


AGAINST PARLIAMENT



Labour Party
Conservative Party
Liberal Democrats
Green Party
Socialist Labour Party
Referendum Party
Socialist Party

FOR ANARCHY

Against PARLIAMENT

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST
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WHY ANARCHISTS OPPOSE PARLIAMENT

We are constantly told that we live in a free society. The guarantee of this 'freedom' is said to be the parliamentary system. This allows us to elect representatives who govern the country in our name, and who are answerable to us. That, at least, is the theory.

This system had its beginnings in a body which only represented feudal nobles, and evolved into one which represented land-owning and agricultural interests more generally. There was no pretence that it was democratic, i.e. representing the will of all the people. By the 19th century, with the development of industrial capitalism, the newly-rich owners of factories and mills lacked political power to match their economic strength. Agitation for an extension of the franchise produced the so-called Great Reform Act of 1832, which only granted the right to vote to property-owners like the industrialists despite their reliance on working-class support during the long campaign. The working-class continued to have no significant economic or political voice. Consequences of this situation were the working-class fight for the vote in the Chartist movement and the growth of trade unions. Most significant, in terms of an independent class outlook, was the development during the rest of the century of various forms of socialism, communism and anarchism.

Government: the Way to Freedom?

Anarchists, because of their belief in the strength of voluntary co-operation and mutual aid, were (and are) opposed to the coercive power of government on principle. They therefore denied the notion that the working-class should work to extend the franchise and then vote its own representatives into power, convinced that this could only ever achieve domination by a minority. However the idea was spread by others (often socialists from the middle-class) that capitalism and the many laws required to sustain it could eventually be legislated away once enough working-class parliamentary seats had been gained. Similarly a socialist system, using the power of the State in the working-class favour, could then be introduced by Acts of Parliament.

Strangely, one of the reasons for taking this line was precisely the repressive capabilities which the capitalist State had built up. Only anarchists anticipated that such standard governmental tools as courts, prisons, police and troops, whoever commanded them, would end up preserving a society of inequality and exploitation, not abolishing it. But parliamentary socialists, believing that any attempt at revolution must resolve itself to the advantage of the ruling-class, took a gradual, reformist approach. By patient legal changes, a socialist utopia would be arrived at, and no-one hurt or aggrieved in the process. Typical of this outlook were the Fabians, an early socialist think-tank still influential in the Labour Party.

Many believed in the reasonableness of such sentiments. With the gradual winning of the vote by all of the working-class, subsequent history has too often revolved around workers giving up their power by electing 'representatives'. The fallacy has been that, by ceding power to someone or some party claiming to represent you, your interests and those of others like you will be the chief concern of those representatives. This idea has legitimised the election of union officials as well as politicians.

It has proved untrue on two counts. Short of the actual deposition of the class of industrialists, bankers, stockbrokers, etc., political representatives are driven to make deals with these people, whose prime aim is to preserve and expand their social and economic privileges. And these representatives themselves, when not born into the ruling-class (making connections at public school and university to last a lifetime), sooner rather than later adopt its attitudes. Supposedly working-class MPs lose touch with their original background, just as do those elected primarily as women or black; and for the same reasons.

The Ruling Class

What is it that makes such attitudes so easy to adopt? It stems from the fact that, once existing in a world of large salaries, consultancies and bribes, chauffeurs and private secretaries, politicians become largely divorced from life as most of us experience it. They are also both more and less informed than most people. On one hand, privy to information and the making of decisions which will affect millions, with only a selected portion of that information available for what is termed public debate. On the other, living in ignorance of everyday life and having their information filtered via civil servants, lobbyists and journalists. The contempt for the public thus encouraged is plain in the constant necessity for leaks to enable us to know much at all of this world. There is in addition a basic condescension on the part of politicians, in their assumption that some people (i.e. themselves and their economic counterparts) are best suited to make the major decisions on how society should run its affairs.

The 1996 debates about MPs' pay, with the outcome of increases of 26% (whilst urging 3% or less on everyone else), were especially significant in revealing this gulf between government and the governed. Once, the argument was that Parliament would work for the working-class through the election of working-class representatives, on the basis of common interest and experience. Now it was said that MPs' wages had to be raised by huge amounts in order to attract the right calibre of person, who would otherwise be lost to a managerial position in industry. Exactly so. MPs and ministers are political middle managers, and their gaze is so frequently turned to the City and the Confederation of British Industry (and their international equivalents, such as the Council of Ministers of the European Union and the IMF) because these are the people to whom they are really accountable. For their part, they exert firm central control over local councils and also by means of placeperson-packed quangos (unelected bodies like hospital trust boards responsible for spending millions in public funds). This in turn exposes the hollowness of local 'democracy'.

Despite the form of a democratic political process which allegedly includes us all, the impotence of national governments before the activities of transnational companies has meant that its content has increasingly become concerned simply with devising ways to improve the lot of the well-off or placate their worries. The end of the belief in anything but the most mild reforms of unfettered capitalism amongst the non-Tory parties comes from the conviction that nothing but a capitalist system is workable. And this further belief unites all of the main political parties - hence the growing ease with which they swap members. This is the essential 'choice' of which they make so much.

None of the above comments should be mistaken for any nationalistic stance. Anarchists are quite clear that the injustices suffered by the working-class are common across the globe. Indeed it is this common character that helps create a working-class that is international, for all its local variations, and makes the need to unite across national boundaries ever more

urgent. And this despite the fact that bosses and politicians still play up national differences in order to maintain weakness and division amongst the world's workers. Those who today complain about Brussels' interference should simply ask themselves, is a British boss or politician so preferable? The idea that they are somehow more under our control or more sympathetic is a fallacy, for the reasons previously outlined. No, it is having a ruling-class at all that is the root problem, whether its members are of the same nationality or not.

A Free Society?

For those who cannot be pacified by material goods (or at least the hope of them), the other side of the democratic picture is coercion. This goes both for those who have an insecure hold on work, housing or education, and those who dissent. With the continuing legal and technical tooling-up of the police, detailed and linked government databases, and the widespread use of closed-circuit TV, all the means for a totally authoritarian system are coming into place. Freedom is reduced to consumerism.

Crime is the justification for these measures. Anything that might indict the role that the propaganda and pressures of a capitalist world play is disregarded as an excuse for individual weakness. More than this, in a system where the market is held to be supreme, any assertion of the interests of the working-class that is not thoroughly diluted by politicians and union bureaucrats itself becomes defined as verging on crime. Thus the outlawing or restriction of strikes, demonstrations, picketing, etc.

The point which we have reached today reveals the basic fallacy that has always underlain the parliamentary road. This idea is that the working-class can make continuing and permanent gains while another class dominates it economically and politically. The 'finest hour' of parliamentary socialism in the post-1945 nationalisations and creation of the National Health Service continued to preserve managerial chains of command and had no idea of how to counteract the harmful inroads of market capitalism other than through subsidies. This may have cushioned the workforces against unemployment for some decades, but by now the truth is plain: the ruling-class drive for profit is the supreme value in a capitalist world. If this means a return to sweatshops, disregard for the health and safety of workers and excessive hours of work, this is the price to be paid to compete in a global market. In the case of public services it means either their abandonment in privatisation, or severe limitations being placed upon them. The same point is true of all such matters that have been the object of reform by Parliament: if they can be clawed back for profit's sake, they will be.

Freedom of Choice

In this pamphlet we explore the ideas of many political parties. Most offer some variant of managing capitalism politically. Ultimately this is to resign ourselves to continuing stressful work, unemployment, discrimination, pollution, and wars over natural resources. Naturally, policies for this management vary, as do the gestures towards social justice. But although certain specific policies will change, there are ideological limits to each party which preserve continuity too. Thus today's Labour Party, while being apparently more pro-business in its outlook than its early 1980s model, in both cases is part of a tradition that has never envisaged any more than the taming of the market, rather than its abolition. Similar examples could be given for all of the parties. They adapt, change rhetoric, symbols, even their names, but they never shift so much that their own self-importance (the 'need' for them or other bosses) is put in doubt. Those claiming to be socialist (rather than social democratic) or communist, while perhaps committed to economic equality, see political equality as a goal that is much further off. They, of course, will benignly rule us in the meantime. Thus they end up on a par with the others, who always seek to offer 'strong leadership' when not merely 'representing' us. What we are trying to do throughout this pamphlet is highlight some of the parties' defining ideas, with reference where appropriate to their current policies. But though there will undoubtedly be a future need to update this account, the continuity must never be obscured by the inevitable hype over policy changes, or even party splits.

Anarchist Apathy?

It is often argued that those like anarchists who deliberately refuse to vote in elections are apathetic, and have no right to comment on political affairs if they do not participate in the approved manner. Anarchists vigorously deny this. Even the politicians profess to be disturbed at the mounting lack of participation in the 'democratic process', a world-wide phenomenon. Anarchists in fact argue for constant and general involvement in politics, that is, all of the questions (work, food, housing, transport, education, etc.) which affect our lives. Apathy - and despair - are the by-products of a vote every few years and the chance to sign the occasional petition to Parliament. They do not come from the refusal to be mocked in a farce. As anarchist-communists, then, we are opposed to parliamentary democracy and capitalism. Neither can we be satisfied with the end of one and not the other. For example, capitalism can thrive in all kinds of political environments but it will still produce similar misery and injustice.

