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The Second Best of Subversion

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Articles from the pages of Subversion on:
**Workplace Anti-racism Class
the JSA Roads the Enemy**

SUBVERSION

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INTRODUCTION

If you're unfamiliar with the Subversion group, or revolutionary politics in general, we hope this will be a good place to start finding out more.

The Second Best of Subversion is a selection of articles, reviews and correspondence from Subversion numbers 11 to 20, covering roughly the four years from autumn 1992 to autumn 1996. We have grouped the articles around certain themes, reflecting partly what we consider to be the most important issues for our class, and partly those activities which we ourselves, through a mixture of accident and design, have been most involved in during this period.

Section 1 begins with a look at some of the weaknesses of Workplace Struggles, not least among which is the role played by trade unions. We argue the need for independent working class organisation and strategy. We explore the ways in which this might emerge, by looking at the class struggle in Poland in 1980-81, and at some more recent smaller-scale attempts to create independent workplace organisations in the UK.

In **Section 2** we have included two articles which deal with pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist forms taken by Anti-Racism.

Section 3 is taken up with a discussion of the question, What is the Working Class? We trace the changing composition of the working class as capitalism has developed over the years, and try to come up with some answers in relation to the class struggle: in which section of our class do we think revolutionary struggle has the most potential to emerge, and which other sections are most likely to join in as it develops?

Unemployed Workers' Struggles are the theme of **Section 4**, which is mainly concerned with debates around opposition to the Job Seekers Allowance and the potential for joint action between Employment Service workers and the unemployed.

This is followed in **Section 5** by two ar-

ticles about Anti-Roads Protests, which discuss the economics behind the road-building programme, and the relationship between anti-roads protests and the class struggle.

Finally we come to **Section 6** which is about Capitalist Strategies of Control, looking at how the bosses continually re-organise the production process, the social environment, and forms of ownership, in their efforts to control and suppress the struggles of our class.

One notable omission from this selection is the many articles we have published (from issue number 18 onwards) on the important Liverpool dockers' dispute. Much of this material has been published in full elsewhere, for instance in Collective Action Notes number 11/12, Fall/Winter 1996 (write to Collective Action Notes, POB 22962, Baltimore, MD21203, USA or to Subversion, Dept 10, 1 Newton St., Manchester M1 1HW). We can provide copies of the relevant issues of Subversion to anyone who hasn't seen these articles.

Some minor amendments (indicated in the text) have been made to one or two pieces, but most of the articles are reproduced just as they originally appeared. Although we might want to say things differently if we were writing it all again now, we feel that this arrangement allows readers to follow the developing discussion of certain themes over a period of time.

Though the articles presented here can't reflect the entire range of revolutionary politics, a reading of this latest collection (along with the **Best of Subversion 1** - still available for £1) should give you a fair idea of our politics and activity. Many of the articles reflect discussions and debates not only within our group, but also, to an increasing extent, dialogue between ourselves and people who belong to other groups or to no group at all. We welcome involvement and collaboration with any individuals or groups who broadly share our views.

SUBVERSION ~ OCTOBER 1997

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Section One - Workplace Struggles

Flame or Ember?

Revolutionaries in Britain have witnessed the defeat of a number of important working class struggles over the last 10 years followed by a rising tide of nationalism and racism across the globe. In this situation they are understandably desperate for some good news. Articles have appeared in a number of publications heralding a resurgence of class struggle across Europe, supposedly throwing a beacon of light to militants here in our efforts to promote a fight back against the current bosses' offensive.

FLASH POINTS

There have certainly been by comparison some impressive flash points in the European class struggle over recent months. Massive street demonstrations involving between 50,000 and 500,000 workers have taken place in Italy, Belgium, Germany and Spain against government austerity plans, redundancies and wage cuts. There have been angry and violent strikes at Air France and the state chemical company in Crotone, Italy, involving confrontations with armed police. Major strikes have also taken place amongst coal and steel workers in Germany at the heart of European capitalism. There have also been numerous smaller strikes right across Europe, east and west. Whilst all of this can only warm our hearts, there are serious worries in our heads at least, about the way things are going.

