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WHICH WAY FORWARD

FOR THE

WORKING CLASS?

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1. INTRODUCTION

We have recently seen the collapse of "communist" regimes around the world, and every worker knows that the remaining "communist" countries like Cuba and China can in no way be described as workers' states. The obvious question which must be addressed is: has socialism been tried and failed? Apologists for the capitalist system gloat and tell us that capitalism is the highest stage of human development and that the universal application of the free market will eventually solve all the world's remaining problems.

In Britain we have witnessed the Labour party enthusiastically embrace the free market and drop all references to socialism in its 1992 election manifesto. Labour simply presents itself as a more able manager of British capitalism than the Tories. But Kinnock's well marketed package did not find enthusiastic support amongst the working class. Bourgeois elections are so clearly based on the leader cult principle as a substitute for the lack of any substantial differences in the policies of the parties. Working class activists in particular knew that the party which had failed to support the miners' strike and the anti-poll tax campaign was not serious about radically improving the health service or state education. Workers in general just did not see that much difference between the three major parties.

Parallel with this development within the Labour party is the adoption of "new realism" by the full-time officials of the trade unions. Unions in Britain today are principally concerned with managing their funds, organising mergers with other unions and recruiting new members by promising better insurance or holiday packages than their rivals. The shop stewards' movement, our sole remaining example of workers' self-activity, has been beaten into submission largely to the relief of the full time officials.

The collapse of the Communist Party and the decline of the other Leninist parties like the Militant and the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in one way point to yet more demoralisation of the working class in Britain, though as we will see in another way these present us with an important opportunity.

The weakening of the workers' will to fight back, as measured by low strike figures, coupled with the effects of the recession has led to a major decline in the living standards of millions of workers as shown in the 1992 Low Pay Unit report "Poor Britain", which is based on official statistics. The other side of the coin of low pay, unemployment and homelessness is a brutalisation and alienation of the cultural lives of all workers. The types of books, magazines, newspapers, TV programmes, videos, etc. which are consumed by workers on such a mass scale regularly feature such themes as the degradation of women, sexual violence, the cult of the psychopath and the like. During their leisure hours most workers seem to spend much of their time watching inane game shows

or soap operas which convince us that their antiseptic realism relieves us of the need to have authentic lives of our own.

Despite this negation during the 80s of the gains made by workers since 1945, there remains a striving for a better life for workers. The successful NALGO strike of 1989 and the anti-poll tax campaign which made such an important contribution to the fall of Margaret Thatcher, are two examples of a fight back despite the ideological malaise and demoralisation. The anger and frustration of workers is not being channelled in any organised and constructive way. It is at least a great relief that unlike workers in France, Germany and elsewhere British workers have not in any numbers turned to fascism as a solution to their problems.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to address this lack of working class organisation, and to try to make a first step in trying to overcome our fragmentation and alienation by suggesting new structures which will allow workers to educate and organise ourselves. This first step will be the setting up of workers' councils in order to provide resources to combat the constant flow of ideas from the capitalist media. The challenge to capitalist ideology will begin by questioning the idea that capitalism is the highest stage of human development and to show instead that Marxism is a crucial tool for workers' self-activity. As workers' confidence grows we will begin to see workers' councils spring up in the workplace and this will be the embryonic form of the economic and political organisation of a workers' state. Workers will begin to develop their own forms of democratic decision making and shake off the idea that society will always be composed of leaders and led, they will see with their own eyes that Lenin was absolutely wrong when he claimed that workers are only capable, on their own, of developing a trade union or economic consciousness. We can learn from the collapse of "communism" never to trust middle class intellectuals to be our leaders, because historically they have always hijacked workers'-led revolutions and used democratic centralism to crush self-activity and install not socialism but state capitalism. Socialism as a workers' state, rather than a Leninist bureaucracy, has never been tried.

The sections which follow will examine, at an introductory level, the need for workers to become organised and from this to begin to examine their strategy and tactics on the questions of: the trade unions, the Labour party and parliamentarianism, the Leninist party, anarchism, which still has a fair amount of support amongst young people, and finally workers' councils and their development. In all this we shall stress the need for Marxist theory, but not the "Marxism" of the latter-day Bolsheviks - the ruling class in waiting - but a vibrant, dynamic and highly critical Marxism which is constantly being refined as history unfolds in its unrelenting dialectical way. We shall begin by examining the current position of the British working class with particular reference to its ideological level of development.

2. THE WORKING CLASS IN BRITAIN TODAY - ITS IDEOLOGY AND ITS PRACTICE.

The first question we must answer is: how do we define the working class in Britain today? As a starting point we need to stress Marx's original formulation of social class: relationship with the means of production, in particular control or non-control of the machines, buildings, tools, raw materials etc which go into the production of goods and services. Note that we are not considering formal ownership of the means of production as the determining factor because it is quite possible for the working class to formally own the means of production by means of nationalisation as with say British Rail or most of production in the former "communist" states. Despite this formal control with all its legal niceties, workers are in exactly the same exploited and alienated position as in say a privately owned family firm. This fetish with nationalisation was the reason for Trotsky's description of the USSR as still being a workers' state despite its degeneration during the Stalinist period. Rather than accepting the reality of state capitalism, he insisted that the nationalisation of the means of production meant that Russia remained a workers' state.

So in Britain today we must define class in terms of how much control is exercised by each social group in the workplace. At the polar opposites of this social relationship are the working class, with a minimum of control over such things as if, where, and how production will take place, and the capitalist class with more or less total control over these decisions. The essence of the class struggle is the balance of forces between these two groups in terms of control of this decision making process. Located between these two classes are a variety of different groupings which can conveniently be called the middle class. In general the middle class enjoys a relatively privileged position as compared with the workers and therefore will normally tend to support the capitalist class as a matter of routine. However with the contradictory unfolding of the capitalist economy the middle class, or certain sections of it, can be sometimes be pushed over nearer and nearer to the position of the working class.

Due to this insecure position and its generally heterogeneous composition, as the contradictory and uneven nature of capitalism manifests itself, the middle class's position is complex and subject to swings in its ideology. This is important because sections of this class, due to its better education, produces most of the output of art, culture and dominates intellectual life in general, and we see this class's contradictory relationship with the other two classes reflected in this output. At times members of this intelligentsia feel threatened and offer to take up positions of leadership of the working class. We shall look at the political forms which this takes later.

Let us now move to the present state of the working class in Britain, and begin by considering the rather condescending stereotyped image presented by the Leninist parties, with the boiler suited male factory worker with his inherent limitations at the rear of the intellectual vanguard in a kind of frozen 1917 image. The working class is not a frozen monolith but rather is, like all classes, an ever changing mass which must change in order to survive and must be studied carefully in order to understand its ideological makeup at any given period.

