. And "the entire intent of English patriotism is to conserve the great agglomeration of people, places, traditions and customs which is known as England" (29).

At the same time we can point to the dangers that anti-imperialism carry with them, the whole genesis of a counter-racism.

But this is also inadequate. It is inevitable that the black american responds to white racism with black racism, as a compensation of his force-fed sense of inferiority. The impressive thing is that the most effective black freedom group has made a class, and not a race, analysis (its substitutionism having led it into Social-Democracy is a separate issue).

The main critique of pure internationalism is that it is reductionist. The reality is that each capitalist country contains internal contradictions different in detail to the next. Therefore to some extent each country develops its crisis at a different time. Thus the May Events in France in 1968 had no affect on the working class of this country, any more than the continual crisis in Italy is. But the development of capitalism is precisely towards the breakdown of national boundaries. As already noted, workers in different countries have been forced to cooperate. As we enter the Common Market, essential for the continued growth of capitalism, this will intensify. We can still say that revolution cannot be imposed by one country on another, but have to be careful of making this a slogan. The problem is not here imperialism. Simply because we have to make a distinction between the genuine spread of the armed struggle against imperialism under a socialist rhetoric- Stalin's occupation of Eastern Europe.

It is important that the revolutionary people in arms do not spread the struggle into areas where there is no base at all, precisely because then it is seen, at least by the invaded, as imperialism. The French republics invasion of Germany did much to ensure that German nationalism would be right-wing.

The simple lesson is there is no easy solution. As capital becomes more international, so nationalism inevitably tends to break down, precisely because it does not bring home the goods. But as it does so it also encourages nationalism as the response of the least protected against it, in search of the recreation of boundaries. There is a dynamic for the growth of both



international solidarity and fascism.

In this context it is worth looking briefly at the defeat of Communist Party by the Nazis in Germany. It is a widely held myth of the Left that the KPD slit its own throat by its definition of the SPD as 'social-fascist'- by in fact its ultra-Left Third Period. This contains a truth which has to be got into perspective. Without doubt the correct policy, while defining the SPD as social-fascist, was to create a 'united front from below', not on an anti-fascist platform, but a revolutionary one. The essential correctness of this Third Period line (ignoring the issue of abstentionism) was that the KPD vote rose dramatically during the crisis that ended with Hitler's taking power, and the democratic parties all lost support. Reich is a lot nearer the mark when he says that the Nazis ultimately won because they appealed to the feelings and utopianism of the masses, while the KPD consistently bored the workers into apathy. When a party group, duly expelled, made contact with the pro-SPD Prussian police over the ban on them having girls in their rooms, they reduced dramatically the anti-worker prejudices of the rank-and-file policemen. By relating everyday experiences and problems to issues of politics they had an impact the Party was simply incapable of. (30). Nor did they ever recognize still less focus on the revolutionism of many Brownshirts. Even though at the end Party members crossed over to the Nazis, and vice versa. I appreciate this is often seen as part of the authoritarian attraction of both organizations. Deeper than that, I am convinced, was the revolutionary implications of both. The evidence was there for anyone to see- Strasserism. Hitler was more perceptive. The first crisis he faced was demands for 'the Second Revolution'. Faced with losing the support of industry, the condemnation of the Christian Conservatives, and other reactionaries, and most important now rejection by the Army, he sold out, and physically massacred the Left-wing of the Nazi Party. (31).

With the growth of international monopoly capital it becomes more possible to fight fascism, precisely because it can no longer begin to bring home the goods. It is vital, and part of the libertarian perspective in any case, that we do not simply proclaim proletarian internationalism, but that we affirm the demand for face-to-face base groups, and are prepared to consistently say that the only solution is "an internationalism in which all (cultural) loyalties, large and small, may find expression" (29a). The thesis in fact of libertarian federalism.

Where face to face is not simply a geographical neighbourhood, but also the affinity group of people working in the same industry anywhere in the world. Of course there are limits. But the answer isn't to sit back and say that. It is to test out in practice a balance of decentralism and centralism that takes communication as far as it can go.



## Hungary 1956

The story of the Budapest rising is somewhat different. It was a workers' rebellion against a self-defined workers' state (degenerated or otherwise!)