AIR FRANCE

There have been suggestions that the bosses deliberately provoked the strike at Air France with a carefully-timed announcement of huge redundancies well in excess of those actually required at the present time, with the hope that the workers would be isolated and exhausted before a more general assault on the rest of the class. If this is true then the bosses probably got more than they bargained for. Certainly the Financial Times was sufficiently worried to bemoan the lack of trade union control over its members at Air France and to express concern over spreading militancy amongst European workers gen-

erally.

GERMANY AND COAL

It is noticeable, however, that the strongest opposition to austerity in Europe comes from workers in the substantial state-owned industrial and public service sectors which have generally still to see the level of restructuring and job losses experienced by those sectors in this country.

Although strikes amongst German coal miners have sometimes been 'spontaneous' and organised outside the official unions, they have quickly been brought under those unions' control. Ideologically they have been side-tracked into nationalism and corporatism (i.e. identifying with the industry rather than the wider working class) with slogans such as 'Defend German Coal'.

Struggles have been isolated with the focus on occupations of pits threatened with closure and token union-led demonstrations. There are many echoes here of the British NUM's defence of the 'Plan for Coal', its appeal for moral support from the 'general public', MPs, etc, and insistence on getting every last miner out on strike, which prevented miners from spreading their struggle directly to other workers in the crucial early stages of the strike. There was also much wasted and misdirected debate over capitalist issues such as which energy industries did, or should, get the most state subsidies. As a result of all this the British miners for all their militancy and courage were roundly defeated.

ITALY AND THE SCHOOLS

In Italy the 'base committees' (COBAS) had some success in organising struggles of workers, mainly in the state sector, outside and against the traditional union structures. They continue to have some influence but even here corporatist tendencies have appeared. For instance, in the schools COBAS there have been attempts to side-track the

movement into 'advising' the government on how schooling should be planned, making the COBAS look inward towards the needs of capitalist schooling rather than outward towards the rest of the class and class-based needs. It seems that 'professionalism' for long such a barrier to 'class' resistance amongst school workers in Britain is still a force amongst such workers in Italy, despite their comparatively more militant stance.

ITALY - SCOTLAND

There are some other unhealthy comparisons to be made. The extremely militant strike and occupation of the Crotone chemical plant in southern Italy which received the enthusiastic support of the whole town bears a number of similarities to the failed Timex strike in Dundee, Scotland:

- considerable militancy and initiative on the ground by the workers involved, but links with the 'outside' world largely left in the hands of the official unions and parties etc
- the blurring of class lines between the workers and their families on the one hand and local politicians, churchmen and capitalists on the other in 'defence' of 'their' area
- an element of 'north' versus 'south' ideology particularly strong in Italian politics today comparable to the Scotland versus England debate here, setting workers in one region against workers in another region.

CONCLUSION

Clearly there has been an upturn in the European class struggle and there exists a huge wellspring of class anger beneath the surface that could give rise to even larger struggles in the near future. The obstacles to such a movement are however very great. Unlike the left our conclusions are that, at this juncture, we in Britain have less to learn from the supposed 'successes' of workers in the rest of Europe, than they have to learn from our failures.

SUBVERSION 14, SUMMER 1994

Uniting Our Struggles

Council Workers

As the annual budget setting process got underway in local authorities around January, the local and national press started filling up with startling news of drastic cuts in almost every conceivable local service. A couple of months later there was apparently contradictory news in some cases of jobs and services being saved!

In fact nothing had really been saved, it was just part of the usual public bargaining between local and central government aimed at fixing us into the democracy game and softening us up for what were by any account very real cuts, affecting real people.

These real cuts, many of them devastating in their effects on the most disadvantaged of our class, have not passed without protest. In Manchester alone there have been a good dozen separate campaigns involving marches, demonstrations and petitions by users and workers alike. But each campaign has pursued its own particular case separately and in isolation, only occasionally, and usually accidentally, coming together face-to-face. Even on these occasions there has been no resultant unity or joining of forces. The situation in Manchester, as far as we can tell, seems fairly typical in this respect. These type of campaigns have been easy meat for the skilful 'divide and rule' tactics of the politicians and union leaders.

There have also been a rash of local strikes by council workers. Some as in Islington and Newham in London involving over a thousand workers. But again these strikes have remained separate and there has been no movement towards any kind of co-ordinated national strike action.