In Britain since 1970 we have seen an accelerating process whereby more and more workers have been pushed into the pool of unemployment; there are fewer jobs in manufacturing especially those in traditionally militant industries like shipbuilding, heavy engineering, coal mining and the docks; there are more in so called services and about half of the workforce are women. Following from this is a major decline in trade union membership; more workers are in full or part time education or "training" as an alternative to work. The devastation of traditional communities has destroyed the social basis of working class socialism as it has existed for over a century. These communities of course provided the bedrock of support for Labour and the Communist Party, but more importantly they also provided the basis of a deeper tradition of autonomous struggle with allegiance to no party and through which workers educated themselves as to the reality of capitalist society through struggle; this education and their institutions and culture were passed on from generation to generation. There is more self-employment and direct and indirect share ownership, with its obvious ideological implications, job sharing, home working, part time and temporary working and moving from site to site. It is therefore not difficult to explain the atomised, selfish, acquisitive, self-made man or woman philosophy which has become so common, especially amongst the C2 skilled working class groups like the electricians or the engineers. Workers who are cut off from traditional communities with their strong values become very vulnerable to "popular capitalism" and "the home owning democracy", and many of these workers are now paying the price of embracing this myth in the tidal wave of home repossessions, failed businesses etc.

Alongside of these latter groups however, as "Poor Britain" shows, there is an increasingly marginalised section of the working class which finds itself economically disadvantaged by being unemployed, on short time, part time or generally in low paid work. These workers are in the main gripped by inertia due to their lack of contact with the political and economic mainstream. There is simply no apparent channel by which the interests of this section of the working class can be articulated. Apart from the mainly non-unionised workplace, the dole queue, the pub, the bingo hall or the betting shop, this mass of workers rarely congregates in numbers and is therefore rarely able to discuss matters of mutual interest. So as issues like homelessness, begging, petty crime,

prostitution, etc. become more and more real for these workers and indeed for skilled workers, it comes as no surprise that we hear views expressed on these subjects which reflect workers' alienation and false consciousness.

Our environmental/cultural scene is dominated by the warehouse style shopping centre, the motor car - the capitalist commodity par excellence, the rattle of the charity collection box, the tax cut, the barrel of a gun pointing at us from a video poster at the central library and the uncollected rubbish on the street.

In recent months the only feeble manifestation of mass political activity was the 2% swing from the Tories to Labour in the recent general election and according to the press many of these voters were middle class.

Because socialism is simply not on the agenda, what alternative do workers see to all this apathy and despair, this self-interested cost benefit calculation?

Despite the ever more powerful capitalist media machine telling us that "there is no alternative" to the market, in fact this state of affairs is no more permanent than any previous one, and as mentioned in the introduction there have been some manifestations of a revolt, of a fight back. Our task is to apply a Marxist analysis to this historical period and to introduce this analysis to the most receptive sections of the working class as a viable alternative to Labourism, Leninism or Trotskyism. The first task is to build confidence through self-education and self-activity by organising relevant meetings so as to lift cultural levels and aid theoretical understanding. Of course the Militant, SWP and the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) all claim to be encouraging workers' self-activity based on Marxist theory. We shall examine this claim, but let us first turn our attention to the trade unions.

3. THE TRADE UNIONS.

The Labour party left, and indeed the Leninist, view of the trade unions is that for all their faults, workers should without question remain members of unions and fight within them to defend their working conditions and to use them as part of the struggle against capitalism. In short the unions at the moment are the only organised mass movements of the working class.

Before responding to these assertions it is necessary to study the function of trade unions (TUs) in a capitalist society, and to do this we need to look at how they developed historically in the 19th century and then we can examine their contradictory existence in the 1990s.

There are a number of written histories of the TU movement in Britain, and it is clear from these that the rise of the TUs runs parallel to later stages of the industrial revolution, ie the rise of mass production. As large numbers of workers left the land and moved to the industrial centres to work in the factories, mills etc, it was inevitable that a countervailing tendency to the power of the capitalists should develop. Workers combined together to resist the despotism to the owners and fought for better wages and conditions. At first employers fought tooth and nail to resist this threat to their power by the use of the Combination Acts, blacklegs, violence, lockouts etc. It was a case of naked exploitation of men, women and children. However as Marx pointed out in "Capital" volume 1, as the dynamic of capitalist development unfolded, the larger employers in particular came to realise that this ruthless exploitation of the whole working class family could not continue indefinitely. Quite simply the standard of living of the workers was below that necessary for the working class to reproduce itself. Legislation was necessary to regulate conditions so as to improve things like life expectancy, and thereby maintain the long term interests of capital in general by preventing small firms from killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

Marx devoted the latter part of his life to the study of political economy, and soon learned from Smith and Ricardo that all commodities had their equilibrium price based on the labour theory of value. The equilibrium price of labour, the wage, was the equivalent of the minimum amount of goods and services necessary for the worker to reproduce him or herself and any dependents at the level consistent with performing a particular job. As we see today the capitalist class is trying to reduce this wage component of their costs closer to this minimum, so as to increase surplus value and hence profit. By the mid 19th century, paternalism, municipalisation and the general realisation by the more far sighted representatives of capital that regulation by the state was necessary, caused a change in large capital's attitude towards the trade unions. Some of the major employers signed agreements with unions which regulated all matters pertaining to the labour

contract.

The state as the agent for capital in general saw it as increasingly necessary to provide for the regulation of maximum working hours, minimum safety, regulation of child labour, sanitation, housing for workers, education, libraries etc. Along with all this came a certain "accommodation" with the officials of the trade unions in order to formalise all matters relating to the labour contract, especially the price of labour. Eventually the labour leaders agreed to the "family wage" ie the idea that a male worker's wage should be sufficient to keep himself and any dependents, whilst female workers were paid less and married women were encouraged to withdraw from the labour market and take up unpaid services in the home and so relieve the employer from the need to provide these vital functions. This deal between the TUs and the capitalist class was to have important ideological implications.

This cosy relationship between the increasingly bureaucratic unions and the capitalists did not negate the political agenda of the unions' rank and file which was to nationalise or in some cases take over industry, though Marxist theory was poorly developed in Britain. Within every form of industrial action there is in embryonic form a longing for a better life, but there is precious little evidence to suggest that the TU movement, with its close relationship with the Labour Party since 1900, has been prepared to do anything other than make sure that labour gets its equilibrium price in the market place. The fact that workers have rarely rejected this agenda and fought for political demands tends at first sight to give credence to Lenin's assertion that workers in general cannot by themselves attain anything beyond a trade union consciousness.