The course of the insurrection was pretty simple. Rising tension leading to the fall of Rakosi; the Poznan riots and trials in Poland. The background of Khrushchev's revelations on Stalin. The funeral of Laszlo Rajk, Rakosi's replacement. The bourgeois liberal Petofi Circle. The eruption of the workers' councils. The demos of October 23 when armed reaction by the secret police led to an exchange of shooting. Workers in the streets. Nagy, a revisionist of the classic mould 'rehabilitated' to serve the needs of the moment. Former advocate of progressive Stalinism, author of a totally uninnovative work misleadingly entitled On Communism. This new Prime Minister calls on the workers to lay down their arms, and sends in Russian troops. Some of these, with tanks, cross over to the rebels: the Secret Police are massacred in their barracks.

As apparently inevitable in Eastern Europe, the revolutionaries have not clarified what exactly they're aiming at. A lot of illusions about parliamentary (ie bourgeois) democracy. (Memories of the Social-Democrats taking over the Soviets in Germany, and abolishing them as they returned power to the parliamentarians.) Free election promised. The non-Communist parties are no longer to be mere formalities.

The revolutionary consciousness of the masses is not put to the test. Brand new, highly mobile, Russian troops pour into Budapest, carrying Kadar to the empty seat. Clean, uncorrupted troops man the tanks. Desperate, hopeless fighting and an appeal to the West that showed the last desperate illusions, repayed with the reality of silence. The workers' councils are whittled down, and the last abolished a year later. In due course, when things have settled, Nagy is pointlessly shot. (32).

It is useful first to compare this rising from the much loved 'Prague Spring'. The Hungarian uprising was a spontaneous proletarian rising against the Party that drew its strength from heavy industries known for being 'Red'. Of course the Right took advantage of it. That does not make it a fascist counter-revolution.

Czechoslovakia was significant as the attempt of the new bourgeoisie in the Party to capture control and introduce their concepts. The process assumed its own dynamic, however, and the new liberals, having succeeded in ousting Novotny, found themselves pushed further and further towards a politically competitive power-structure. It was the technocrats, not the workers, who controlled the development. Therefore the radical wing of the movement achieved the time-honoured triumph of asserting the right of management to manage in their 2000 Word Manifesto.

It was with the invasion that the autonomous action of the workers took the centre of the stage, but at a much lower level of consciousness- thus the protests against the sacking of Smrkovsky, for example. It was here too the students realized where they should be finding their allies. (33).

It has been claimed by more than one writer that



the Workers' Councils in Hungary did not appear till the Russian second invasion. (5a): this is simply not true. If it says anything it refers to the focus of the Western press.

We have, perhaps, to take into account the nationalist element of both these events- Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The consequence of Russian imperialism has been, as Western imperialism, a reactive nationalism. But this is grossly exaggerated. Thus Tito's current reversion to Stalinism is disguised as an attack on nationalism: this has unquestionably been an element in discontent, but it skilfully ignores the real liberalism of some of his opponents and revolutionary Leftism of others.

Unlike Czechoslovakia, Hungary occurred as part of a wave of revolt that swept across the 'Communist Bloc' with the death of Stalin, the battle for the succession, the explosion of the scores of contradictions hitherto repressed by terror. The ruling class had no alternative. Successive purges were crippling the economic development of the Empire. East Germany and, even more, the strike in Russia at Vorkuta, were sparked by Stalin's death. Hungary and Poland by the de-Stalinization speech.

The significant content of these risings was the refusal of a working class to be oppressed any longer. As bourgeoisie illusions produced rehashes of democracy, so the central feature each time was the self-organization of the working class, the creation of workers' councils. Which are the historical form of proletarian power in this era.

There is no evidence that in Hungary the Revolution lasted long enough to generate for example sexual liberation. The organization of the workers remained an organization of struggle.

More important, in learning lessons, is the fact that in its own way the Hungarian rebellion repeated the mistakes of Paris in 1871. The Workers' Councils did spring up spontaneously in a lot of places, but there was no conscious attempt either to organize or to spread the revolt. Once again, there was no development of consciousness before the rising, no awareness of what was involved.

It has been claimed anarcho-syndicalists were actively involved. If so their perspective was useless. What was needed, once again, was a grouping of revolutionaries developing a clear perspective and being prepared to point out what was needed. Not a group aiming to use the revolt to climb to power, but one committed to ensuring that the class took power through its own self-activity.

Historically, obviously, the nature of the Hungarian uprising could not have been this. But for this reason it was bound to fail.



Paris May 1968

Paris was only one of the upsurges of 1968- there was a general student revolutionary movement right across Europe. It was also the year of the riots in Berlin; the shooting of Rudi Deutschke; Kommune 1.