In addition to the obvious hardship to those who have lost services or been made redundant, conditions for the workers remaining have grown steadily worse, with mounting management pressure to increase productivity, all against the background of a compulsory competitive tendering process accepted by Labour councils and unions alike. Politicians and senior management in the councils are carrying out a determined campaign to weed out trouble-

some workers, not just political activists but also those suffering from ill health or anyone with a 'bad attitude' who isn't willing to commit themselves 'body and soul' to their new corporate strategies. Despite all the trendy talk about teamwork and equal opportunities 'management by fear' is returning with a vengeance!

The following description of conditions for workers at the London borough of Hackney is very familiar to those of us working for councils in the North West:

"In the case of local community activists, the Council has reportedly withdrawn facilities for some groups to use its properties for meetings - and in one case the local Labour Party allegedly discussed setting lawyers and private investigators on its critics. And in the case of Council employees, where Members and Officers have real power, the picture is a horror story. It's worth selectively listing just what's going on, for comment is simply superfluous: it has been made a sackable offence for employees to squat in Council properties; it's a serious disciplinary offence to talk to the media or to Councillors about Council services (with real sackings to back the threat up); every employee has been asked to register with the Council if they belong to any voluntary group active in Hackney; despite condemnation by the NCC/Liberty, being in arrears of Council rent or of poll tax renders people ineligible for many jobs (again sacked, according to one union, by at least one sacking for poll tax non-registration and more allegedly in the pipeline, plus staff being moved jobs because the Council itself has cocked up their rent payments); the Council has retrospectively decided to use personnel and payroll data for totally different purposes, namely hunting for people in difficulties with rent and poll tax. "New Management Techniques" are all the rage, including the Total Quality Management approach that was lauded as an exemplar of good private management in last year's American election...by the rabidly right-wing Republican party.

"And, last but not least, there are corruption, racism, and a massive wave of disciplinary actions with many sackings. According to the local NALGO, it recently had over 100 members facing investigation for Gross Misconduct, with over 98% of them black, yet it believes that many of the accused are completely innocent, and that for many others, even if disciplinary action was conventionally justified, management is going for dismissal when it's totally disproportionate to any "offence". Mean

while, the local paper reports humiliating results for the Council when it defends its earlier dismissals - but no reinstatements, so the climate of fear is perpetuated. It is widely alleged, including by some dismissed staff, that the "corruption" and "fraud" allegedly involved in many dismissals go far higher, but that certain leading local figures are simply covering it all up.

"To fight these attacks and abuses is far from easy. Politically, the claim that it's all designed to improve services goes down well with anyone who knows the real standards on offer in the last few years. Real fraud and corruption are a permanent feature of local government, not just of Hackney, so repression under the banner of fighting it carries a lot of moral authority - even if close study of the details shows many people being framed and scapegoated on nonsense "evidence" and charges. And one pretext for the new management techniques is to better know how resources are really allocated, in order to use them more efficiently: who could argue with that?"

"Nor does your correspondent want to act as adviser to the local Labour Party dissidents: however good their intentions, the facts of life in local government, its power over local residents and workers, means that promises for a distant future will have to be treated with caution even if anyone tries to make good on them. The unions themselves are not much better: member-involvement is poor, and most employees are frightened; on top of that grass-roots weakness, it turns out that many of the full-time officials, like many senior council officers, are leading Labour local government figures in nearby local Councils. And dismissed employees seeking legal redress keep discovering that law firms specialising in industrial relations...are also specialists in work for their friendly neighbourhood Labour Parties." [from RED BANNER].

We're sure this list of nasty 'goings-on' in Hackney could be substantially added to by many of our readers from their own experience elsewhere.

In Manchester there have been numerous 'disciplinary' leading to sackings, which despite ritual union protests have gone largely uncontested and the situation is getting worse. Undoubtedly senior management in the local authorities are having some success in this war of attrition.

WHAT NOW?

This growing frustration of workers in the local authorities, the rash of protest campaigns and sporadic strikes in the public services, and in particular the initial angry nation-wide response to the announced mine closures, have convinced many activists that there is both a need and a potential to unite struggles, particularly around the public services.

This 'feeling' has been reflected in the organisation recently of several different national conferences, all with the common acclaimed theme of "uniting struggles amongst workers and in the community". They have been sponsored by an assortment of semi-official trade union bodies, anti-cuts campaigns, miners support groups and others. We have attended two in Manchester and have seen material for some of the others.