In reality it is the unions themselves which have been a major impediment to workers' self-activity and self-education. The capitalist class has long understood the need to encourage opportunism amongst workers, and those opportunist workers who do make it to the top of the union bureaucracies obviously cease to have any real involvement in the day to day struggles of the workers they represent. TU leaders are decision makers of multi-million pound organisations normally based in head offices in London with large permanent staffs. Managing the union funds is the priority, and therefore smooth relations with the relevant employers rather than industrial action is the order of the day. The high salaries of the officials - we do not pay them enough claims that astute Tory Peregrine Worsthorpe - is a strong inducement to do deals at every opportunity and to stifle the rank and file by all means available. The crushing of the shop stewards' movement in the 1980s was therefore a pleasant development for the officials; indeed the official union rule books normally do not recognise the existence of these organs of local resistance. To understand the ideological makeup of the unions we need to be aware

of what constant bargaining over the price of labour power and the range of fringe benefits with the representatives of capital will do to the values of most of the officials. Similarly they want the return of a Labour government so as to get back into corporate planning - beer and sandwiches at number 10 - after being excluded for so long.

Sparsely attended branch meetings, more workers opting out of the union and general apathy by the rank and file as shown by few strikes, go slows and overtime bans is the current state of affairs. Obviously the NUM defeat of 84-85 was a turning point for all trade unionists, but even there the NUM leadership, despite some good commitment, kept rank and file decision making to a minimum. In all unions the rank and file are simply expected to do as they are told by the leadership, which mirrors the worker-employer relationship. It comes as no surprise therefore to see single union agreements, mass dismissals, secret ballots, union busting etc as commonplace within the 1990s industrial relations scene.

Unions themselves have for some time been crucial in transmitting the new realism ideology to the working class, engineers and electricians for example often have private medical insurance and may accept no strike agreements. Policing the status quo has in fact always been the role of the leadership, and historically their record on race, women, immigration and more recently on training are appalling. Again mirroring capitalism itself, unions are becoming more and more concentrated and centralised ie fewer, larger units, all this both despite and to some extent because of anti union bosses and mass unemployment.

What then is the correct strategy for class conscious workers with regard to the unions? In the long run workers' councils will replace the unions' functions, but in the more immediate period we must try to build informal structures either in or out of the workplace depending on how the balance of forces are at work. The return to a healthy shop steward system would be encouraging but there can be no simple formula for setting up organs for workers' self-organisation, self-confidence and self-education especially as these are so opposed to the essence of unionism in the 1990s. We must abandon the idea of simply looking after our rights within the capitalist system, but rather using our own organisational abilities as preparation for the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by a state run by workers.

4. THE LABOUR PARTY AND PARLIAMENTARIANISM.

During the recent election we heard a lot about democracy, the will of the people, and the like. A crucial part of capitalist ideology is the idea that parliamentary democracy represents the highest form of government, it is the counterpart of the view that the free market is the highest form of economic organisation. In view of this we can begin our look at the British Labour Party and the Leninist tactic of parliamentarianism by examining that vital part of the capitalist ideological machine: representative democracy.

The concept of democracy - literally rule by the people - was first developed in ancient Greece, so far as we know. However in that period of history democracy did not mean rule by all the people but rather by a land and slave owning ruling class with votes for some of the other classes. Slaves and women took no part in democracy. Despite these contradictory origins the word democracy became central in the fight by the bourgeoisie to overcome feudalism. Whilst in its revolutionary phase the capitalist class talked about freedom, universal suffrage and equality as a means of presenting its interests as being those of all classes. Bourgeois thinkers stressed the separation of civil society, that is the world of production and distribution with its alleged harmonious if unequal relationships, and political society, where more and more people had the vote and everyone was equal before the law.

When the bourgeoisie took power it was a long time before true universal suffrage was achieved; they were terrified of the idea that the majority would be able to vote in a working class party. It took a long time before the capitalists had enough confidence in their ideological machine to help them maintain power. Nowadays it is clear that despite the very occasional Labour victory the capitalist class remains firmly in control despite the fact that as a class they form only a small minority of the voting population. Several Marxist writers have sought to explain this control of the majority by the minority - hegemony - as Gramsci called this phenomenon. It is clear that most workers do accept the idea that the result in a representative democracy general election reflects the will of the people - the Tories are our legitimate government, so be it. But the question is: what is meant by the term "the people"?

In a formal sense "the people" means all those members of the electorate living within a given jurisdiction, but for us it cannot be separated from its use in a particular epoch, here the capitalist epoch. To accept this term is to accept the separation between civil and political society, that is to accept that all in society are politically equal, no matter whether they are factory owners, cleaners, lathe operators or merchant bankers. Despite one person one vote, real power does not lie in the formal political

structure but rather in the totality of class relations which depend on control of the means of production.

For workers, democracy must mean workers' democracy; we shall ignore the "will of the people" as having no significance for us. Marx's view of democracy in the context of the prelude to a socialist society is the dictatorship of the proletariat - the working class will dictate its will to the other classes until such time as all classes have disappeared and "the people" really will exist as equals in society. For the moment we can dismiss "the people" as a piece of ideology with its institutional embodiment, the House of Commons, with its 650 representatives of the constituencies passing laws in the "national interest", with the "checks and balances" of that "wide cross section of society" the House of Lords. That the same theory is applied to local government seems hardly to matter as City Halls have so few functions now.

From its formation in 1900 the Labour Party has always accepted the bourgeois view of democracy. As the working class became the majority of the electorate it was only a matter of time before this majority would produce a Labour government, and it would legislate away the capitalist system, and replace it by socialism. Two questions arise here: would the capitalist class simply accept the will of "the people" and acquiesce in their own extinction? and what did the leaders of the party mean by "socialism"?

In answer to the first question there is no historical example of a ruling class giving up power in response to the "will of the people", and we have no reason to expect the British ruling class to do so. To answer the second question we need to look at the intellectual inspiration of the party - the Fabians. These middle class thinkers like George Bernard Shaw and Sydney and Beatrice Webb saw socialism as the gradual replacement of the capitalist class by state officials, a kind of benevolent state capitalism. A system of creeping nationalisation would ensure that workers eventually "owned" the means of production and the worst excesses of exploitation would end because the most able workers would be able to become managers as part of a meritocratic management system. As Paul Mattick has pointed out all this is very similar to the Bolshevik idea of socialism. The leading Fabians who at first condemned the Russian revolution later expressed their admiration for Stalinist Russia because it had suppressed the independent working class elements of the revolutionary movement by setting up a system of bureaucratic state planning.

These middle class thinkers with their gradualist "socialism" joined forces with trade union bureaucrats and other opportunists to form the leadership of the party and their aim was to secure a government which would carry out this grand plan. So as to fit in with their opportunist ambitions Labour MPs insisted on maintaining the Tory tradition of being representatives rather than delegates.