We conclude this pamphlet by outlining some of our positive views of a world in which they have both been superseded. Our starting-point is that individual freedom is best realised in a society without domination, brought together instead by voluntary co-operation and association. The needs of the individual and the needs of society are in a constant tension, but they stand the best chance of being harmonised in a world which has seen the abolition of classes. This means an end to the power of anyone to dominate, either economically or politically. Power would instead be diffused.

One hundred years ago, anarchists chiefly argued against the working-class taking the parliamentary road on a theoretical level. Today we have all too much experience to confirm their original insight that freedom, equality and well-being are not to be achieved via that route. In the 21st century it will be more than time to leave behind the political illusions which have littered the 20th. This pamphlet is a contribution to the exposure of one still deeply-rooted.

THE CONSERVATIVES

If you have read the introduction to our pamphlet it will come as no surprise to you that the Conservative Party is not going to be praised lavishly in the pages that follow. We think that the Conservative Party represents the undisguised interest of the rich and powerful. However it has enjoyed the electoral support of vast numbers of working class people. What we will try to do is to explain how this has come about, its implications for how society is really run and what we can do about it.

It is all too easy for revolutionaries to label groups like the Conservatives as simply evil, exploiting and controlling the working class for their own selfish gain. At a purely practical level this is what is going on but no party could be in power for 18 years on this platform. We need to look at the complex self-justification of Conservatism to see how it has been so successful. We do not subscribe to conspiracy theories of politics, there is not a secret organisation behind Capitalism's political triumph in liberal democracy. As materialists we accept that the vast majority of Conservatives believe in what they say but that ideas do not come out of thin air. We think the form of present society determines the scope of political thought within it. But it is a two way street. Political action can change society reality and understanding of our own and other ideas makes it possible to do so with an end in mind.

We think Conservative ideas are a product of a certain level of capitalist development. It's easy to see why the super rich go along with them. Less easy to see why so many of our class should want to be ripped off and bossed about. Some reasons we will discuss below but a general one should be mentioned. More than any other party the Conservatives stand for the system as it is. To do nothing is to support it, to carry on with everyday life confirms it's validity. To be involved in political action leaves it to carry on. That is why it is vital for our class to examine Conservatism and to do something about it.

History of the Conservative Party

"Damn your principles, stick to your party"

B Disraeli Con. PM

Don't worry, we're not going to give a blow by blow account of British political history since the 1660s, just pick out some key threads of the Conservative Party's development that are relevant today. The Tories, derogatorily named after 'Irish bandits' by their opponents originally represented the interest of the landowning aristocracy. In the face of the growing success of Whigs, later called the Liberals, who had the backing of commercial and industrial interests, the Tories reformed themselves in the 1840s into the Conservatives promising, in the words of their leader at the time "to conserve what is good and change what is bad."

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Conservatives took over the Liberals' position of advocating Capitalism economically and after the Second World War they accepted the new consensus of Keynesianism and the welfare state. In the 1970s however the Conservatives made a radical change. Always they had resisted and accommodated themselves to change, now they advocated it. The Conservative Party became the home of radical neo-Liberalism, advocating the free market and the curtailment of the state under the banner of personal freedom. From this has come the policies of the Tories in power, of course it's not really an innovative change, merely removed the reformist brakes on capitalism that made life almost bearable under it, social security, pensions, health services, trade union rights etc.

In the end Conservatism represents the interest of those on top and is the instrument for selling it to those at the bottom.

For the moment it represents the very conflicting values of the free market, law and order, British nationalism and traditional family values. But all ideas come alike to Conservatism if they could stay in power by advocating other policies they would.

The Party Now

Obviously parties do not fight elections on their political philosophy, but on the practical issues of the moment. In Britain at the moment all the major parties accept the consensus of Parliamentary Democracy and a capitalist economy. This is of course one of the reasons the electoral process is a sham. Therefore in the election the Conservatives will argue that they can provide better answers to the problems of unemployment, inflation, crime, education, defence etc. than the other parties within the framework of the PRESENT SYSTEM. We don't want to get bogged down into the minutiae of manifesto promises, firstly they have little relevance to what the party will do in power, (the Poll Tax was not mentioned in the Tories 1987 manifesto, only a vague pledge to reform the rates). Secondly no British government can significantly alter the economic dynamics of world capitalism or pursue a policy independent of it.

Within these narrow confines with the real political differences obscured we may ask if the Tories will be better at managing things than Labour. There is no doubt that individual corruption is rife amongst the Tory MPs and Ministers and that 18 years of government have left them without any major policy initiative to fulfil but at least we know what we're getting - more of the same crap. This is what the Tories are offering the electorate.

There is no trade off between experience and corruption. The elected politicians are a small part of the state and whomever takes the job has to perform the same role. Moreover democratic politics is not a highly skilled job, it has massive contrivances for many people but these cannot be improved by getting better quality staff. In fact the useless may do more good than the competent as they will be less efficient in crapping on people.

Conservatives and Nationalism

"patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel"

Dr Samuel Johnson.

One of the strongest vote pullers for the Conservatives is its appeal to patriotism. Without going into a deep analysis of nationalism its relation to patriotism we can briefly say they appeal to the instinct of co-operation and social solidarity all people have. This feeling is then twisted to divided the working class and play notions off against one another. This has worked for the Tories many times, most notably with the Falklands war in 1982 but also cropping up in all aspects of politics. At the moment the European Union divides the Conservatives pulled between playing their traditional British nationalist card

and commercial interests favouring union. While being sucked inexorably into a bureaucratised super state. Ultimately Britain is part of an international capitalist system that individual governments can only weakly influence. The party's official stance of wait and see reflects this. In the meantime they hang on to meaningless issues like a new royal yacht to keep up national pretensions.

More serious for working class people are the issues of racism and immigration. Here the Conservatives are openly hypocritical. In public they decry racists and racism. In reality they maintain and perpetuate their oppression of racial minorities and enact measures like the Asylum Bill.

Conservatives and Sexism

There will never be a woman Prime Minister in my lifetime"

M. Thatcher

The Conservatives have an ambiguous position towards women. They are the first and so far only major party to have a woman as leader (excluding Margaret Beckett's brief tenure as Labour leader) and Prime Minister. Yet they have shown the least interest in women's issues and most strongly maintain traditional ideas of different roles for the sexes, witness the various attacks on 'single mothers' as the cause of all societies ills. The theoretical failing of the Conservatives is to assume that if legal and political equality exists social equality will follow. Individual women can 'succeed', like Margaret Thatcher, without changing the position of women as a whole. Ultimately there is no hope in a 'society of opportunity' which is hierarchical. For everyone who climbs up, someone must be trodden underfoot. The political failing is they don't give a toss.

Achieving sexual equality is a vast and complex issue and cannot even begin to be dealt with in a small section of a pamphlet on a very patriarchal institution like parliament. However it pervades all aspect of political, social and personal life and we can only be sure it cannot be changed through the ballot box.

Conclusion

We have not dwelt on the many achievements of the party during its nearly 18 years in office. We are sure you will recall that these are the wonderful folk who bought you mass unemployment, VAT on fuel, the Poll Tax, the Job Seekers Allowance and countless other benefits while they and their friends enjoyed the hard won fruits of privatisation.

Looking back at the last 18 years we ask you to draw your own conclusions, ours curiously coincide with those of Aneurin Bevan, a former Labour politician who we generally have nothing in common with but who was spot on when he said:

"That is why no amount of cajolery, and no attempts at ethical or social seduction, can eradicate from my heart a deep and burning hatred for the Tory party that inflicted those experiences on me. So far as I am concerned they are lower than vermin."

THE LABOUR PARTY

Origins

The Labour Party was never "socialist", however you understand that word. From its birth it has been the parliamentary mouthpiece for the trade unions, or rather, their bureaucracies. Early indications of its role can be seen in the First World War. In August 1914 they denounced war as unjustifiable. Soon they had entered the War Cabinet, and condoned the crushing of the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland and the execution of the Irish socialist James Connolly. By 1918 the labour leaders were able to declare that the "Labour Party is not a class party but a National Party".

The massive increase in the Labour vote in 1922, one might have thought (though not us!) that the Labour Party would have become more adventurous. Henderson, the Labour leader, said: "Trade unions should undertake not to seek to alter existing conditions by declaring a strike". What fighting talk!

In the November 1922 elections, Labour again made great advances. Another Labour leader stated that a "Labour Government...would not be a class government". He went on to defend the British Empire as something that "we cannot lightly cast...off at all".

By 1923 Labour had a majority in the general election. Its first action as a government was the signing of the Dawes report, the Allied bankers' measure against the revolution in Germany. The 1924 dockers' strike was smashed by the government. In 1925, a successful miners' strike under a new Conservative government had the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald spluttering that: "The Government have handed over the appearance at any rate of victory, to the very forces that sane, well considered, thoroughly well examined socialism feels to be probably its greatest enemy".