It was in France, however, that the students were able to connect with the workers, and for a brief few months to forge a coalition. Without nearly the same endurance as that which now confronts the Italian state.

Once again, we need to place the triggers of the explosion within their concrete context. The students were not revolutionaries because they saw the role of sociology as a means of coercion. The point at which these realizations formed a basis for action was when it combined with knowing that even of those who passed the exams, the lucky ones had a good chance of not getting jobs. In a nutshell, the problem of graduate unemployment.

It dovetailed with the reality of acutely low wage levels, pension scales and the rest of it. Which just hadn't been tackled for a long-time. With lowered income and a higher education it was particularly the younger, skilled workers who took up the demands for autogestion.

First to regale the reader with a description of the events themselves, to be followed by the lessons.

In ham-fisted response to the troubles on the Sorbonne, the Rector invites the CRS, the quasi-military police, to solve the problem. Students are beaten up, arrested, and summarily convicted. Thus what could have been solved by structural reforms in the University gets out of hand. Demonstrations and street fighting become the order of the day. At Renault's Boulogne Billancourt works the CGT dominates, condemns the ultra-leftists: the crowds of would-be revolutionaries stand outside and watch. It is not the first time: it will happen again.

In due course the government climbs down massively, withdraws the CRS from the campus and re-open it. But it doesn't calm the situation. By the middle of the same day the occupation was complete.

Debates, debates. The occupations spread across industry. Finally even Billancourt is occupied. The students plan a big deputation. The CP does its best to sabotage it. The march takes place. Contact is made. But the gates stay up: each to his own side. The demonstrators drift away at the end. The same mistake, the same fetishizing of the Union leaderships.

The Worker-Student Action Committee at the Citroen works repeats the same mistake. 'We must let each factory liberate itself'. The disease of sectionalism expresses itself through distorted anti-vanguardism of the students.

The 'revolution' instead occurs within the University. It is here that the students discuss, debate towards a perception of their own liberation. It is here the young workers join them. The factories remain in the



hands of the CGT. The occupations become a struggle for more money. At the same time, the vanguardist groups, their credibility established by having been gaoled and released, bankrupt the Assemblies. There is a massive regression to what is truly anachronistic. In the end even the worker student committees are taken over by the politicians. They no longer have any meaning. It is not the effectiveness of Gaullism, which seriously believed it was finished.

Nor was it the infamous CGT. Of course the Communist Party sowed illusions, confused and mystified the workers, and played a consistently counter-revolutionary role. But the key to failure was the totally inadequate perspective of all the revolutionary groups. None of them understood, at least until it was too late, the mistakes they were making. A recognition of this is much more valuable than attempts at self-justification after the event. (34).

The details of the end of the rising don't even matter. (35, 36, 37, 38).

What lessons can we learn?

Virtually already said is the mistake of not being prepared to ignore the CGT officials, recognize them as an essential part of the state apparatus, and to act in a way that in any other situation would have been elitist. Precisely because in a revolutionary situation the only chance is the seizure of power and the smashing of the state by the working class as a class. Because of their objective conditions and their response to it sections of the students had become working class. But they carried on feeling guilty for their class origins, and left the initiative in the hands of the Communist bureaucrats.

Not only this, though as a result of the consciousness involved, they involved the young workers in the Sorbonne and not in acting within their own factories. They took the revolutionary militants out of their factories and further isolated the movement.

The need, yet again, was for a revolutionary grouping with a clear perspective. Which is easy to say. It is now that this lesson can be learnt. Before 1968 the Class had not the historical experience behind it to resolve the contradiction. It had only its preconditioning of sectionalism, and thus was essentially bankrupt.

The critique goes further. Not only did they not understand this, but they had no perspective on the need to concretely smash the state. Street fighting and occupations are no substitute for the destruction of bourgeois power and its replacement by proletarian power. And yet, for those who cared to look, the lesson was crystal clear in the disaster of the Italian Occupations in 1920.



## Italy 1968 till now

The current crisis in Italy began in 1967, but the strikes of May 1969 form perhaps the best place to begin. 50 labour contracts in private and state industry came up for renewal. Official trade union escalation of strikes got out of hand, spreading across industry. Many were led by the rank-and-file committees created in 1968. The contracts were not due till the tail end of the year, and had till now been a successful technique for controlling the rank-and-file. A confrontation with the police on July 3, with picketing outside a Fiat factory. A march of strikers and students is hemmed in and brutally attacked. It moves its commencement point and is attacked. The government resigns.