This allows an MP to do whatever he or she likes once elected rather than being subject to the demands of their working class electors. Only the need to get re-elected every five years acts as a disciplining mechanism on MPs, so following the dictates of the parliamentary party machine is given priority over local party or working class demands. Ralph Miliband's book "Parliamentary Socialism" shows how right from its beginnings the party betrayed and abused its left wing activists and supporters, these activists having done the lion's share of the day to day work.

More important than this however is the damage done to working class thinking by Labour. The party's ideology was based firmly on the paternalistic notion that workers should vote Labour at every opportunity but that this should be the full extent of workers' political activity. The idea that workers might engage in "extra parliamentary activity" as a means of taking more control of their lives was vigorously opposed by the party and the union bosses. As early as 1920 it had become obvious to many activists that the party had no intention of creating the means whereby workers could take control of their own lives.

During the early 1920s Lenin's booklet "Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder" began to circulate and this advised workers to form a British section of the Communist Party but also to engage in electoral deals with the Labour Party in order to return a Labour government. Because of Lenin's reputation at the time this disastrous advice was acted upon and large numbers of workers who were sympathetic to the workers' council movement joined the Communist Party or in despair even the Labour Party. Nowhere in his booklet does Lenin advise workers to form councils and begin to run their own lives. It is interesting to note that it was workers and soldiers organised in soviets or councils who actually made the Russian revolution and only later after a few tactical moves were the Bolsheviks actually able to take over all these councils and crush them as independent workers' organisations.

Since 1945 the Labour Party has dominated working class politics, and has, in league with the unions, helped to stifle workers' self-activity by selling out strikes, victimising activists, supporting imperialist wars and generally demonstrating to the ruling class its willingness to police the working class. In the 1990s Labour has even abandoned its myth of evolutionary socialism, it has simply become a career ladder for opportunists of every variety. Its MPs tour the world on "fact finding missions", do deals with Tories, seek company directorships and titles and jostle for power. Any mention of the word socialism is seen as a gaffe by all but a few "loony left" MPs. The abandonment of the clause IV commitment to evolutionary socialism written by the Webbs makes perfect sense to careerists who see the collapse of "communism" as a ideologically fashionable vote winner, thus playing on the fact that a workers' lot under state capitalism is far worse in most respects from that of western workers. Quite what will happen when East European workers find out about the realities of private

capitalism is of no interest to Labour but vital to us.

The 1992 election result, whatever else it shows, tells us that most workers see no alternative to their role of passive spectators to the professional politicians debating the issues of the day in the cabinet or parliament. However failure to win power for the 4th successive time despite the recession, poll tax and the obvious loss of the will to rule by the Tories - even the Financial Times advocated a Labour vote - means a number of workers are bound to begin to ask questions about Labour; which under John Smith will move ever further to the right, do deals with the Liberal Democrats and ask us to wait patiently and passively until 1997.

Let us conclude this section with a look at the tactic of parliamentarianism, ie where a revolutionary party uses the propaganda opportunity of parliament to draw attention to its activities and gain members and supporters. Lenin was a strong advocate of this approach at appropriate times in the struggle, and in "Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder" advocated that British Communists make an electoral deal with the Labour Party. Some of the Leninist parties like Militant have used the authority of Lenin or Trotsky to pursue the tactic of entryism -ie where the revolutionary party only continues to exist in secret and the membership all join the Labour Party. The SWP and RCP have used the tactic of standing their own separate party candidates on occasions. The Sinn Fein tactic is one of gaining maximum support and therefore propaganda from an intensive and successful general election campaign but the candidate refuses to take his or her seat. On mainland Britain it is a long time since candidates from parties to the left of Labour gained any electoral success, but it is our view that even if this tactic is successful in propoganda terms it merely serves to create or further two illusions: 1. that power actually resides in parliament - which, unlike Russia in 1917 where the Duma was new and as Lenin realised few workers had any illusions about it - is a very powerful myth amongst British workers, and 2. that a worker's political role is merely to vote for the "correct" candidate, who will normally be a middle class leader. As the personality rather than the politics of the individual candidate becomes the focal point of media attention, a situation develops in which mass action is ridiculed, played down or ignored by the press. All recent attempts at the use of this tactic have resulted in lost deposits and very low numbers of votes, in short demoralisation. In the campaigns there will be little said on the need to build workers' organisations and engage in self activity, but lots will be said on the need to build the party, the need for "good leaders" and disciplined workers.

We are convinced that parliamentarianism is a disastrous strategy for the British working class as it reinforces the deeply held view that power resides in parliament, instead we need to engage in activities that persuade workers that it is they themselves who will run society and that the priority is therefore building

appropriate structures for this task and not being side tracked into parliamentary elections.

5. THE LENINIST PARTY.

The basis of the Leninist theory of the party is that heterogeneous grouping the middle class which we examined earlier. According to Lenin it is only certain members of this class who, because of their intellectual development, are capable of gaining a true understanding of Marxism. This select grouping within the intelligentsia, who allegedly have devoted themselves to creating a workers' state, are responsible for leading the working class within the structure of the revolutionary party. As we have already seen according to Lenin the working class by itself is only capable of gaining a trade union consciousness; grasping political theory is by and large beyond them. This theory, which reflects the economic and social backwardness in Russia in the early 20th century, is presented by Lenin as a universal truth which justifies the largely middle class leadership of the democratic centralist parties.

By studying the works of Marx and Engels these disaffected intellectuals gain their theoretical knowledge of the class struggle, join the Bolsheviks and then begin to work towards creating a socialist society. But the key question here is what do they mean by "socialism"? The simple answer is something very similar to the Fabians in terms of the final goal but the means of attaining this had to be applied to the unique conditions of early 20th century Russia. It is perfectly true that certain sections of the middle class place great emphasis on education as the means of maintaining their relatively privileged position within society. Children born within this class will have easy access to books from an early age and as they grow up generally will be encouraged to become as well versed as possible in the cultural and intellectual fashions of the day, as a prelude to higher education and a job in the professions. Even today most, though by no means all, of the leadership of the democratic centralist parties come from this section of the middle classes.

This elite must be contrasted with the position of the Russian working class in the late 19th and early 20th century which formed the model for Lenin's thinking. The workers were largely illiterate and generally poorly educated, of recent peasant origin and therefore religion and superstition still had quite a strong hold. But in contrast with this in 1917 Russian workers were employed in very large factories, were becoming increasingly unionised, and had in 1905 formed their own workers' councils, or soviets, based to some extent on the old village commune the mir. So it is already clear that Lenin's view of even the Russian workers was at the very least an over simplification.