Once again in 1929 the Labour Party took power with a minority. the incoming government took a leading part in reducing the wages of textile workers. They applied the Tory Trade Union Act to strikers; they passed the Anomalies Bill against the unemployed (over 1.25 million at the time) They endorsed the arrest of 31 workers leaders in India. By 1930 they had agreed to the arrest of 10,000 Indian Nationalists. Strikes and uprisings in Egypt, Palestine and Nigeria were crushed.

But the heights, or rather depths, of Labour rule came in 1931. The crisis had the Labour government considering raising unemployment contributions, cutting insurance benefits to 26 weeks of the year, cutting teachers' pay, reducing spending on roads and grants under the Unemployment Grants Scheme, and the most crucial, a 10% cut in dole. Some in the Cabinet rejected this, so MacDonald dissolved the government and set up a 'National Government' in coalition with Tories and liberals. In doing so, he and other Ministers and MPs split from the Labour Party. An election confirmed them in power.

The remaining Labour leaders had been too heavily involved in MacDonald's and Snowden's policies and continued to defend their role in the Labour Government. The treachery of MacDonald, rising unemployment and the looming threat of fascism failed to bring them to a more radical position. The prevailing ideas in the Labour Party were 'MacDonaldisim without MacDonald' in the following years.

Labour won a massive election victory in 1945. Within 6 days of taking office they had sent in troops into the London docks to break a strike there. 3 months later troops were again called out against a national dock strike. The antagonism between dockers and the Labour government came to a head in 1948 when Labour used the old Tory Emergency Powers Act and again sent in the troops. Other striking workers were also subjected to strike breaking by troops during the Labour term of office. Abroad Labour helped Dutch imperialism by sending in troops to crush an Indonesian nationalist rising using surrendered Japanese troops in this dirty business to back them up. They again employed Japanese troops to crush the Saigon workers' rising in 1945.

Recent History

The re-run of slavish devotion to the needs of capitalism came with the 1964-1970 Wilson government. It put means testing forward in its policies on social services; it pioneered the abolition of free milk for schools; it tried to bring in an anti-strike act; its housing record was appalling and it backed everything the USA did in Vietnam.

The Callaghan government of 1974-9 proved no different. Unemployment continued to rise; the numbers of the poor continued to increase; public expenditure on roads, transport housing, etc., fell drastically. The monetarist policies implemented by the Thatcher government were being pioneered under Callaghan in the Treasury and the Cabinet. Wage restraint resulted in a massive revolt among public sector workers.

When Kinnock became Labour leader he presided over a Party where changes were already taking place. The old ideas of welfarism and nationalisation which had given the Labour Party some sort of pseudo- "socialist" veneer were already beginning to crumble. Kinnock came out in clear support for Government secrecy during the Zircon-Duncan Campbell episode. The Labour leadership implied that the US presence in Britain was OK. All support to the miners was refused during the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-5. He also proposed a National Assessment, a repeat of Callaghan's Social Contract, which had led to wage restraint and 1.5 million unemployed.

Blair

But the changes that spelt a clear end to allegiance to the Welfare State were to be carried through to their conclusion with the new leadership under Blair. the 34-page document *Labour into power: a framework for partnership* launched in late January 1997 complete the changes that have come about within the Labour Party. The reforms outlined in this document are part of the 'Americanisation' of Labour, the finishing touches to turning Labour into a US-style Democrat Party. The annual conference will become a 'showcase' rally, where the Great Leader will be given a stirring soundbite speech, with plenty of happy clappy loyal supporters.

The old National Executive Committee will be down graded-stripped of its powers, and what is left of the Labour left blocked from influencing it. This watered down NEC will zealously support any Labour leadership and never cause it embarrassment. The union link will be further weakened and Blair will try hard to get membership of his Party based on individual membership.

The old Labour left around Benn, Skinner and Co. will be totally marginalised, a minority increasingly unwelcome inside the Party.

The accelerated rotting of old style Labourism has taken place, because like similar parties throughout the world, it cannot adapt to the end of Keynesian economic strategy which involved the development of a Welfare State and 'full employment'. It can no longer make any promises that it can carry out a reformist programme to transform capitalism into something more 'humane' (but still exploitative). Even mild reforms cannot now be granted under capitalism because of the development of the global economy. If the boss class is to stay competitive on a world scale it cannot offer concessions. It has to press ahead with its austerity packages and redundancies, in order to streamline national economies and make them leaner and meaner, able to stand up in a bout in the global economic ring.

The Labour Party, unlike the Conservative Party is fairly united on Europe. A large section of the British boss class realises that its best chances are inside the European bloc. It needs access to these markets. It thinks it can rely on Labour to help this come about. Integration into a single market will mean even further attacks on the working class. They hope Labour can oversee these attacks.

Blair is planning on more repressive police actions, more people sent to prison for longer, greater State surveillance. Blair knows that if he is elected it will be in a situation of continuing mass unemployment and increasing poverty. Gordon Brown, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, has promised that he will not increase income tax on the top 10%. He announced that there would be no "blank cheques" and that public sector workers could expect no more than the graduated 3.3% pay increase already promised by the Conservatives. Labour will need increasing police powers if it is elected and attempts to carry on the work already put into operation by the Conservatives, the attacks on living standards, wages, and benefits against which many may decide to act.

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Liberalism as a political doctrine is one that emphasises individual rights, and tolerance between individuals. It is therefore an outlook which has difficulty in adequately accommodating the collective side of human life. Though liberals are agitated by such conditions and attitudes as poverty, homelessness and racism, their commitment to The Individual is in great tension with their social commitment.

This individualism was focused in the economic theory that inspired 19th century liberals, that of free trade or laissez-faire¹. The idea was that individual manufacturers and traders, unhampered in their inventiveness or price-setting by anything apart from that which other individuals (supposedly just as 'free') would be willing to pay for their products, would be encouraged to offer them for no more than the market would bear. This naively assumed that enlarging profits and cutting costs in ways that cheated or exploited the worker or consumer would not occur, they allegedly being free to buy from a myriad of suppliers or work for a myriad of employers. The adulterating food producer, the exacting employer etc. are simply put out of business under laissez-faire theory by the freedom of workers and consumers to go elsewhere.

If this description sounds familiar, it should, for it sketches the essential delusions underpinning today's New Right economics. In 150 years, what was liberalism has become conservatism. The Liberal Democrats have their roots in this ideology, though other influences and their need to reposition themselves with regard to other parties have tempered it. The main later development in liberal thought originates in the increase in working-class organisation and electoral strength in the later 19th century, combined with the undeniably widespread problems of poverty and unemployment. All this brought home to the then Liberal Party the inadequacy of unfettered capitalism and individual action in the face of its attendant problems. Having become identified with reform, the Liberal Party originally secured much of the working-class vote as sections of it became enfranchised. But more searching criticisms of capitalism and the legal system upholding it saw many workers move towards a political expression that could result in a decisive changing of laws in their favour, (i.e.) through Parliament and their 'own' party, Labour.

Still stressing the classless individual above all, but now with some recognition of the inability of that individual to resolve all of his/her problems alone, Liberal ideology thus ended up being basically social democrat decades before the Social Democratic party (SDP) was created in 1981. The latter was mainly based on Labour malcontents like David Owen and Shirley Williams. Their outlook, favouring employer-employee co-operation, political decentralisation, membership of NATO and multilateral disarmament, was very much akin to the Liberals'. Having allied within months of the SDP's birth, their 1988-89 merger and change to the name Liberal Democrats were inevitable. However, coming from a Labour/union background, the SDP side brought to Liberal politics a new influx of members and a basis for revamping liberalism so as to claim the centre ground whilst the Tories and Labour could be painted as champions of the Right and Left. (This late 80s scenario has now largely dissolved as all concerned squabble over the increasingly crowded centre).

Wealth and War

Today the Liberal Democrats have a vast programme of reform in view. Yet time and again this reformism conflicts with a conservatism about capitalism and its accompanying politics. So although many things they propose might, if achieved, make life more bearable, they still wish to retain much in the way of institutions and attitudes that generate the problems in the first place. Some examples from current Liberal Democrat policies will attempt to show this.

Outstanding in this respect are their economic policies. They can state 'Modern business finds success by motivating everyone involved with the enterprise to work together as 'stakeholders'², yet also 'A strongly competitive domestic market is an important ingredient for success in the global market'³. What competition means in actuality is economic winners and losers or, more concretely, jobs and joblessness, rich and poor and, ultimately, the difference between living well and dying miserably. In a further twist in the spiral of contradictions, Liberal Democrats also back 'reform of the world trading and financial systems', to remove discrimination against developing countries'⁴. (This dovetails with their desire to more strongly regulate the City).

But the history of capitalism shows that powerful companies will, having attained that position, do all they can in terms of legal mechanisms, cartels or inter-governmental institutions to keep it. Such reforms as are made (e.g. in recent years in GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), while making noises about dealing with poverty, are in the end always an attempt of the already rich to confirm their place. This is 'the grain of the international economy'; can it be desirable to try and 'work with' it?⁵

The Liberal Democrats' defence commitments make clearer their hankering to preserve the essentials of the domestic and global set-up, even as they perceive many of its faults. They favour continued membership of NATO and reform of the United Nations which would include a larger Security Council and a 'permanent peacekeeping force'⁶. Of course various factors in global troublespots can complicate the aims of the militarily powerful when participating in 'peacekeeping' (e.g. the US in Somalia). The fact remains that, beyond settling the immediate conflict, the underlying objective is to make the country in question safe for the market. Clearly those who are already prosperous are best placed to take advantage of 'peace' through investment, trade tie-ups and co-operative local rulers.