The unions try to impose line delegates on to the struggle so better to control the movement. There was no question of a spontaneous rank-and-file shop steward movement, still less of factory council. But the unions do seem to have associated this, demagogically, with the Ordine Nuovo thesis.

The fascist bombings marked the counterattack- the arrest of Valpreda and others, the murder of Pinelli. A total of 10000 workers were awaiting trial.

Not enough. To restore their profits to the earlier level they had to destroy the gains of the working class. Inflation, price rises, speed-up. Violent strikes and three days of street fighting in Venice. At the same time, vicious taxes are introduced against the workers.

This was in October 1970. In July the government had resigned, thus forestalling a general strike. The new was directly repressive. The state of the economy made this the only possible way for the ruling class to regain control. The reformist demands of the Union bureaucrats were simply unrealizable.

Ever since 1970 the struggle has moved out of the factories. Mass squatting in the South, in Rome, with full scale community self-management. The Communist Party had not been invited to join the government because they no longer had anything to offer the ruling class.

As the repression grows, as violence soars, so open groups like Lotta Continua have to adjust their organization.

As part of this, unlike in 1969, the workers don't see the current coming up of contracts as a focus for struggle. (39, 40).

The Italian capitalists have now resorted to the technique of reducing production, and bringing the economy to a grinding standstill. Engineering unions are going on strike for their claim. They are fighting desperately to retain the line delegates, who seem in fact to have become something of a thorn in the side of the employers.

At the same time, Agnelli proclaims the only solution is the internationalization of capital in the Common Market. Italy is near an irreversible situation; a situation which, he says, is comparable with France in May 1968. (41).

The concept of taking the struggle out of the factories represents, as Lotta Continua acknowledges, a drastic mistake. It is within the factories that the basis for working class unity is laid; losing the struggle within



the factory is losing the struggle altogether. They also correctly recognize that "communism is not something that comes after taking power". And present a picture of the approach to the proletarian seizure of power. The Red Base as a jumping off point, in which the workers reappropriate all that is theirs, not by building some kind of alternative society. The aim is not a kibbutzim, which would be reabsorbed. And the revolutionary must not simply teach the class, but be part of it, learn from them.

According to this thesis, revolutionary consciousness has not yet achieved enough of a mass base for the seizure of power to be on the agenda. (42).

Once again, the issue of spontaneity crops up. And with this the thesis of imposing the workers' leadership on the rest of the proletariat.

The recognition that the point of production provides the core contradiction of capitalism does not demand that we see the working class as a class taking power and ruling the peasantry, and other sections. This was one of the serious ideological errors of the Bolsheviks. (The peasantry are also at the point of production.) At the point of revolution there are only two classes.

There seems to be here a very big danger of reflecting bourgeois class analysis, of ignoring the lessons of history since Marx, in a slavish adherence to what Lenin said. It is not dissimilar to the disastrous sectional analysis of the French students.

Saving this requires an alternative analysis.

I have already pointed to what I consider the inadequacy of the 'hierarchical splitting' of the working class and emphasized that the development of capitalism requires the increasing concentration of power in a smaller and smaller group, accompanied by the progressive routinization of work.

This carries with it the danger of Luddism. I mean by this a desire to smash the machines instead of control production. The simple reality is that the day after the revolution manna is not going to fall from heaven. A revolution will only succeed if it both smashes the state and succeeds in organizing production as a class-for-itself.

Capitalism does have an alternative, which is workers' participation and the partial humanization of work. As Volvo has attempted. But at a period of crisis in the economy this is not possible.

The farce of the line delegates, as an attempt by the Unions to regain control of the workers, who are forced by the concrete situation to become more and more militant, thus incurring the anger of the ruling class, has been used almost seems as an attempt to discredit the Ordine Nuovo thesis. But it is the rank-and-file committees which appeared in 1968 who in fact represent the revival of this tradition.

If the revolutionary movement in Italy does not grasp the truth that the battle is about control, and essentially about control of production, then it is lost. And the 'taking the city' has rings of, sometimes explicitly, seeing this as the way of coping with the drastic fall in living standards.



At the final point of crisis, the class will explode. But unless it has not simply a concept of defending its gains but also of concretely smashing the bourgeoisie state and seizing power, the revolution will collapse. If it stumbles its way to success it will be that much weaker for not having known what it was aiming at. It is not simply necessary to recognize what will happen, but to point the way, in terms of the history of the class, which is, to repeat, its self-organization in workers' councils aiming to seize power as the expression of the class. To point concrete lessons from past and present struggles, and to learn at the same time, being prepared to criticize a mistaken perspective ruthlessly.