The contemporary British working class is different in that only its most deprived or brutalised sections are actually illiterate, and religion and superstition is of only minor importance. A

minimum of education is a prerequisite for employment in the service sector based economy and social mobility is such that many workers now obtain jobs formerly reserved for the middle classes. As explained this to and fro between the classes is vital for their survival, and Marxists must use this dialectical approach to social class.

To refute the Leninist view of class consciousness we need to examine the workers' daily involvement in the class struggle at their place of work. This battleground is not normally within the experience of the middle class intellectual and therefore the present day worker, with his or her greater access to political theory, is likely in many ways to be better able to link the theory and practice of the class struggle. Workers are more likely to know how irrelevant most of Leninist theory is because of their own experiences, and thus it is hardly surprising that the working class, or actually mainly student, paper selling rank and file of the party find it such hard going these days. Militant workers know that the Leninist party has nothing to offer other than paper sales, branch educationalists on the need to build the party with good leaders and "disciplined" rank and file, and stage managed annual conferences. The idea of a middle class intelligentsia with little or no workplace experience bringing its theory to the working class is absolutely false and has been shown to be so for the most advanced capitalist economies for at least 100 years as is clear from the work of say Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Korsch.

How can we explain the persistence of this Leninist view of the essentially passive role of the working class? a class to be used as an object by the "Marxist intellectuals". To answer this we need to return to the specific position of the individual member of the middle class who has only their educational attainments or a small capital stock keeping them from the ranks of the working class. This insecure position was particularly the case for the middle classes in late 19th century Tsarist Russia, which is the backdrop to the biography of the key figures in the Bolshevik Party. The radical intelligentsia felt itself being stifled by an increasingly anachronistic autocracy which was totally out of step with the liberal atmosphere in western Europe. But large amounts of foreign capital was pouring into Russia and the working class was developing rapidly especially in the St Petersburg and Moscow areas. This melting pot, of a disaffected intelligentsia, a growing working class and a massive peasantry not long freed from feudalism all within the ever changing borders of a Tsarist empire, was ready to erupt and late in his life Marx himself began to take an interest in the situation.

The intelligentsia found itself in a contradictory situation as it keenly soaked up the most advanced thought coming out of the capitalist world and yet saw itself at home surrounded by backwardness in the shape of the autocracy, the church, the police state and the poverty stricken workers and peasants. The influx of

western capital in the form of giant factories and the modernisation which this promised seemed to present a hope of resolution to the impasse of the radicals. In the "Marxism" of the late works of Engels and especially of Plekhanov could be seen firstly a world view which stressed the modernising and progressive nature of capitalism which would lift Russia once and for all out of the grip of the autocracy, and secondly a philosophy which propagated middle class materialism and bourgeois science which could be used as a powerful ideological weapon against religion and superstition which had such a hold on the masses.

From Marx, Lenin and the other radicals had understood the idea of a bourgeois revolution which would, as had occurred in Britain and Germany, pave the way for the dominance of capitalist mass production. But Lenin saw all too clearly that the capitalist class in Russia was small in number and lacking in resources and therefore little significance in terms of economic and political power. So the obvious question arose: how to create a modernising bourgeois revolution without a bourgeoisie?

Lenin soon realised that the radical intelligentsia themselves were to take the place of the bourgeoisie, so they armed themselves with dialectical materialism, or Marxism-Leninism as it came to be known, and set about the task of building the party which would drag Russia and its masses into the 20th century. Naturally a small group of radicals needs more than just a theory in order to modernise Russia and the only likely allies for them were the new working class who had to be persuaded of the need to overthrow the largely foreign capitalists in order to build a workers' state. Lenin was struck by the way that factory conditions had already created such discipline amongst the workers and therefore made them ready for the discipline of the democratic centralist revolutionary party. Marx's term "the dictatorship of the proletariat" was one of the many rallying slogans, and much talk about "socialism" was used by the Bolsheviks to suggest to the workers that they themselves would take power and run society, and Lenin's famous "State and Revolution" was written in order to outflank other left wing groups and persuade the workers to make common cause with the intellectuals at a crucial stage in the revolutionary struggle.

Quite what Lenin meant by "socialism" and "the dictatorship the proletariat" depended on the situation, ie who was asking the question and what the tactical requirements of the particular stage in the struggle were. So when in "State and Revolution" written just before the October revolution the workers are needed to overthrow the provisional government "socialism" means a workers' state run by workers, whereas in "Left Wing Communism" written after the Bolsheviks have won the civil war and have more or less total control over the state apparatus then "socialism" means workers doing what they are told by the old factory owners who have been brought back as managers of the newly nationalised industries. Similarly it became clear from this time onwards that "dictatorship

of the proletariat" meant dictatorship of the party. The Workers' Opposition which was by 1921 calling for a democratic workers' state was first ridiculed and then banned by Lenin and particularly Trotsky, all opposition was described as counter revolutionary and crushed as with Makhno's army and the sailors and workers of Krostadt.

After 1921 the only real political activity was faction fighting amongst the Bolsheviks themselves, with Lenin in his final writings calling for a reversal of his own policies and encouraging working class revolt, but this was merely a tactic by a dying man trying to hang onto power. Trotsky, the father of the bureaucracy as Stalin called him, was to try the same ploy by joining the Left Opposition which earlier as the Workers' Opposition he had crushed. Few of the Bolsheviks saw socialism as a society controlled by the working class but rather as a state in which industry had been nationalised and all the important decisions were made by the controllers of the means of production: the scientific modernising radical middle class aided by all the privileged classes of the Tsarist period who were flocking into the party. So when Trotsky was outmanoeuvred by Stalin's faction neither side was arguing about the nature of the state but merely which faction should control it, Trotsky was as Mattick pointed out "Stalin's loyal opposition". Who was the better leader? Who would treat the workers better? Who had the better grasp of dialectical materialism? These were the questions being asked and they indicate the extent to which working class self-activity had been crushed.

To further subdue independent working class activity and thought a new spiritual orthodoxy was needed to replace religion and the old ideology. Dialectical materialism or Marxism-Leninism as it came to be known filled the bill. Lenin's version of materialism as explained by him in "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism" claimed to give society a simple tool for understanding all of natural science and philosophy, it was principally an attack on religion and in particular "idealism" which Lenin felt was creeping into the party and damaging its scientific status. The work was in fact a complete vulgarisation of Marx and merely revealed how little Lenin knew of philosophy in general and Hegel, Mach and Avenarius in particular. As Pannekoek's excellent book "Lenin as Philosopher" shows, Lenin seems to have so misunderstood all he read on theory and presented 18th century materialism as the theory of the proletariat that in fact he did immense damage to the struggle for working class emancipation by presenting a theory based not on working class practice but on bourgeois science. Lenin's book presents a view of philosophy in which humans receive sense data which gives them a more or less accurate reflection of the world; it stresses man or woman as a purely natural rather than social being and it follows from this that natural science is a neutral or value free discipline. Scientists simply use their senses with the appropriate methods and instruments to bring them ever closer to objective truth claims Lenin. The obvious implication is that the Bolsheviks

are engaged in comparable activity in the social world: they are value free scientists armed with dialectical materialism modernising Russian society and that all this therefore gives them legitimate control over the party and therefore the working class and the peasantry.