On the positive side they have allowed some exchange of information between some very different groups of workers in struggle. People attending them may well have come away at least feeling that they weren't 'on their own'. The conference participants have also expressed genuine distrust and often outright hate of politicians of all hues as well as union leaders. But that unfortunately is about as far as it goes.

The predominant ideological influence of the left at these conferences has proved yet again to be a dead weight on the development of any original thinking or effective organisation.

The genuine desire for real united class action has been squeezed into the theoretical formulae of this or that left-wing group. Grandiose, meaningless resolutions have been subjected to tortuous compromise wordings that reflect the relative strengths of the left factions in attendance, following on from predictable and pre-rehearsed debates. Stale old slogans are dusted off and presented as new. Those who have stopped thinking altogether parrot their 'demands' for the TUC to call a general strike. The more adventurous, but equally 'out of touch', suggest we call a general strike ourselves! In both cases we find that this 'general strike' is meant to be little more than a token 24-hour stoppage anyway!

No-one is actually analysing the common causes and threads running through the struggles which are taking place. No-one is asking what potential there is and how we can unite in com-

mon action, with common demands, the struggles already underway or about to start. The 'unity' that is continually talked about seems little more in most cases than the lining up of various 'campaigns' on the same platform or demo, with any 'link' being provided behind the scenes by one of the left groupings.

Very occasionally, the recognition seems to surface that it's not just the Labour and trade union leaders that are an obstacle to the development of effective class struggle, but the whole organisational form and mode of operation of the organisations they lead. That there is no trade union and labour 'movement', just a body of institutions that were never up to the mythology created about them and which were long ago integrated into the apparatus of capitalism.

But clearly the full horror of this recognition for people, many of whom have devoted their lives to working inside (or alongside) these institutions is just too painful to accept. Material reality can't be allowed, in the end, to intrude on their cosy assumptions.

Thus such people can say on the one hand "...the remedies will have to come from below and will take place despite, and in opposition to, the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions", and in the next breath make demands on Labour Councillors to reject their role as bosses and recommend us to "...struggle to force union leaders to lead a fight or make way for those who will". All this demonstrates at best confusion and at worst deliberate manipulation.

Of course if there is enough pressure from below - not in the form of branch resolutions and the like, but through unofficial and wildcat actions - union leaders will respond. They may even call 24-hour 'general strikes'. But the whole purpose of this will be to try and control the movement and smash it!

To defend our wages and conditions and our benefits, to fight cuts in services and jobs, to fight for our needs against the requirements of profit and the market, we urgently need to develop an INDEPENDENT movement of our class. Struggles may start off within the confines of trade unionism and under the influence of Labourist ideology but they must rapidly go beyond these confines. They must begin to consciously recognise who the enemy is - not just the traditional estab-

lishment, the Tories, churches, judiciary, press, etc., but also the capitalist institutions, like the Labour Party and the trade unions, inside the working class.

Our class, despite the arrogant and pessimistic warnings of the left, is quite capable of this. Without the benefit of the left to advise them and up against Stalinist and military dictatorship Polish workers, briefly in 1981, showed the potential which exists. They organised their own strikes and occupations through mass assemblies and directly elected committees made up of recallable delegates. These actions were co-ordinated through central committees with delegates from different workplaces and areas. Common demands were thrashed out. Workers in one sector refused to go back unless the demands of all sectors were met. They organised an embryo system of dual power which challenged the apparatus of the state at all levels. There are many other examples.

We need organisations which can help that process along. Not 'rank and file' groups hanging on the coat-tails of the trade unions. Not 'campaign' groups which operate within the framework of capitalist democracy through petitions, lobbies and media stunts.

We need groups that bring together the minority of committed militants in the workplace, independent of union and sectional divisions, to discuss and inform struggles and agitate for their extension wherever practicable. Such groups need to concentrate on the real struggle and not to be side-tracked into union reform campaigns or grandiose schemes to set up new unions, which would just end up the same as the old ones. Outside the workplace we need 'solidarity' groups which promote mutual aid and direct action. Any such groups need to be under the direct control of the people involved, without being tools of different left groups. Some anti-poll tax groups and miners support groups have taken tentative steps towards transforming themselves this last direction but sadly most seem to have been content with a 'campaigning' role.

The conferences so far have given us no confidence that they will play any positive role in developing a genuine independent class movement. Despite this, Subversion will continue to take every opportunity to intervene in such events and would urge others in our political camp to do likewise.