## CURRENT SITUATION AND POSSIBILITIES

The dynamic of capitalism, as noted earlier, requires that it is increasingly internationalized and monopolist. As economic units compete they necessarily enlarge in order to defeat their rivals, who then attempt the same strategy to stay competitive.

It is not calls to arms in the name of protecting Europe against economic takeover (43), but the demands of pure profit. Not only profit, but economic survival. Failure may mean takeover or bankruptcy. Where the firm is taken over the defeated management, particularly if it's resisted, hasn't much chance of surviving.

State capitalism, in this situation, rapidly becomes an anachronism, because it too is not large enough to be competitive. The multi-national company, along with the political integration of Europe may well, however, in due course lead to a multi-national state capitalism.

Taking up again the class analysis of pg 5-6, while pointing to the increasing proletarianization of the strata unwilling to recognize their situation, so that the office becomes a new typing pool for example, and seeing this as defining the revolutionary Class against the rulers: we have to emphasize that it is still at the point of production that ultimate power is. Of course transport can bring industry grinding to a halt, but the ruling class, eg with troops, can get transport going again where a soldier simply does not know how to work a machine, however routine- and nor does the boss.

With the automation of production, it may well be that this shopfloor power is weakened, but we are nowhere near that situation yet. And can only begin to approach it when capitalism has sufficient surplus to expand and develop. Containerization is a lot simpler than creating a self-operating machine. Which still needs a technician to keep it going, to repair it when it breaks down.

Since we are still in a stage of capitalism where men are needed for production, then the revolutionary perspective of man as producer is not simply or mainly a cry against the alienation of labour. It is recognizing where the power is.

And where we have to seize it.

It is not enough to seize it here: we have also to control distribution.

But the thesis that man is oppressed primarily as consumer is neither true nor functional.

This is not an argument against community self-management. Because the struggle is about the class taking control of its total environment. Not the class as an amalgam of all who feel themselves to be oppressed, but of all those who are objectively repressed and whose oppression can only be resolved by a revolution.

The class is created by objective conditions. It can only solve the oppression by its destruction of those conditions, which is bourgeoisie control of the means of production.

Not simply this, however. Bourgeoisie power as



such has to be smashed, finally and irreversibly.

At this stage the class ceases to exist as a class, and becomes once again a fluid coming together of people for specific purposes.

Given this analysis, what of the current situation?

In industry, as the TUC, CBI and government sit down to talks on the economy. With each industrial struggle the union leaders more clearly are seen to be on the side of the bosses. Are they to stand out against the class enemy or hope to get what they can by fraternal negotiation?

Not merely this. The class interests of the Union leaders are the same as those of the bosses. Inevitably, in the development towards bureaucratic capitalism, we move from the period of economic and political competition to the period of consensus. The corporate state reflects the needs of capitalism. The attempt by the Common Market to integrate work conditions and so forth reflect precisely this drive. Even at the level of sociology, significantly, we see the replacement of conflict theory by consensus theory. Not just as a description, but as a functional ideology (41).

In this situation the development of unofficial organization becomes both inevitable and crucial. The shop stewards' committee today can become the workers' council of tomorrow.

Some trades unions, by 'training' their stewards, have attempted to coopt them. The consequence, if not less militancy, does seem to be less democracy. In other words, the steward does not see the importance of a high level of consciousness and self-organization in the shop. But as the conflict intensifies, inevitable in a period of slump, so the consciousness of workers in their need to act for themselves; their awareness that the representative cannot be trusted; intensifies. As a concrete expression of this, the threat and procedure of recall is inevitably going to be used.

In this context, what position do we take about the popular campaign to democratize the unions? I believe it is a red herring that distracts the workers from the real struggle. Because the Union, whatever its contradictions, is necessarily increasingly integrated with the state, so the battle must be to draw militants away from official posts and the struggle for democracy within the Union to focussing on the battle for control of the factory.

Revolutionaries must be seeking to establish rank-and-file committees, coordinating both across industry and geographically, from the point of raw material to the point of consumption. Already this is happening. We must intensify it and give it a revolutionary content. We must define the struggle as one of power, and fight it out as such.

What of people outside industry? The social worker? The teacher?