Today dialectical materialism is still the philosophical position of the Leninist parties, though certain adjustments have had to be made because of their embarrassment at the excesses of Stalinism. Typical is the position of the SWP who try to play down Lenin's views in "Materialism" and to concentrate on his alleged later conversion to Hegel's ideas set out in notes which remained unpublished during his lifetime. Alex Callinicos who seems to speak for the SWP on these matters and his "Marxism and Philosophy" takes this later conversion of Lenin position, but in fact Lenin's last major work "Left Wing Communism" makes only two passing references to dialectics and is in general a thoroughly anti-dialectical work, stressing the need for correct scientific leadership and clever tactics with the workers doing as they are told, and the SWP, Militant etc still take this view today. The fact is that before his death Lenin ordered the reprinting of his earlier work "Materialism" and refused to publish the many manuscripts showing his conversion to Hegel, some of which were later published in vol 38 of his collected works.

As we have seen Lenin must be held largely responsible for the collapse of the anti-parliamentary workers' council movement in Britain after 1921 which had such dreadful consequences for the class struggle here; Lenin seems to have had little concern with world revolution and a lot with getting a Labour government elected which would be more sympathetic to the Bolshevik state. It is essential to reject all this vulgar theory of value free science and the reactionary practice which goes with it. Marx's dialectical view of science stresses its progressive and modernising aspects in the context of developing the means of production, but simultaneously points out that the actual accumulation of scientific knowledge was never a value free activity but rather was always to some degree connected to the interests of the capitalist class and its need to extract surplus value. Similarly with Marxism itself it is not a value free science which only the intelligentsia can grasp; working class practice will be the determining factor in testing theory. Workers need to do their own thinking rather than leaving it for "more intelligent" people whether these be part of the capitalist or middle classes. We need to end the privileges associated with distinction between hand and brain workers and encourage all workers to engage in self-education by setting up appropriate facilities.

A good example of these facilities were the soviets set up in 1905 and 1917 when the Russian working class grasped the steering wheel of history and briefly took control of their lives despite the vanguard party, the unions and the reformists. Similarly with

the Ukrainian peasants in Makhno's army, the workers and sailors of Kronstadt, Alexandra Kollontai and the Workers' Opposition. Let us end this section by looking at the views of Leon Trotsky in 1921 gloating on having bloodily crushed the workers and peasants:

"There is good reason for believing that the KAPD (the German workers' party who supported workers' councils - ed) under its present adventurist and anarchist leadership, will not submit to the decisions of the international, and finding itself out in the cold, will probably try to form a Fourth International. In the course of this Congress, Comrade Kollontai has sounded this very note, although rather muted. It is no secret to anyone that our party alone is the true mainspring of the Communist International. However, Comrade Kollontai has depicted conditions in our party in such a way that, if she were right, the workers, with Comrade Kollontai at the head, must sooner or later start a "third revolution" and establish a true soviet system. But why the third revolution and not the fourth, since the third revolution in the name of the "true" soviet system has already been made in Kronstadt, during February? There are quite a few left wing extremists left in Holland, and perhaps in other countries as well. I cannot tell if all of them have been taken into consideration; what I do know is that their number is not very great, and they are unlikely to swell into a torrent inside a Fourth International, if perchance it should ever be established." Quoted in G and D Cohn-Bendit "Obsolete Communism the Left Wing Alternative" Penguin 1969 p244.

6. IS ANARCHISM THE ANSWER?

Although there is no tradition of anarchism in Britain it is the case that numbers of young people would claim to be anarchists of some variety even if in some cases this is little more than a fashionable cult phase. Despite the media hype about "alternative" politics it is true that a genuine anti capitalist ideology is deeply felt by many young people and this manifests itself in anti-poll tax activity, anti-fascist demonstrations, animal rights etc. Typical of this view is the group connected to the paper "Class War" which presents a vigorous anti-capitalist, anti-police, anti-royal family and anti-authoritarian perspective. But like much anarchist literature there is very little theoretical analysis to guide the practice, and this deficiency leads to little in the way of constructive organised activity based around the working class and a lot of negative acts against "the state" or "the rich".

For our purposes, as supporters of workers' councils, it is important to look at anarchism for two reasons: firstly because a number of young workers engaged in political activity do support this perspective, and secondly the council movement itself, and particularly people like Korsch, Pannekoek and Gorter, has been accused of being anarchist, libertarian or syndicalist. In view of all this it is important to clarify our position on anarchism in order to try to win over workers to the idea that a rigorous analysis of society in general and particularly the working of a capitalist economy, the relationship between social classes and a theory of revolution, are all a precondition to political activity. Anarchism does not have a detailed and coherent view on the state, because this requires a clear class analysis. Despite the fact that it attacks the state as the crux of the problem of capitalist society, it has a muddled analysis of the economy and it is inconsistent on social class, only in some variants putting a clear working class perspective. Where anarchism simply calls for the destruction of the state and a free society it corresponds to a wide range of different class interests at different points in history: artisans or skilled workers employing their own labourers in the early stages of capitalism; peasants reacting against the forces of agrarian development; merchants and capitalists frustrated by the power of the aristocracy, the church, the guilds and the monopoly privileges granted by the monarch to certain companies. Even today in the Tory party the libertarians would respond positively to this agenda. In practice where anarchism's analysis is consistent and penetrating it is because the analysis is actually a Marxist one, and so it is necessary to show anarchist workers that the Leninist authoritarian interpretation of Marxism is not the correct one and that indeed Marx himself aimed his activity towards creating a society of truly free people.