The continuation of NATO, the retention of nuclear weapons and the maintenance of 'the current real level of defence spending'⁷ jointly raise the question of what is being defended, and against whom? Why this anticipated array of enemies if a reformed international capitalism is going to generate and distribute wealth so fairly?

On the most immediate international level, they are more enthusiastic about membership of the European Union than the Tories or Labour. There is some logic in this: as they point out, 'acid rain and water pollution know no boundaries'.⁸ But this acknowledgement of common regional interests in the environmental sphere continues in the economic in a much more contradictory way. Thus they also advocate 'improving Europe's competitiveness in world markets' at the same time as the laissez-faire of the Single Market 'presents great opportunities for the British economy...widening and strengthening (it) so that British industry can compete better'. The confusing logic of these positions, in essence, seems to be: the countries of the EU

should compete with each other, but as a bloc compete with the rest of the globe. This allegedly makes for 'a fairer and more prosperous world'.

Regrettably for all the fine words about a more united Europe, this stress on competition is tailor-made both to bolster nationalism (because of the variations in national economic circumstances) and, beyond this, the hardening of the world into new regional blocs to succeed those of the Cold War. Where economic interests are concerned, military involvement is never far behind, either to protect economic advantage or to help achieve it. (The gradual development of common EU positions on foreign and defence policy is part of this process).

Reform...but not too much

But the Liberal Democrats tend to envisage social and political reformation rather than the conservatism apparent in the defence field, usually attempting to mingle the two. Undoubtedly this is seen as being commonsensical and practical. Thus the Tories' NHS internal market would largely be retained, but with more money pumped into the system so as to reduce waiting-lists and abolish eye and dental check-up charges (though not those for prescriptions, which would merely be frozen). Thus £2 billion more is pledged for education, but university students would still eventually have to repay what they had been granted in living expenses. And thus local councils would have restored freedom to build new homes and use the money from council house sales to this end, a mortgage benefit would be granted to low-earners, and so on, but this desire that housing should be affordable for all clashes with the drive for profit, profit being increased by the scarcity of a commodity in relation to demand. When the demand is for such a basic human need as housing, it is naturally very high: a capitalist's dream that these proposals would not end.

This split between seeing the need for change but being too committed to the old ways of capitalism and political hierarchy runs throughout liberalism: it almost defines it. Liberal Democrats see the injustices produced by centralisation and so propose decentralisation throughout Britain at all levels; but there remains a ruling-class, economically and politically. They propose a Freedom of Information Act; but there remain politicians and bosses with the secrets to conceal. They suggest sound measures for tackling pollution and waste; but their opposition to nuclear power has grown ever more diluted. More broadly on the environmental front, though opting for measures like a carbon tax on energy sources, they will not seek the end of an economic system that favours short-term gratification and therefore a short-sighted use of natural resources.

The Individual and the Class Struggle

Anarchism addresses itself to beliefs in the value of the individual and individual freedom. It could be argued that it shares these beliefs with liberalism. But anarchism looks deeper into the roots of oppression, and finds them not in the defective workings of parts of the system but integral to it. This is the class struggle, and it can only be ended in the abolition of classes, not the pretence of partnership. This is why anarchists go further than liberalism: beyond reformism, towards revolution.

Notes

- ¹ Historical background on the Liberal and Liberal Democratic parties has been drawn from JOYCE, Peter: *Towards the Sound of Gunfire! a history of the Liberal Democrats*. Liberal Democrat Publications, 1994.
- ² *Pocket Guide to the Economy*. Liberal Democrat Publications, 1996, p.7. (Henceforth PGE).
- ³ PGE, p.8.
- ⁴ *Pocket Guide to Liberal Democrat Policies*. Liberal Democrat Publications, 1996, p.26. (Henceforth PGLDP).
- ⁵ PGE, p.2.
- ⁶ PGLDP, p.9.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ All quotations in this paragraph are drawn from the leaflet *Making Europe Work for Us - the Liberal Democrat Vision for Europe*. Liberal Democrat Publications, August 1995.

THE GREEN PARTY

The Green Party began life in 1973, growing out of slowly mounting public concern about pollution, rising global population and depletion of the earth's resources. Its original name, People, (changed to the Ecology Party in 1975, then the Green Party in 1985), symbolised two qualities which have largely continued to inform its politics. These are an evasion of the issue of class, and a belief that ecological politics are a decisive break with previous ideologies: "neither left nor right, but up front."¹

Certainly the recognition that humanity is part of Nature, not its emperor, is vital. So too has been the accompanying realisation of interdependence, e.g. human beings cannot pollute the environment, particularly through their economic activities, without affecting their health and that of other living things. To make these the foundation of a political/philosophical outlook, when other parties still think in terms of economic growth as a cure-all, has led to a degree of true distinctiveness for the Greens. (Though the Liberal Democrats have come to adopt some of their ideas). Among their notable policies, therefore, are:

1. A sustainable, zero growth economy, which would emphasise local production, organic farming and taxation on energy and raw materials;
2. Extensive use of renewable energy sources (e.g. solar), with a phased reduction in the use of fossil fuels and the abolition of nuclear power;
3. Massive investment in public transport to discourage the wasteful car culture;
4. Decentralisation of power, strengthening district and local councils;
5. Population stability, with clear implications for limiting new births.

These policies are linked to anti-consumerism, whereas consumption and the excitation of new 'needs, form the very motor of capitalism. (Environmentally-conscious entrepreneurs will supposedly resolve this contradiction). There is also a degree of realisation that the distribution of the world's wealth is grotesquely unjust and has profound ecological consequences. Thus far greater local and national economic self-reliance is supported, which would simultaneously free farmers in the Southern hemisphere from giving over so much of the best land to growing cash crops for the benefit of Northern consumers. However on this question there remains a worrying emphasis on applying population control techniques to Southern 'overpopulation', even though it is also recognised that the North needs to radically change its ways of living and working.

Green Economy: Green State

In this respect, a key policy is the Basic Income Scheme. This would allot everyone a guaranteed weekly amount to cover housing, clothing, food and fuel costs. Thus it would resemble but go beyond the benefits system, as it would not have a cut-off point in time. The answer to the objection that no-one would then work is that people have motives other than that of financial gain for working, e.g. to be socially useful or creative, or for social contact. In addition, the Scheme would mean that a financial incentive to work would remain, that of raising the individual's living standard above that of mere subsistence. Overall, this is said to reconcile 'a degree of social justice' with giving free enterprise market forces - in other words, wealth creators - as much freedom as possible within the rules necessary to protect the global environment.²

This expectation - that the 'free market' will continue in a Green society, yet governmentally shorn of all the characteristics that make it environmentally disastrous - exposes the contradiction that pollutes the Green mainstream. For the free market depends on greed: the greed that is the profit motive, and the greed that capitalists need to stimulate in consumers to both make and increase their profits. Additionally, with this motive, there have always been capitalists who will make and sell anything, no matter how destructive, in order to make profits. It is therefore greatly opposed to values that seek to cherish the inhabitants and resources of the Earth.

Anarchist communists believe that, with considered use of technology, work can be shared so as not to be onerous and yet productive of all the necessities of a decent life, in much the same way as Greens. However, greens' support for co-operatives, for example, partly rests on the view that they will lead to "improved working relationships between employers and employees"³. Evidently these enterprises continue to be hierarchical rather than egalitarian. This is borne out by the continuing role envisaged for unions, as this must mean that there will continue to be employers with whom to carry on negotiations. Furthermore, rights to strike and to picket peacefully would be enshrined in a Bill of Rights, and 'would apply equally to a member of the armed forces and other employees of the state.'⁴

But the desire for 'a just society, one where wealth is shared fairly'⁵ is not reconcilable with one where economic and political hierarchies continue, as these quotations show they would. The existence of an organised state, as mentioned above and as is implied by the whole project of a Green government (rather than society), highlights this point. Whether openly favouring the rich or claiming to act on behalf of the weak and the poor, the state is an instrument which depends for its life on the legalised domination of some by others; that is, class rule. Since anarchists seek an end to all such economic and cultural domination, they necessarily seek an end to the state and government too.

There are nevertheless many Green objectives and values with which anarchists agree, and as well as contributing to the development of ecological thought (viz. the works of Murray Bookchin), they have also learned from the Green movement, of which Green parties form only a fraction. But the Green Party's anxiety to be seen as having broken free from 'grey', growth-biased politics, and its apparent belief that the history of State capitalism (in its 'Socialist' or 'Communist' variants) invalidates communism as such, pulls it inexorably back towards the more reactionary position of a clean, Green capitalism.