The nature of social work and teaching are both essentially anti-revolutionary, since their function is to keep society operating smoothly. But they contain vital contradictions within them. The teacher is functionally supposed to brainwash the child. Ideologically he is told he is helping him to develop his potential. Concretely, he



is in a position of power, and as such terrified of losing control. His role has to be to turn the teaching process into a model of workers' democracy, in which the child and teacher are defined as equals. He has to involve the community in the school which allegedly serves it, and connect the oppression of the kids with that of the parents. Unless he has achieved mass support he will in due course get the sack.

What of the free school? Where this springs up as the creation of a self-organizing neighbourhood one can argue its value. Where it springs up as the action of dissatisfied teachers one cannot: in that context it is a simple cop-out.

Even a free school produced by a neighbourhood is dubious, because it carries with it the implication that we should build alternatives. Why not also alternative factories? It loses sight of the need to focus the struggle on reappropriating what already by right belongs to the class.

The social worker is in a similar situation, though not identical, and therefore in fact requiring a totally different solution. The only possible revolutionary role open to the social worker is to work for the self-organization of his clients with a revolutionary perspective- ie challenging their conformist assumptions. Not merely to have the class organize its own community care, but primarily for it to take control of that community with the target of its being part of a class taking power.

What about sexism?

It has already been said that abolishing capitalism does not necessarily lead to the abolition of sexism. And yet, as long as there is sexism, there is also power and oppression.

A libertarian revolution is not simply about the working class taking control of the means of production. It is about destroying all forms of oppression.

Necessarily, we take into account the radical feminist position. The first debate is whether in fact women have always been an oppressed group, because of the concrete reality of their reproductive function. If they were always, how do we account for the occurrence of matriarchal societies? Of course it is role reversal, but if reproduction is the key how can the roles be reversed? We have also to explain matriarchal religion, the earth mother. The defeat of female supremacy by male supremacy in the development of Greek religion (45).

We have two alternative theses. The radical feminist, in identifying reproduction as the source of oppression, sees the ultimate solution in the abolition of reproduction (46). Engels presents the alternative. A period of matriarchal society when hunting became unimportant and woman still controlled cultivation, then man took it over, and in his bid for power enforced monogamy to introduce the patrilineal family, and thus his control of inheritance (47).

Neither position is very satisfactory. Engels can be criticized on the grounds that primitive societies probably always mainly depended on gathering fruits and



root vegetables a lot more than hunting, and from what we can see of primitive societies the women seem to do this.

It is simplest, and perhaps simplistic, to resolve this by accepting the thesis that the source of woman's oppression is as reproducer. Precisely because for periods of her life she was rendered relatively weak and incapable. If this is correct, then the feminist thesis that the only ultimate solution is the abolition of reproduction is also correct.

But, just as capitalism can produce contraception and abortion, so also as technology develops it will be able to produce test-tube babies. Which points to the main mistake of radical feminism when it claims to be revolutionary. Capitalism is capable of resolving the oppression of women as women.

It cannot resolve the oppression of women workers as workers. And it is only when women have power at the point of production that the fight against sexism is likely to be concretely integrated into that against capitalism. This is not to say revolutionaries should wait till then. We do have to recognize the dynamic of sexism and fight it in our own lives and as a social assumption.

We are only going to make any headway when the male worker recognizes that it is in his interests to smash it.

Finally, community self-management.

At a time when the government is fighting to impose dramatic rent rises on workers, we see clearly the consequences of an over-fixation on the factory by the Left. On relatively few Estates are tenants fighting back. On even fewer have they the support of Labour councillors. The Councils resisting the increase are very few, and it is likely they will cave in. Once again, as over the Industrial Relations Act, the party of the working class is seen as being part of the ruling class.

Into this situation leap the various Leftist groups groups. "Force the Tory government to retreat". "Bring down the Tory government. Return a Labour government pledged to socialist policies".

The issue is not about the next government, but about the class seizing power. On the level of the Estate or the private landlord dominated community the issue is the working class taking control of its neighbourhood. No-go areas. People's organizations focussed on community self-management, on power and not on income. The traditional tenants' Association plays the same role as the trades union: the struggle is about income, not power, for them.

It is vital that militants recognize in every struggle the Communist party plays a reformist role, whether in industry or the tenants' fight. We see their standards take up militant positions, and yet demand loyalty to Left Union leaders. Who put Scanlon and Jones where they are? The CP. Need one say more?