Let us begin by looking at the views of Michael Bakunin, who has

retained the reputation of being the best theoretician of the anarchist movement. The only rival to this position of Bakunin is Pierre Proudhon, who wrote at length on property, money, value, and indeed economics in general. At first Marx learned a good deal from Proudhon but later in a book entitled "The Poverty of Philosophy" Marx demonstrated that the views of Proudhon simply could not be used as a guide to working class practice because they were utopian, inconsistent, but most importantly they did not aim at a society run by the working class. So partly due to these attacks by Marx, Proudhon was replaced by Bakunin as the inspiration of the anarchist movement. Bakunin was a professional agitator and revolutionary of Russian aristocratic origins with tremendous commitment and enthusiasm, and was admired by Marx for his bravery on the barricades. Despite some good insights Bakunin's theory was crude: he speaks of the need to disobey, to rebel, to reject all authority especially the state and religion, these two institutions being closely connected in oppressing the Russian masses. For him revolutionaries had a duty to engage in the destruction of the state and to set up what he called "federalism": "free federations of the individuals in the communes" - Collected Works, in French, Vol2 p39. But he did not have a serious class analysis, and preferred conspiratorial intrigue, often working with intellectuals in his secret International Brotherhood, to patient working class self-activity. He wanted to offer a kind of secret leadership to the working class, but his organisation in Spain in the 1870s led to a complete fiasco for the workers because of its opportunism and lack of detailed theory. In fact he had little knowledge of the class relations of capitalist society, believing that simply destroying the state would end the problem of exploitation as if by magic. His classic remark was to call for the "social and economic equality of all classes" in his programme of the Alliance of Socialist Democracy, a remark which reveals Bakunin's total lack of theoretical understanding of the economic and social basis of exploitation. For these reasons Marx felt that he was a great danger to the working class and despite his personal liking for him Marx insisted on fighting to have Bakunin expelled from the International.

Not much has changed today with regard to the theory of the anarchists, few of them see the need to overthrow capitalism at its very root the mode of production, and they settle instead for a kind of spiritual or theoretical overthrow of capitalism by overthrowing the state. Perhaps the best known contemporary anarchist is Noam Chomsky the writer on linguistics. His book "For Reasons of State" is a good example of the lack of clear analysis with its vague discussion of the difficult question of freedom, relying as it does on 18th century bourgeois philosophers as the guide to working class practice. It is of course important, as Chomsky points out, to concede to Bakunin the important insights he had on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat in that he predicted in a sense what occurred in Russia where the Bolsheviks established their dictatorship, but he again had little in the way

of detailed theoretical analysis and has little to offer workers in the form of a guide to action.

We need to search for the most advanced and rigorous knowledge of social science in our struggle for a classless society and in general concessions to the vulgar analysis of anarchism must be resisted, but where workers with an anarchist orientation are engaged in the struggle against capitalism, as occurred historically in Russia, Spain, France and Italy, we must make known our view of the need to have a clear understanding of society, and the historic role of the working class as the only class which can overthrow capitalism, as a precondition for changing it.

Let us finish this section by saying a little on the movement called syndicalism. This is originally a French theory based on the "syndicat" or trade union and its central role in overthrowing capitalism. Georges Sorel, though he took no active part in the movement, was the best known thinker in this tradition. His views are a mixture of anarchism and Marxism but based on the small trade unions which then to some extent did reflect the working class's self-activity in early French capitalism. At the core of the syndicalist approach is the general strike, inspired by a "myth" or spur to action or vision, which will as if by magic overthrow the state and with it capitalist society. As our earlier sections show modern capitalism has rendered this trade union based approach redundant as the union has become such a key institution in the capitalist economy, and needs to be replaced by authentic workers' organisations.

7. THE NEED FOR WORKERS' COUNCILS

This final section is intended to show why workers' councils are the way forward for the working class given the situation in contemporary Britain. It is important to stress however that this does not mean a return to the past to rejuvenate an old tradition. We use the term workers' councils in a flexible way to indicate a range of possible structures which workers feel to be appropriate to given historically specific conditions, though workers can learn by examining examples of particular structures used in the past by workers in an attempt to take control of their lives.

We have so far looked at the function of parties and unions, and we could easily add trades councils which are usually either talking shops or career ladders for the local trade unions in Britain's cities, and come to the conclusion that none of these offer any serious opportunity for workers' self-activity. Given the isolated and vulnerable position that many workers find themselves in at the moment it is likely that initially workers will have to hold their first meetings outside of the workplace, though where well organised workers feel a meeting can be held at work all the better. It seems likely that at first we will be dealing with modest numbers with modest short term goals like establishing contacts and planning realistic strategies. These initial meetings however small at first will probably be the only forum in which workers can gather to discuss their problems, fears, hopes etc. because the union branch will most likely be a dead letter which does little more than collect subs and negotiate redundancies, and anyway we know that fewer and fewer workers are actually members of unions in the 1990s. More workers work part time or do temporary work or job share, more workers also work at home or travel a lot from site to site, and of course more are simply unemployed; given all this it is clear that for many workers these embryonic workers' councils will represent the only means of really associating with the people with whom they work. The increasingly fragmented nature of our class requires that we respond with the most appropriate organs of workers' self activity given the specific conditions under which workers actually work. The transition from out of workplace meetings to work place councils which will eventually take over and run the economy may well take a long time, but these councils will slowly become the arena for the class struggle as workers attempt to take more and more control of their lives rather than leaving things to career politicians or union bureaucrats.

It has become fashionable amongst middle class intellectuals over the last decade or so to talk about a "post industrial society" with "local communities" taking more control over their lives through cooperatives, local decision making, more handicraft production etc. Perhaps the best known advocate of this academic school is Andre Gorz - see his books: "Farewell to the Working Class" Pluto Press 1982 and "Paths to Paradise" Pluto Press 1985 -

and whilst at first sight this may seem interesting in fact it is important to dissociate ourselves from this kind of utopian reformism which rejects workers' councils and the need for a proletarian revolution. Gorz himself has no political theory worth the name, he talks about benevolent presidents and prime ministers passing laws to allow more autonomy for local "communities" in what he himself appropriately calls "Utopia for a possible dual society" in the appendix to his earlier book, see above. According to the Gorzian fantasy the ruling class throws in the towel and the president makes the worst excesses of capitalism simply disappear leaving a "dual society" in which there is a limited mass production sphere and an autonomous local artisan sector, a Proudhon Fabian hotch potch. As part of all this there remains a state, albeit a benevolent one, and a money based economy. In all of this Gorz reveals his lack of understanding of the connection between exchange value, surplus value and money and their links with a capitalist economy; rather than seeing these as historically conditional he universalises them in a muddle of ideas based on Marx's Grundrisse, Ivan Illich and existentialist philosophy. This fetish with money is shared by Cornelius Castoriadis in his would be blueprint for how workers should organise their councils in "Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self Managed Society" Wooden Shoe Pamphlet 1984.

Gorz claims any attempt by the working class, even through workers' councils, to take power will only lead to state capitalism. At the same time he claims that the working class is rapidly becoming a non-class thereby rendering Marx's class analysis, which he claims was always inadequate, redundant. In the 1980s many on the left claimed that at the very least Gorz had made a major contribution to our understanding of the nature of the working class due to his detailed description of the changes which it had recently undergone. Actually the hard empirical description which he gives is to say the least scanty, being just a general look at trends in unemployment, temporary working etc. Whilst attacking Marx by claiming all this refutes his analysis, in fact Gorz has to admit that much of this change was anticipated by Marx and integrated into his theory.