SUBVERSION 12, SPRING 1993

Solidarnosc ~ Trade Unionism in Poland

The 1980 workers' uprising in Poland was not the first time the working class there had fought back against state capitalism. In 1956, 1970 and 1976 workers had taken to the streets when the state had tried to impose cuts in their standard of living by raising food prices.

The strength of the working class was such that, despite severe repression, in each case the state gave in. These uprisings underlined the fact that there was a line beyond which the state could not go at that time. They also meant that the state was forced to constantly rethink its strategies for increasing the competitiveness of Polish capital. The state's solution to the 1970 revolt was to try to modernise the economy by importing western capital and technology. This was to be paid for by exploiting the peasantry in order to subsidise the money wages of the workers with cheap food. After 1976 the idea of autonomy for enterprise management was introduced. This was to prove crucial in the early stages of 1980.

Despite their best efforts, the Polish state built up a huge debt to western banks by 1980 - approximately \$28 billion. Its response was to try to cut the subsidies to workers and on June 30th announced a "reorganisation of meat distribution", which meant a 60% increase in the price of meat.

The working class responded with a wave of strikes effecting factories in Ursus (tractors), Huta Warszawa (steel), Poznan (metallurgy), Tczew (transmissions), Mielec (aviation) and Swidnica (aviation).

The party's response was to try to negotiate locally. They couldn't risk losing the goodwill of the West, nor risk a major disruption of production which would endanger its ability to service the massive foreign debt. The policy of local enterprise autonomy made this policy easier to put into practice. The hope was that it would keep workers divided. The result was the exact opposite. Workers in other plants saw their fellows winning demands and immediately went on strike themselves! They took the opportunity to elect strike committees and organise them-

selves. By July 15th there were 50 strikes going on. Two days later the city of Lublin, with a population of 300,000 started a general strike.

Even at this stage there was a major change with previous uprisings. In earlier years workers had taken to the streets, this time they remained in their workplaces to avoid being gunned down. They remained where they were strong and united.

The strike wave continued until early August. At this point the state decided on a new approach. If the carrot had failed, now they would go back to trying the stick. The problem they faced was in finding who to repress. These strikes were examples of workers organising themselves. There were no obvious leaders who had instigated it, nor easy targets to pick on. There were underground groups and "free trade unionists", but they had not played a central role in the struggle up to this point. Failing anyone else to repress, the state turned on these people.

Repression started on August 11th when a bin man was arrested for 9 hours. Two days later, 3 Lenin Shipyard workers connected with underground unions were arrested. Up to this point, Gdansk, Sopot and Gdynia (the centres of the shipbuilding industry) had been mostly quiet. The result was a general strike that spread rapidly from shipyard to city. A strike committee of 10 was elected (including Lech Walesa who had climbed over the wall when the strike broke out) which was soon joined by 100 delegates from other departments. They published a list of demands, some of which were economic, some political.

By 18th August 100 enterprises in a 100km area around Gdansk were on strike. An inter factory strike committee (the MKS) was set up with two delegates from each factory on strike. The MKS controlled the entire region and resolved all problems of food and transportation.

MKS were set up in Szczecin and the Silesian mines. The strike wave had spread all over Poland, accompanied by self-organisation of the working class

that was challenging the authority of the state in a way that had never happened before in Poland or most of Europe. But it also contained the seeds of its own destruction. Soon the strike wave was to be hijacked by those with quite specific objectives that turned out to be against those of the workers.

ENTER THE KOR.

The repression that followed 1976 led a group of intellectuals to set up a Committee for defence Against Repression, the KOR. This was to provide legal defence for those in need and material support for families. It was to become an important centre of opposition to the Communist Party (PUWP). It was soon joined by supporters of free trade unions. The political objectives of the KOR and the free unions were to liberalise the Polish state and to make Polish capital more competitive. These objectives can be summed up by quoting from the founding charter of underground unions in Northern Poland drawn up in April 1978. It stated:

"Only free unions and associations can save the state, since only democratisation can lead to the integration of the interests and the will of the citizen and the interests and power of the state."

Lech Walesa was one of the signatories of this charter.

Supporters of KOR had a lot of respect in Poland. They endured state repression and carried on their work. There is no denying that they were brave men and women. It is right to deny that their objectives coincided with the needs of the working class.