The laughable situation where a Sunday newspaper sees the Party as the centre of subversion in industry at the same time as the trades union bureaucracies lift their years old bans on Party members becoming officials. At



least they recognize the real enemy.

As the community and industrial revolutionary organizations must be integrated, the demand that workers support tenants, and hopefully, essentially, vice versa, is a central one.

In every other field, we should be demanding control also. Thus claimants' unions, intrinsically trades unions with no ability to strike, have to see their role as taking control, but equally to see clearly that their problem, like that of women, is soluble in capitalism, though in the current slump unlikely to be solved. They have to recognize that their significant role is in refusal to scab with a readiness to use techniques like occupation to oppose victimization of members; and in a high level of involvement in neighbourhood struggle and organization. They must resist the temptation which sundry liberals and even self-proclaimed revolutionaries have fallen into. "The worker with a job is a conformist/fascist/sexist pig or whatever, and enmity towards him is healthy. (48)."

The time has come to spell out the role of the revolutionary.

We have already said spontaneity is not enough, and a close-knit revolutionary grouping with a clear perspective is essential if the revolution is to succeed. This revolutionary group has to see itself, not as the executive committee of the class, but as a propagandist and catalyst for struggle. It has to maintain a collective viewpoint, but guarantee the right of opposition groups to seek a change of line. It cannot, however, allow open dissent. This merely makes for confusion and loss of credibility.

Unless what a group says is consistent, then no one is going to listen to it.

Inevitably in such an organization leninism will tend to develop - that is to say, the group will see itself as becoming the organization which takes power for the class. To stay libertarian, it has to fight any tendency to view it as anything but a group aiming to make possible the smashing of the state and the creation of proletarian democracy through the self-activity of the Class in the creation of self-managing Workers' Councils. At the linking of all oppression and the smashing of all. At the raising of consciousness to a level where the Class understands precisely what is necessary to win.

By the same token, it has to fight any tendency to develop leaders and create a structure which makes it impossible. Not merely revocable functions, but rotation.

It has at the same time to ensure its militants do not become ensconced leaders. It is one thing to become a shop steward, and another to keep it. Once the job is taken the revolutionary should use it to build up a strong shopfloor assembly, which sees him merely as its spokesman, linking this form of organization with the aim of self-management. As soon as possible the militant



should give way to someone else.

The local group should, ideally, be a Collective (by which I mean a group of people living together for a political purpose). If this is not possible it is at least essential it be well-integrated. That it does not divorce politics from lifestyle. The process of developing consciousness, which inherently means the destruction of conditioned conformist pre-assumptions.

Just as spontaneity is proved inadequate on a mass scale, so it is equally inadequate on a group level. The struggle for liberation has to be conscious and deliberate.

To sum up: in a period of slump, accompanied by capitalism's attempt to solve its problems by growing, the real situation is rising tenant discontent; rising revolt on the shopfloor, even if with an inadequately developed perspective, that involves militants recognising the Union bureaucrats are hand in glove with the bosses- meaning militants are prepared to go to prison; that struggles in factories and communities are linking; that any rise of fascism is competing with the concrete class solidarity of workers of different colours.

At this time we see the so-called left Union leaders waver between militancy and class collaboration, in an attempt to stay acceptable to their rank-and-file but also meet the demands of their own concrete class interests. We therefore see them pathetically, but still dangerously, twisting for example the occupation, the current main tool of the class, into a means to achieve improved wage settlements on a plant to plant basis. We see a fetish growing up about this method of struggle, which in practice frequently involves shop steward domination and the keeping of the struggle within the context of 'the right to work'.

In the face of this, the working class can either develop and extend its struggle into one for the destruction of bourgeois power, or it can suffer defeat, and we can reliably predict a lengthy period of barbarism.

The role of the revolutionary is not to take power as a member of a vanguard group. It is to make the taking of power by the working class, as a class, through and in the Workers' Councils, more possible by pointing out lessons.

It is this, and the conviction that we have to destroy all oppression if the revolution is to be genuinely liberatory, that marks us off decisively from the leninist, of whichever brand.

Day One after the Revolution is not the moment of complete freedom. There has to be a period while bourgeois power is irreversibly destroyed. There has to be the flowering of forms of liberation that can only begin to take shape in the struggle against capitalism. There has also to be the progressive development towards complete cybernation. Only when work is no longer necessary can it become free: only when childbirth is no longer necessary can it become free. It is only in the destruction of the compulsions of a pre-cybernetic economy that libertarian communism becomes a reality.