Let us move now to Gorz's specific objections to workers' councils. Firstly elaborating on the inevitability of Leninist state capitalism he claims that the councils will never involve real democracy because ultimately each worker will be subordinated to "the plan" and will thus have limited control over their own life, this is followed by a discussion of the philosophical question of freedom and necessity in good French tradition. The simple answer to this is that of course no worker is able to provide their subsistence alone and must therefore cooperate with other workers at the plant, local, national and international level. One of the progressive aspects of capitalism is to have performed this integrative task. The point is that this will be done by workers not in the present alienated and forced way, but

councils will be an arena in which men and women can for the first time in history demonstrate their humanity, by showing what true democratic organisation really means. Secondly Gorz rejects workers' councils because he claims that modern capitalism has produced a situation in which each production unit is just one small part in a fully integrated, highly complex system with massive technological division of labour, and that this renders workers' control and management of any unit impossible. Historically if we consider the workers' councils in Turin after the first world war, Hungary 1956 and Barcelona 1936, to name but 3 examples, we know that already these economies had to varying degrees become integrated and complex and yet demonstrated that they were up to the job of handling each and every unit. It is in fact vital that workers do control the whole economy rather than a few token enterprises as in the case of the workers' cooperatives set up in Britain in the 1970s or the sham democracy of Tito's Yugoslavia.

Finally Gorz explains the problem of human agency, that individuals can never really act in concert. Quite apart from the fact that he confusingly earlier claimed individuals only represent their class, and even more confusingly that class was hardly a relevant tool of analysis any longer, he dresses up the point about lack of ability of individuals to act in concert in philosophical garb as his final "refutation" of workers' councils. History is actually made by real people making common cause with those with whom they see that they have common interests, there is no reason why real workers acting together cannot take control of the means of production and we know that this has already happened on many occasions in history. The immediate problem is actually to overcome these and other arguments which tell us that we are not capable of running society, which we hear in our isolated atomised lives and to make common cause with other workers and prove these arguments wrong in practice.

For the purposes of guiding our practice we reject post-industrialism along with post-Marxism, post-modernism and all the other post-isms paraded up and down the catwalks of Paris and elsewhere by marginalised intellectuals like Gorz, Baudrillard and Kristeva who have reacted to the shift to the right in Europe by being simultaneously anti-Marxist and therefore safe, and radical and controversial in order to keep up their book sales.

Turning now to the problems of actually setting up initial meetings, we need to be aware of one or two eventualities: obviously to the extent that our meetings attract workers the Leninists will attempt to either recruit or indeed to try to take control of councils as occurred in 1917 in Russia. There may be problems as regards the decision making structure in that we want to have full participative democracy but we also need stability. As

we move nearer to work based councils there will be a reduction in the effect of these problems partly for practical reasons but also for theoretical reasons: our theory and practice will be that much more developed. The problems of racism and sexism will be best overcome when workers stand side by side ready to take over the means of production. By these means the working class will solve the problems of participative democracy for the whole of humanity.

Let us end this pamphlet with a quote from Anton Pannekoek, in "Lenin as Philosopher" p103, where he urges workers to reject Leninism and its attempt to impose the idea that the Russia model is relevant in the west:

"In reality, for the working class in the countries of developed capitalism, in Western Europe and America, matters are entirely different. Its task is not the overthrow of a backward absolutist monarchy. Its task is to vanquish a ruling class commanding the mightiest material and spiritual forces the world ever knew. Its object cannot be to replace the domination of stockjobbers and monopolists over a disorderly production by the domination of state officials over a production regulated from above. Its object is to be itself master of production and itself to regulate labour, the basis of life. Only then is capitalism really destroyed. Such an aim cannot be attained by an ignorant mass, confident followers of a party presenting itself as an expert leadership. It can be attained only if the workers themselves, the entire class, understand the conditions, ways and means of their fight; when every man knows from his own judgement, what to do. They must, every man of them, act themselves, decide themselves, hence think out and know for themselves. Only in this way will a real class organisation be built up from below, having the form of something like workers' councils. It is of no avail that they have been convinced that their leaders know what is afoot and have gained the point in theoretical discussion - an easy thing when each is acquainted with the writings of his own party only. Out of the contest of arguments they have to form a clear opinion themselves. There is no truth lying ready at hand that has only to be imbibed; in every new case truth must be contrived by exertion of one's own brain."

8. FURTHER READING.

The major writers on the workers' council movement are Pannekoek, Korsch, Gorter and Mattick; with Rosa Luxemburg's writings useful for the pre-1920 period. But much of this material is out of print and therefore difficult to get hold of, so where these works are unobtainable through mainstream bookshops the following sources are worth a try:

Northern Herald Books
0274 685185

Frontline Books
1, Newton Street,
Piccadilly,
Manchester M1 1HW
061 236 1101

Echanges et Mouvement;
BM Box 91;
London WC1N 3XX

AK Distribution
3, Balmoral Place,
Stirling
Scotland FK8 2RD

The only book readily available by Pannekoek is the anthology by S. Bricianer "Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils" Telos Press 1978, though Pannekoek's "Lenin as Philosopher" Merlin Press 1975, is a major source for this pamphlet. Most of Pannekoek's work remains untranslated.

Paul Mattick's "Anti-Bolshevik Communism" Merlin 1978 and "Marx and Keynes" Merlin undated, are both useful books.

Karl Korsch's "Marxism and Philosophy" NLB 1970 is good on the Bolsheviks and his later work remains loyal to this critical tradition, whereas Georg Lukacs' "History and Class Consciousness" is useful but his later work reflects his accommodation with Stalinism.

Recently republished is Herman Gorter's "Open Letter to Comrade Lenin" Wildcat 1989.

Other works:
Alexandra Kollontai "The Workers' Opposition" Solidarity undated.
Maurice Brinton "The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control" Red and Black 1975.
Rosa Luxemburg "The Mass Strike" Merlin undated, and "Leninism or Marxism?" ILP Square One 1973.
G. and D. Cohn-Bendit "Obsolete Communism - the Left Wing

Alternative" Penguin 1968.
Bob Jones "Left Wing Communism in Britain 1917-21 An Infantile Disorder?" Pirate Press 1991.
Mark Shipway "Anti-Parliamentary Communism" St Martins Press 1988.

Where anarchist views are expressed in any of these other works readers are referred to our chapter 6.

The new journal "Radical Chains", though aimed at academics rather than workers, is full of useful material on the topics in this pamphlet.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION.

If after reading this pamphlet you feel that there is any information you could give us or need, either on theory or on any practical activity workers are engaged in in your area, please contact:

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