The Victories of Electoralism

What of the Green Party's political record? Its electoral successes have been few. The most prominent examples are the European Parliament elections of 1989 (where 15% of the vote was won, though without a seat being gained), and Cynog Dafis' 1992 election as a Plaid Cymru MP in alliance with the local Greens. They have therefore stressed their success at gaining district council seats, but in an era of massive centralisation these victories have been rendered somewhat hollow. As

with the Liberal Democrats, there is political self-interest as well as democratic principle in their consequent support for proportional representation.

In any case, electoralism appeals to some Green Party members more than others. The tension in this sphere is indicative of something that runs through much of its history, thought and practice. The early days of being forecasters of doom unless their ideas were put into practice via an Ecology Party government made little impact. The party's character also changed as people from various political and personal backgrounds were drawn towards it, aware that the environmental crisis needed some thoroughgoing political expression beyond the activities of pressure groups.

Some were originally 'pure' environmentalists, previously uninvolved in politics; some were socialists and even anarchists. Disappointed in their revolutionary hopes of the 60s and early 70s, the latter group could yet see in the Green critique of industrial society confirmation of their own class-based version, with much fresh factual support. Both groups hoped that the parliamentary route would prove the practical way to achieve desired changes.

The very fact that, in the course of over two decades, it has not, (though 'The Environment' has become a totem before which all politicians bow), plus the extra- or anti-parliamentary roots of many activists, has produced a continuing appreciation of the virtues of direct action and decentralised power. Yet this has been confronted by influential advocates of centralisation and 'professionalism', who have interpreted the lack of electoral achievement as a sign that they have not been enough like a 'grey' party. For example, giving the media a recognised figure to speak to (not, of course, a leader) would allegedly make it more credible and electable. Well, perhaps, if you want to reproduce the structures and thus the practices of what is already established. There are echoes of the Labour Party's struggles over image and appearing 'fit to govern', and the Green Party's temptations surely arise from a similar despair where simple careerism is not the explanation.

Because radical change that does not go with the grain of capitalism and its media cheerleaders is so hard to achieve, efforts are made to temper the message and render the organisation more like that to which people are already accustomed. Unfortunately it is precisely the established ways of thinking, acting and organising that have created the ecological/political swamp in which we are sinking. The more this process of adaptation occurs, though it may make for survival within the world of parliamentary and capitalist politics (and the Green Party is not a stranger to some hefty business donations⁶), the worse it bodes for real improvements in our lives. It also diminishes the Greens' claim to have a thoroughly fresh perspective, especially as the other parties have in recent years all applied a Green gloss to themselves. What the Green Party's experience demonstrates is that a parliamentary road-building programme, like that for cars, wastes energy and resources.

Notes

- ¹ A phrase coined by the German Green Herbert Gruhl. Quoted in: WALL, Derek: *Weaving a Bower Against Endless Night...an illustrated history of the UK Green Party*. Green Party, 1994, p.48.
- ² *A Guide to the Green party's Basic Income Scheme*. Green Party, 1995, p.2.
- ³ COOPER, Tim: *Working to Live*. Green Party, 1988, p.13. (NB This pamphlet remained in print at the time of writing, implying it is still valid for the party).
- ⁴ Cooper, op. cit., p.14.
- ⁵ Cooper, op.cit., p.13.
- ⁶ HARA, Larry, & MATTHEW, Gary: *Paradise Referred Back: A Radical Look at the Green Party*. Green Flame One, 1990, p.18.

THE LEFT

1: The Left In Context

In the coming general election campaign, there will be no shortage of candidates and lobbyists declaring themselves a 'real' and 'radical' alternative to mainstream capitalist parties. As many as a dozen left wing political groupings are likely to put up their own candidates to compete with each other on the electoral hustings. Other left groups, in contrast, will want all efforts put behind the campaign for a New Labour victory - despite their 'criticisms' of Blair. Still others will insist that we pick and chose on a seat-by-seat basis the most 'credible militant candidate' on the ballot paper. These groups will insist that their candidates (or their electoral policies) represent an uncompromising anti-capitalist alternative which places working class struggle centre stage. They will argue that support for their ballot box intervention will boost working class political confidence and encourage a heightening of class struggles. At the same time, each of these groups will argue that the different electoral policies of other left wing political parties are bankrupt and will damage our struggles, distract our attention and disable our fight, if they're taken up. Behind this tough-talking rhetoric, lies a very different political reality. In fact these leftist groups, whether loyal to New Labour or independent of it, are not revolutionary alternatives to capitalist politics, but just another variant of them. Just because their leaders hope that we'll take their claims to be 'revolutionary' at face value, doesn't mean that we have to. Any thumbnail sketch of the British 'far left' as it exists in 1997 should try to illustrate three central ideas. First, that contrary to their claims, these groups are not expressions of 'revolutionary' ideas, but practical opponents of them. Second, that these groups are united in common politics much more than they are split apart by tactical differences. Third, that effective working class opposition to the ruling class means breaking free of the constraints of 'left wing' capitalist politics, and marking out a truly independent political existence.

2: Turning To Specifics

The SWP, RCP, SP, the CPB, the CPGB(M-L), the WRP: the list seems endless. The mixed-up alphabet soup of acronyms and initials is confusing in itself. Yet all of these 'rivals' share common political priorities: concern to build their own organisations and recruit new members and supporters, backed up by an insistence that without their 'vanguard' leadership, working class militancy will drift without direction. Those looking to a real alternative to mainstream capitalist austerity will recognise these ideas as reactionary drivel. Yet knowing this is not enough - it's also important to understand what particular groups are up to. What then are the 1997 electoral policies of the major left players?

The Socialist Workers Party

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is now the biggest left wing party in Britain, claiming to control in excess of 10,000 members and supporters. Alongside the Militant group, the SWP is probably the most well recognised of left wing organisations in this country. The SWP has swelled in size dramatically since 1990. Its party bosses believe that a 'window of opportunity' has opened up on New Labour's left side, through which the SWP can advance. In the last few years the SWP's political programme has been turned upside down twice, as it has struggled to make this happen by becoming ever more 'appealing' to potential recruits. The SWP has based this recruitment drive on a 'hard trot, soft trot' double-act which has seen it target the most meek and the most militant at the same time by talking both kinds of politics. As a result, the politics of the SWP now fluctuate wildly. At the moment, the party is tacking firmly to 'the right' so as to maximize its appeal to Labour voters 'worried about Blair'. This has led the SWP to prioritise 'popular' issues over potentially controversial ones, and to serving up instead a luke-warm diet of bland anti-Toryism. In the coming general election the party will urge us all 'to vote Labour, but build the socialist alternative'. The SWP says that a Labour government will quickly be exposed as little different from its Tory predecessor, and that this experience will radicalise thousands, then millions, of working class voters that the SWP can then move in on, and try to absorb into its ranks. But it is the SWP, and groups like them, that even now peddle the lie that we should somehow 'expect better' from New Labour leaders. This winter the SWP rallied behind a mass petition campaign which called on Labour leaders to defend New Labour's link with unions and repel further attacks on the welfare state. Pleading with bureaucrats and worrying about the future of New Labour - so much for the SWP's 'militant' 'independence'. There's no doubt that attack from a ruthless Blair government will shake-up the political expectations of countless working class people. But that's the very reason why it's so essential we understand that New Labour (like Old Labour before it) is not, and can never be, on our side. That way we won't get distracted by lobbying our enemies - Labour officials, city councillors and trade union bosses (just as much as financiers, media moguls and Tories) - to back us as our struggles get underway. As New Labour's first austerity budget bites, the SWP will express its 'shock' at the cuts - and then call on the party that introduced them to lead the fight back against them. Although it pretends to be 'the alternative' to New Labour, the SWP remains little more than its boisterous left wing.

Socialist Party

Another sizeable left wing group that used to cling loyally to the Labour Party is the Socialist Party/Militant Labour. 'Militant Labour' (ML) (who used to be called the Militant Tendency) changed their name once again before the general election, this time to become 'The Socialist Party' (SP). Militant have enjoyed nothing like the same recruitment success as the SWP in recent years, though it too has looked to reinvent its politics, and give its old leftism a new face. Only a few years ago Militant was a dour and fiercely orthodox Labour left current. New Militant/Socialist Party is different in many respects. Old Militant was exclusively concerned with the health of the official Labour movement, and dismissive of all other 'left sects'. The Socialist Party is out to recruit from new social and political struggles, and to free up its monolithic organisation - which it recognised was a handicap in its efforts to recruit from a new generation of militants. As yet, the Socialist Party's change of tack is seen by its bosses as a necessity forced on the party by the weakness of the left. The Socialist Party have not yet converted to 'new left' politics. Anyone active in the fight against the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), or who's come across Youth Against Racism

in Europe (a front group for the party) will know just how little has changed. The Socialist Party/Militant's new 'soft-focus' politics soon revert to 'business as usual' Labourism come election time. Militant's new party will put up 25 of its own candidates at the general election (a considerable come down from the 100 they probably originally planned on standing). It may also reach deals with the Scottish Socialist Alliance (though the Socialist Labour Party (see below) has rejected co-operation with it) and will certainly call for a Labour vote everywhere there is not an 'acceptable' independent left candidate standing. Socialist Party/Militant may now be outside the Labour Party and stuck on the fringes of the trade union bureaucracy, but it still remains besotted by it.