## REFERENCES

- |      |    |                      |   |
|------|----|----------------------|---|
| (1)  | VI | Lenin                | State and Revolution                            |
| (2)  | L  | Trotsky              | quoted in The Commune                           |
| (3)  | F  | Engels               | Civil War in France                             |
| (4)  |    | Guillaume & Grainger | The Commune                                     |
| (5)  | R  | Dunayevskaya         | Marxism and Freedom                             |
| (6)  | G  | Woodcock             | Anarchism                                       |
| (7)  | E  | Nolte                | Three Faces of Fascism                          |
| (8)  | N  | Bedaevyev            | Slavery and Freedom                             |
| (9)  | CA | Reich                | Greening of America                             |
| (10) | P  | Cardan               | Modern Capitalism and Revolution                |
| (11) |    | Schneider            | Vanguard, Vanguard.....                         |
| (12) | L  | Trotsky              | History of the Russian Revolution               |
| (13) | M  | Bookchin             | Listen, Marxist                                 |
| (14) | F  | Engels               | Socialism Utopian and Scientific                |
| (15) | M  | Brinton              | Bolsheviks & Workers' Control                   |
| (16) | VI | Lenin                | Coll Wks vol 27 (!)                             |
| (17) | D  | Guerin               | Anarchism                                       |
| (18) | AO | (to Solidarity)      | Kibbutz Experience                              |
| (19) | F  | Fanon                | Wretched of the Earth                           |
| (20) | L  | Trotsky              | Nashi Politicheskoye Zadachi                    |
| (21) | R  | Luxembourg           | Marxism or Leninism                             |
| (22) | P  | Sedgewick            | Victor Serge: Party and Class                   |
| (23) | V  | Serge                | Memoirs of a Revolutionary                      |
| (24) | A  | Kollontai            | Workers' Opposition                             |
| (25) | M  | Brinton              | Irrational in Politics                          |
| (24) |    | Cammett              | Gramsci and the Origins of<br>Italian Communism |
| (25) | V  | Richards             | Lessons of the Spanish Revolution               |
| (26) | B  | Potter               | Rape of Vietnam                                 |
| (27) | R  | Segal                | Race War  |
| (28) | S  | Halbrook             | Bakunin & Marx on Nationalism                   |
| (29) | G  | Woodcock             | Crystal Spirit                                  |
| (30) | W  | Reich                | What is Class Consciousness?                    |



REFERENCES CONTINUED

- (31) A Bullock Hitler: A Study in Tyranny
- (32) A Anderson Hungary '56
- (33) M Johnstone Czechoslovakia's Struggle for  
Socialist Democracy
- (34) Anonymous Beginning of An Epoch
- (35) Gregoire and Perlman Worker-Student Action Committees
- (36) M Brinton Paris: May 1968
- (37) Cohn-Bendit Obsolete Communism:  
Left-Wing Alternative
- (38) Quattrocchi & Nairn Beginning of the End
- (39) Anonymous Italy 1969-70
- (40) Anonymous (or sundry) The Struggle in Italy  
both by Big Flame
- (41) Financial Times- October 27, 1972
- (42) Safri and Caprotti Organizing for Revolution
- (43) J-J Servan-Schreiber American Challenge
- (44) D Atkinson Orthodox Consensus  
and Radical Alternative
- (45) R Graves Greek Myths
- (46) S Firestone Dialectic of Sex
- (47) F Engels Origins of the Family, Property  
and the State
- (48) K Patton Right to Work or Fight to Live  
for example



### Other ORA Publications.

From February 1973, ORA will be publishing a monthly newspaper, **Libertarian Struggle**. Copies can be obtained for 5p. each or £1 for a year's sub. from 29, Cardigan Road, Leeds 6.

ORA has also published 5 issues of The Newsletter, a journal for discussion. From January 1973 this will appear as a larger size, printed quarterly theoretical journal, the **Libertarian Communist Review**. Copies of the previous Newsletter (no.5) and copies of the **Review** when it is published, will be obtainable from 68, Chingford Road, London E. 17.

A number of pamphlets have been published for ORA as a whole or by local groups. For a full list write to the Contact Secretary, 68, Chingford Road, London E.17. To whom all enquiries about ORA, local contacts, etc. should be addressed.

This pamphlet was published by  
the Organisation of Revolutionary  
Anarchists (Leeds group)

72, Beechwood View, Leeds 4.