The Socialist Labour Party

The Socialist Labour Party (SLP) launched at the initiative of National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) President Arthur Scargill in the Spring of 1996 might not now make as big an impact in the coming general election as both its supporters and its critics first thought. There may be as many as 100 or more SLP candidates, but equally there might only be a dozen or even fewer. It's also possible that SLP leaders will call for a New Labour vote in all other seats, even against Socialist Party/Militant or other non-Labour left candidates. A few Labour local councillors have defected to the SLP, but the party has yet to win an electoral contest. The party claims to have recruited just over 1200 supporters in its first few weeks, with Scargill setting a target of 5000 SLP members by June 1997. Despite the best efforts of the Scargill leadership team to put them off, the SLP has attracted the interest of many smaller left-wing groups eager to participate in its work. Militant were eager to sign up to the SLP, in the hope of joining a 'broad left' alliance rather than a strict party, but were turned away. Scargill's ultimatum to other left groups both inside and outside Labour is that they either dissolve themselves into the SLP, or keep clear of it. A growing number of SLP activists who have maintained their previous political affiliations whilst working inside the SLP, have found themselves excluded from the party. The politics of the SLP are very much like those of the 1970s' Labour left: politics which Scargill himself picked up on his rise through the ranks of NUM officialdom. The SLP stands for nationalisation, more money for welfare and social services, and fewer restrictions on trade unions. Such 'corporatist' capitalist politics didn't serve working class interests in the 1970s, and the ruling class certainly isn't looking to contain working class militancy in such an expensive way in the late 1990s - though that could change three years into a Blair Labour administration. For now the SLP looks likely to live life in the political margins. Just like the SWP and Socialist Party/Militant, it will claim to offer a 'socialist' 'alternative' to New Labour which is in fact neither of these things.

The Minor League Left

The SWP, ML and the SLP will operate as the 'big three' in the general election, but they will be joined by many other smaller currents. A few of these groups will put up a handful of their own candidates come the election. In the Trotskyism tradition, this will include groups like the Workers Revolutionary Party-News Line (WRP-NL), the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), and the Communist League (CL). In the Communist Party tradition this will involve the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), the Communist Party of Scotland (CPS), and the Communist Party of Great Britain-Weekly Worker (CPGB-WW). Parties no longer likely to put up their own candidates include the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and the Workers Revolutionary Party-Workers Press (WRP-WP). It's not necessary to understand the complex criss-crossing history of these groups to recognise that they are not only marginal and irrelevant but propose politics counter to working class interests.

The Independent Working Class Association

A new political alliance which claims to have broken free from this 'old and reactionary' left is the Independent Working Class Association (IWCA). Formed in the summer of 1995 from an initiative by activists in Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) and the left-wing Red Action (RA) group, the IWCA claims to stand opposed - not only to New Labour but also - to the existing 'far left', and to recent 'old-left' initiatives such as the SLP. Despite these promising features, the IWCA has from day one remained weighed down by the 'political baggage' that its founders have brought along with them. Many in AFA now argue that the resurgent British far right has been - literally - beaten off the streets by anti-fascist militants, and that this defeat has led the fascists to turn instead towards electoral work. The IWCA says it exists specifically to offer a working class 'left alternative' to this ballot-box fascism. In the view of the IWCA, electoral fascists will concentrate their work on those inner-city estates where working class alienation from New Labour has created a volatile political vacuum in many communities. The IWCA are right to stress that anti-fascist work must not become, by default, pro-Labour work. But anarchist-communists have never thought otherwise. The IWCA are right too on the need to combat the spread of reactionary ideas amongst those workers and residents who feel 'betrayed' by the town hall, and by the Westminster, Labour Party. But the IWCA are dead wrong to argue that 'the alternative' can be discovered in a repackaged leftist alliance, that touts for passive working class votes for just another 'party ticket'. The political colours of those groups that have been welcomed into the IWCA fold also acutely exposes just how familiar and orthodox the IWCA's supposed 'clean break' with the leftist past really is. Despite attracting critical interest when its formation was floated, the IWCA has not maintained much momentum. Red Action now appear more circumspect about the project. Any IWCA intervention in the general election is likely to be small, if it materialises at all.

The Socialist Alliances

Yet another new initiative that has taken off over the past year or so is the 'Socialist Alliance' project. During 1996 a number of such alliances were set up in different cities around the country in the hope of pulling together a broad current of left-wing groups, political parties and activist campaigns, better able to pool resources and co-ordinate joint local activity. In Scotland the Socialist Alliance (SSA) project appears both more cohesive than the more threadbare network of English and Welsh alliances, and more interested in electoral work. The SSA has already begun to stand candidates of its own at council level in Scotland. In the past few years there have been a number of similar initiatives, looking to build a 'united front' alternative to New Labour, the rigid party-left, and the single-issue campaign group. These have included the Chesterfield Conference and Socialist Movement, the Revolutionary Socialist Network, the Red-Green Network, the Green-Socialist Network and several

others. Few of these efforts have proved to be stable. Most have dissolved as the novelty of the coalition has given way to the stark reality of conflicting politics. During their natural life-span SAs might provide a forum in which militants could link up, and organise limited practical joint work. As with any local strike support work, campaign against hospital closures, anti-fascist activity, or any other struggle, it all depends on who the Alliance attracts, and the immediate politics that it adopts. Where an Alliance is thick with leftist hacks or would-be bureaucrats, or determined on electoral work, participation is clearly pointless and the Alliance should be opposed. This is a tactical decision, dependent on local circumstances, not a matter of principle. However, any Alliance that puts up candidates at election time has clearly 'crossed the line' and can only be treated as having done so.

New Labour: Victory and Defeat

Many left groups are betting that a New Labour victory will quickly lead to a revival in the fortunes of the 'old left' and its allies among the trade union leadership, once the harsh and oppressive reality of a Blair administration becomes apparent. But they divide on the question of what will happen next. Some see this process of 'disillusionment' generating a tidal wave of pressure pushing a Blair government leftwards, and forcing a New Labour cabinet to relent on its attacks. This is what groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Labour Left Briefing, Socialist Action and Socialist Appeal argue. They see that the 'unofficial ceasefire' declared by the left of New Labour, will be called off once Blair enters Downing Street, and the battle for the party is joined. Other left groups disagree, betting that Blair's 'betrayals' will see a left breakaway from Labour ranks, as tens of thousands dutifully form up behind their spotless 'independent' socialist banner. This is the view of groups as diverse as the Socialist Workers Party, Militant Labour, the Communist Party of Great Britain-The Weekly Worker and of course the Socialist Labour Party. Both these sets of groups share the view that a defeat for New Labour would trigger much the same surge leftwards. This would happen as bitter recrimination tears apart the facade of unity in New Labour's ranks, now facing the prospects of another five years of Conservative rule. This realignment would - these groups argue - be born of pessimism and not of a surge in confidence and working class combativity. New Labour victory or New Labour defeat it is vital that thinking over the future direction of the class struggle is not hijacked by these groups and obscured by a faction fight within the hierarchy of the official labour movement and its left allies.

Malaise on the Left

The series of intense struggles that erupted throughout the 1980s, often (though not always) ended in defeat, despite the heroism and resilience of many tens of thousands of working class militants. Together with changes in the nature of employment, the decline of traditional smoke-stack industries, and the political influence of the unions that 'represented' those workers, led to political paralysis and a growing sense of demoralisation in the British Labour movement. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the state capitalist system in eastern Europe that many of these groups regarded as socialist, these setbacks deepened the sense of political malaise on the left. It was the political rethink that these experiences triggered that has led to Militant Labour's decision to quit the Labour Party, to Scargill's launch of Socialist Labour, and to the Socialist Workers Party's drive to inflate itself numerically whatever the costs politically.

Pushing Forward the Fight

This process of political realignment and reassessment is evident not simply across the spectrum of the British far left, but across Europe and internationally. The old edifice of left-wing British politics has collapsed, and with it has gone some of the dead weight of Stalinism, left Labourism and old-style Trotskyism and Leninism. We must ensure that new political obstacles are not erected in their place. These politically volatile times are full of both risk and opportunity for working class militancy.

In the many battles that are to come in the months and years ahead - be they under a brutal Blairite, a pernicious Portillo, or a scurrilous Scargill government - uncompromising, militant, revolutionary politics will be indispensable. Through the general election and beyond it is essential that our struggles are not booby-trapped or derailed by would-be left wing leaders in their partyist disguises. We must develop the confidence to demand what our class needs, and refuse to accept what's on offer. An important step in asserting our political independence and cranking up our combativity is learning to reject capitalism in its left wing guises as much as in any other.

THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY AND PLAID CYMRU

In Scotland and Wales the electorate will be offered the 'choice' of voting for their respective national ruling classes (or would-be ruling classes!) in the form of the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru. Both parties have presented themselves as the centre-left alternative to Labour and would like to win the traditional working class vote in Scotland and Wales. In the past 25 or so years they have advanced from being essentially 'fringe' parties to major players, particularly at a local government level. Much of their appeal stems from popular resentment on the part of large sections of the Scottish and Welsh population to remote rule from Westminster by people who have no idea of their specific culture. This resentment has been exploited by the nationalists who increasingly use the language of socialism whilst pursuing politics which are wholly capitalist in content.

The 'Tartan Tories'

The Scottish National Party (SNP) was formed in 1934, from the unification of a number of groups and tiny 'parties' who held similar views on the need for a 'national renewal' and Home Rule. Unlike their Irish counter-parts the Scottish National Party was far from 'revolutionary' and although it has since its foundation had a militant and republican fringe it has always been a strictly constitutional nationalist party. What also united the nationalists was a, well founded, belief that the Labour Party, despite a *paper* commitment to 'Home Rule' was as Unionist as the Tories.

The original leadership of the SNP were a mixed bunch including many Gaelic revivalist intellectuals and Scottish cultural figures such as the poet Lewis Spence. The early SNP made little or no attempt to present itself as a working class party and even if it had it's doubtful whether it could have made any inroads into workers' support for the Labour Party or Communist Party. Neither was (or is) the party republican and its rhetoric was strongly anti-English rather than anti-British Imperialist per se. From the beginning, however, the party was very much geared towards fighting elections even if its small size prevented widespread electoral activity.

The SNP's first Parliamentary success, however, didn't come until 1945, when they captured (but promptly lost) a seat in the Motherwell constituency. Ten years later the SNP was still only winning about 0.5% of the vote and its rise did not begin until the late 1960s (It has had continuous representation at Westminster since 1967). Its electoral high point was in 1974 where the party took 30.4% of the vote and gained 11 MPs. Much of this popularity surrounded the party's 'It's Scotland's Oil' campaign- where it mobilised around the issue of ownership of this potentially lucrative North Sea resource off Scotland's coasts. Labour's response was to resurrect their commitment to 'Home Rule', so sweeping the carpet from beneath the feet of the nationalists. The 1979 Referendum, which saw the Scottish electorate narrowly vote in favour of a Scottish Assembly, was a response to this surge in Scottish nationalism. When the British Parliament overturned the decision the response wasn't the mass (peaceful, democratic, constitutional etc.) rebellion the SNP would have liked but a dull resignation and a subsequent massive drop in support for the Scottish Nationalists.

The SNP have, deservedly, been tagged the 'Tartan Tories' by their opponents, despite their claim to be a 'moderate left of centre' party. This has been due to the class background of their leadership and the bulk of their supporters, particularly in rural areas of Northern Scotland. They have, however, since the early 80s, attempted to present themselves as the left alternative to Labour. They now have a Trade Union Group which competes in a turgid struggle with the Scottish left, particularly the various Communist Party and ex- CP union hacks. Although most class conscious Scottish workers have viewed this with the contempt it deserves, with the advent of New Labour, the SNP has begun to look increasingly like Old Labour draped in a Saltire.

So what are the policies of the Scottish Nationalists? First and foremost the SNP works to win a majority of Scottish constituencies in the Westminster elections. Stage two in their plan for an 'Independent Scotland' will be, no doubt frenzied, negotiations with the Scottish Office over the handing over of power. Once this is done the SNP will register with the United Nations and apply to become a full member of the European Union. They will then call a Scottish General Election to the new Scottish Parliament. The Queen, or her successors, will, incidentally, remain the Head of State, until "such time as the people decide otherwise". Scottish workers role in all this will be to vote for the SNP and then to carry on working... for the national interest. Indeed, for Scotland's working class there would appear to be very little to do other than carry on as before and, if things go as smoothly as the nationalists would like, Scotland's working class will hardly have noticed any change whatsoever.

Of course the SNP's programme contains all the usual hot-air and bluster we would expect from a party attempting to get itself elected. The voter is told that voting SNP will "eradicate poverty" as the nationalists Research Department has calculated that Scotland's hairdressers will gain an extra £3.75 a week, bringing their income up to a staggering £7,795 per annum. (SNP Research Department 13/11/95). Scottish unemployment will be cut too. Perhaps by the SNP's commitment to strengthening Scotland's conventional defences (conscripted into a Scottish National Army?) ? Although the nationalists wish to give Scotland "comprehensive health care...free to all" and to abolish prescription charges -"when resources permit" (where have we heard that one before?) they would find this impossible if they were to, as they claim, make the Independent Scotland a "highly competitive economy". In effect, the SNP are claiming to do the impossible- to make a success out of a capitalist economy in dire crisis, not just locally but on a world scale. A crisis which has meant that everywhere the national ruling classes have had to start dismantling their welfare systems. And the new Scottish political bosses would have to do the same. The social democratic carrots, tagged onto their home grown variant of the capitalist stick would rapidly be jettisoned and the Scottish working class would continue to pay the price.

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru (in English 'Party of Wales') has a very similar history to that of the Scottish National Party. Formed in 1925 by individuals of similar ilk to those of the SNP (including the writer and dramatist Saunders Lewis) Plaid Cymru, however, had to wait for 41 years for an electoral victory. Today Plaid Cymru have a total of 4 MPs from 38 seats in Wales and claim 10,000

members across the country and beyond. Of all the parties presently represented at Westminster, Plaid makes the biggest fuss of being 'socialist'.

The aims of the party are:

"To secure self-government for Wales and a democratic Welsh state based on socialist principles" and to "Safeguard the culture, language, traditions, environment and economic life of Wales, through decentralist socialist policies." Plaid's 'socialism' however, amounts to stodgy social democratic reformism. Their leader, Dafydd Wigley MP, in his speech to the 1995 Annual Conference, claimed "It is Plaid Cymru, not the Labour Party, that inherits the vision of Keynes..."(!). This may be true, seeing as the Labour Party have discovered 'the social market' but it is hardly socialism! Wigley went on to outline his 'socialist' vision, similar to the 'socialist' vision of nationalists of left and right before him. Plaid Cymru would be campaigning to help the "people of Wales establish business ventures...and to help those small businesses to develop successfully." The Party of Wales promises to defend small local bosses against big foreign bosses, Wigley again "We take the side of small business against the ravages of big industrial corporations. We will back the small man and woman in their fight against big faceless bureaucracy." Plaid Cymru would not however oppose foreign investment in their self-governing Wales- their 'socialist' Wales will be an "enterprise Wales".

In some ways the arrogance of the English establishment, with its Secretary for Wales, who is never even Welsh, is even more obvious than it is in Scotland. South Wales has been hit hard by the crisis of British capitalism and the solidarity found in the old industries, all but destroyed in the past 20 years, has been replaced with an aching gap. The working class of Wales, particularly in the South, have tended not to support the siren-call of Welsh nationalism. Neither, however, have they been won over to anarchist communism-as yet!

THE FAR RIGHT

The parties on the far right standing in the general election can be divided into two main camps: the anti-European parties (the Referendum Party and the United Kingdom Independence Party) and the out and out Fascists (the British National Party, the ex-National Front now trading under the name of the National Democrats and the rump of the old National Front).

The Referendum Party

The Referendum Party has attracted a lot of media attention and high profile support from scum like Margaret Thatcher and John Aspinall. This is because their friend and fellow shitbag the billionaire Sir James Goldsmith is the brains (?) and money behind it. The stated aim of this party is simply to force whichever government gets in to call a referendum posing the following questions: "Do you want the UK to be part of a Federal Europe? OR do you want the UK to return to an association of sovereign nations that are part of a common trading market?". The unstated aim is, of course, to get Britain out of Europe.

This is also the aim of the United Kingdom Independence Party, though they have an advantage over the Referendum Party, owning a whole range of little Englander policies to use once the malign influence of Johnny Foreigner over the Channel has been cast off. What they don't have though is a bucket full of cash from Goldsmith and look likely to achieve the exclusive single figure votes usually only enjoyed by Leninist sects and the Monster Raving Loonies.

If either of these parties does force a vote on Europe what can we expect? Most likely no change, as even if there was a majority vote to leave Europe there would be nothing to stop the mainstream capitalists staging an intense propaganda campaign and calling another vote to get what they want, as happened when the delinquent Danish population voted the wrong way a few years ago. Multinationals like Toyota and Unilever have already started leaning on the government to force greater integration.

And even if they succeed in their aim all they offer is more capitalism, favoured by the right of the Tory Party so we can no doubt look forward to a flood of wealth trickling down to the tune of Rule Britannia from good British wealth creators - and if you believe that you'll believe anything.

The Fascists

As for the actual Fascists the British National Party are planning to stand 50 candidates (and thus qualify for a party political broadcast), the National Democrats will stand in 21 constituencies and the rump National Front also promised to stand candidates.

All of these parties are offering a more blatant form of authoritarian Capitalism combined with crude racism. The Fascists won't be able to form a government but any Fascist MPs elected will actively work for their policies to be implemented and signs of growing support for Fascist parties tends to drive the mainstream parties to the right. Realistically this is all the Fascists can hope for at the moment. So what are these policies? For starters they want all immigration to be halted and all black people to be forced out of the country (though where to is unclear). Law and Order is to be made even harsher with longer prison sentences, the return of the death penalty and corporal punishment. The BNP also want to give the unemployed another bashing and make people work for dole (though let's face it just about every politician seems to favour this at the moment!).

The Fascists are aiming to create a strong authoritarian state to do away with the "softness, liberalism and excessive tolerance" which our current rulers have shown, and use this to control all areas of political and economic life. The fact that such dictatorships have been tried already by not only the right (e.g. Spain and Portugal) but the left as well (e.g. Russia and Eastern Europe) and brought nothing but misery to millions after decades of trying does nothing to deter them. In their scheme of things they will be the privileged new elite running society directly for their own benefit. Those who benefit from a totalitarian British State will be few in number. Even if you don't fall into one of the categories of people singled out for extra harsh treatment (e.g. Blacks, Jews, Gays, "Reds", etc.) unless you're already rich and powerful all the Fascists promise is more hard work and you'd better not complain....Fascism does not challenge capitalism in any way. And with capitalism still intact in the Fascist British state the flow of wealth from the bottom upwards can only continue with resistance made all the more difficult.

THE NATURAL LAW PARTY

If you really think these prats bouncing around on their arses will save the world there's really no hope for you. Try using your brains instead of your bottom.

THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST ALTERNATIVE

What follows is not a programme, more the sort of principles and practices which we believe would be essential to a free society.

In some ways there are resemblances to ideas that the political parties put forward (Tories, Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Greens have all put forward variations on the theme of decentralisation, for example). This reveals two things. Firstly, that anarchist communism is not something totally alien to the experiences and desires of many working-class people, for whom political parties have often been the expression of their hopes for a better life, and which must take at least some measures to seem to be fulfilling them in order to retain their votes.

But secondly, these parties have also identified with values and ways of working - those of capitalism and hierarchy - that could not help but prevent the realisation of such aims as social justice, individual liberty, and harmony with the environment. Whether it be managers' use of 'consultation' or employee shares, or politicians' 'decentralising' through regional parliaments or neighbourhood committees, there is a common thread. This is the popular desire for more control over one's life entwined with a deceptive way of fulfilling it, which curiously always manages to keep real power in the same hands as before. Anarchist communism seeks to do away with all such half-measures and intermediaries, so that the working-class at last attain control over their own destiny to achieve a genuinely classless society.

A prime objection to anarchism is that it is against human nature. A society without leaders, laws and the apparatus to support them is envisaged as 'chaos', as violent, cruel and greedy. Since these are in fact leading characteristics of the present capitalist order - supposedly a world of general wealth and freedom - we should ask if a society founded instead on individual freedom, mutual co-operation and a sensitive use of the planet's resources is likely to produce the same fruits, whether in human character or the state of the Earth.

Class Consciousness

How can the exploitative values now dominant be supplanted? Without going into a full discussion of how an anarchist revolution might be achieved, its indispensable element is a widespread class-consciousness (A conscious minority that tries to make a revolution simply forms a new elite, as with the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution). This consciousness embraces disgust with the present order, the sense of solidarity, the desire for thoroughgoing change and the knowledge of how to achieve it. It is class-based because it is the lives of the industrial and agricultural workers of the world - individuals but with many things in common - which can only be relieved by this consciousness and its expression in the building of a new society.

It follows that those who are thus capable of making a revolution have struggled to go beyond the mind-set that living in a capitalist world tends to produce. We are not just creatures of our environment: we can imagine something better, and actively strive to realise our ideas. Through all the problems involved in carrying through the revolution, any temptations towards authoritarian or exploitative behaviour would face an alert, energised populace working through a very different social framework. Whereas these behaviours now are given every encouragement (from education, media and workplace), anarchist communism would mean precisely the opposite.

Making Progress

It would, however, be unrealistic to imagine that a completely clean break could be made between one form of society and another. Though a revolution is initially a time of crisis, it then continues as a process. The ways in which we work, create, organise and relate to one another will be continually refined. The basis to this will be the quest to fulfil the twin values of freedom and solidarity, as against the self-centred and short-sighted outlook promoted now.

Anarchist communism would depend on mass involvement. This is both to release everyone's inventiveness and ideas, and to prevent the formation of some sort of governing or economic elite. Two forms of organisation are crucial in this context. The first is regular mass meetings of communities and workers, to ensure that full discussion and participation in matters affecting a locality could be achieved. The second is federation, as many issues (e.g. the uses of a river which runs through many communities) need a broader perspective than the local. This can only come from the involvement of all the communities affected. Federalism would run through successive bands - local, district, regional, international - to take decisions appropriate to that band.

Linked here is a further organisational principle, that would apply to all such situations where the immediate physical presence of all those affected is impracticable. This is delegate democracy. This strongly contrasts with representative democracy (such as Parliament) where, an MP having been elected, he/she then takes decisions on personal, party and ultimately ruling-class grounds, with little reference to the working-class part of the electorate. This approach is also what undermines what currently passes for federalism, as in the EU where it is basically a matter of ruling-class speaking to ruling-class. A delegate, however, is sent with instructions from his or her area or workplace, and any decisions reached at broader bands of a federation (e.g. regional) must be ratified at the narrower (e.g. local). Delegates are also subject to strict rotation, and recalled if they do not act or speak in accord with their instructions.

Certainly all modern methods of communication, such as the imaginative use of computers, will assist in the flow of discussion and decision-making between the various bands of federations. But even then, particular care would need to be taken against the smaller ones not being heard and thus alienated. Though anarchist communism looks to the creation of a global community, it remains rooted in the local and face to face contact rather than today's way of decisions handed down, apparently from untouchable elites.

These organisational principles apply both economically and politically. For in an anarchist communist society these areas of life, rather than the current fragmentation where each has its supposed experts, are seen as what they are, mutually reinforcing and in need of the other. Thus, for example, everyone in a community may come forward with ideas for running the workplaces and what should be produced, without being either 'economist' or 'politician'.

Work and Wealth

This fluidity of roles would similarly apply to work itself. Of course, people have individual inclinations and talents but, under capitalism, many of these are squandered or only fulfilled in 'spare' time because they do not fit with their role as an employee doing a particular job in a particular enterprise. Anarchist communism would allow for the rotation and sharing of all kinds of work, whilst stressing that any technology used must be as safe and non-polluting as possible. There will be plenty to do in an anarchist world, but the emphasis on individual fulfilment and the achievement of mutually-agreed goals would mean the enhancement of living rather than merely 'making a living'.

This last phrase translates today as the gaining of enough money to buy desired goods and services. But anarchist communism seeks the abolition of money and the market. In a world scarred by hunger, disease, homelessness and poverty, and the concentration of most wealth in the hands of a relative minority, the notion that these methods of economic distribution are the fairest and most efficient possible is disgusting nonsense. Real wealth lies in the produce of the earth (agricultural, mineral, etc.), the talents of human beings, and their combination in products and techniques which represent the experience of generations. Yet it is the possession, or lack of, piles of metal and paper that assign a person's ultimate status and power in today's world. In fact, owing to the perverse use of computer technology in financial and other forms of speculation, the wealth of the rich has become increasingly abstract. But its concrete effects are clearly illustrated by the poverty of 'Third World' farmers and labourers paid less and less for crops, or the homeless on the streets on every capital. This complete mismatch between human need and the actual concentrations of material plenty is lubricated by money and the dominant position it affords.

Capitalism relies on monetary and material rewards (or the hope of them) to ensure that work is done. Creativity is only worthwhile in this view if it ends up producing profit. Reducing human beings as this does to consuming machines, there can be little wonder that so many dislike their jobs or, without them, steal to have the goods with which all are constantly tantalised. Since in anarchist communism the working-class and peasantry are in control of planning, production and distribution, there can be confidence that all necessities will be produced and, according to circumstance, made freely available or fairly shared out via community stores and warehouses. Goods and services would also become produced in such a way, and such a spirit, as to mean that work was much more congenial and purposeful. For if the incentive of money was lacking, the incentive of sustaining a free society and one's place in it would also be powerful.

Even within capitalism, where public service is discouraged (at least by the bosses' conception of reward) many workers are still chiefly motivated by the satisfaction of using their skills to help others. And this is quite apart from those who, perceiving a need, act voluntarily, alone or in association, to meet it. There is no reason to suppose that, where a social climate existed that positively cherished such motives, they would diminish. Thus in striving to ensure fulfilling work for all (such that the distinction of work and leisure would become far less clear), and with material security brought about by the efforts of all, the frustration and poverty that fuel so much anti-social and self-destructive behaviour now would come to lack such combustible material. But this 'utopia' would, in the nature of things, still encounter all sorts of challenges and difficulties. This would be the overriding incentive to be active and productive, the drive to continue and improve the way of life of anarchist communism.

But there would also be a grim history of which to be aware, so as to actively guard against its return in a new guise. The history of a world riven by internal and external violence, the domination of a few over the many, racial and sexual oppression, pollution. When we are told that anarchism means chaos and communism tyranny, this can only provoke a bitter laugh. The horrific present of global capitalism provides these things in abundance. We look to a day when the future anarchist communist people can look back, and relish their freedom.

Aims and Principles

1 The Anarchist Communist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2 Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class.

Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as political level.

3 We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class women and black people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and

achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4 We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class.

The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5 As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6 It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7 Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part on its overthrow. Trade unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc.).

Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation for the workforce.

The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow.

Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist-communism.

What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8 Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9 As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation.

We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method.

We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.