They had little role in the early days of the uprising. Ironically it was the state which turned them into its leaders. Looking for someone to pick on, it was supporters of KOR that they found. This reinforced the idea that they were the state's strongest opponents, so workers looking for new ideas increasingly turned to them for leadership. Thus it was that Walesa got elected to the strike committee at Gdansk, even though he did not work in the shipyard he represented. Other oppositionists became members of the

MKS Praesidium on the basis of their being experienced negotiators.

NEGOTIATIONS

The original demands of the Gdansk strikers were as political as they were economic. They contained all sorts of mystifications about democracy, free elections and judicial independence, but nonetheless their central thrust was simple - to get rid of the Communist regime in Poland. This terrified the oppositionists. Bogdan Borusewicz, a leader of KOR in Gdansk said: *"Asking for pluralist elections is maximalism. If the Party gave in, Moscow would intervene. There must be no demands which either force the government to resort to violence or lead to its collapse. It was the ending of censorship that led to intervention in Prague. We must leave them some exits."* By the time the demands had been finalised, the KOR had got their way. The state would be allowed a way out.

The government realised that it had to negotiate. On September 1st the Gdansk Accords were signed. Lech Walesa immediately called for a return to work. He said: *"The strike is over. We did not get everything we wanted, but we did get all that was possible in the current situation. We will win the rest later because we now have the essentials: the right to strike and independent unions."*

Kuron, an important KOR leader, said: *"The unions ought to be partners in the administration protectors of the workers."*

Work resumed. The MKS at Gdansk and Szczecin formed themselves into branches of Solidarnosc. By the end of the month it represented 90% of the workers in Poland.

UNION AGAINST THE WORKERS

What was really amazing was just how quickly Solidarnosc began to act like established trade unions in the West. Its leaders quickly got themselves into positions of being intermediaries between the workers and the state. In the guise of "representing" the working class they went around stopping strikes, toning down wage and other demands in the interests of "national unity". As early as September 16th, Solidarnosc in Gdansk warned against wildcat strikes - even though it was these same strikes that had started the uprising just two months before!

The Gdansk Accords had left unsettled the workers economic demands. Very important amongst these was the right to not work on Saturdays. There were

many strikes in the winter of 1980-81 over this. The Solidarity National Coordinating Committee issued a statement on January 28th asking branches not to call any more strikes. Walesa said: *"The situation is dangerous. We need national unity. To achieve it, we, government and workers, ought to seek a common path: we should unite in the country's interests. We extend our hand to the government."*

The government again tried repression as a tactic. After a particularly nasty incident at Bydgoszcz in March, Solidarity was forced to do something when some of its organisers were beaten up by the militia. They called for a token 2 hour work stoppage. When the government refused to yield, Solidarnosc called for a general strike on March 31. In the best tradition of union bosses, Walesa negotiated with the state, got a few minor concessions and called the strike off without consulting anyone.

A pattern was beginning to emerge. Faced with pressure from the working class, Solidarnosc called for token strikes, did deals and called off strikes. A common spectacle was Walesa flying round the country in a government helicopter telling workers to go back to work.

However, the strikes continued. October and November 1981 saw the beginning of street demonstrations which the union could not control. By the middle of November there were more than 400,000 wildcat strikers in Poland.

After its September and October Congress, Solidarnosc started to make political demands of the state. It wanted to move towards Poland becoming a western style democracy, so it could operate as a western style trade union. Having lost much of their political control over their members, Solidarnosc's leaders hoped that such reforms would enable them to regain it.

The state could not permit such a challenge to its authority. Solidarnosc was useful when it could control the working class. Faced with a working class outside its control the state called upon the Polish military to take over and re-establish order. In 1980 the military, faced with a united and confident working class, and trusting in the Party's ability to rule, had been unwilling and unable to do this. Fourteen months of Solidarnosc's malign influence had undermined the unity of the working class, at the same time as the Party had lost

its legitimacy and ability to govern. The army took over in the first military coup in a state capitalist country. Workers fought back but were put down ruthlessly by the army. Many were given long prison sentences, others killed. Walesa was put into "preventative custody". Clearly he was not someone who should be dealt with too harshly. Maybe they saw him as a person they would need to deal with in the future.

HOW DID IT ALL HAPPEN?

It is too easy to look at the Polish uprising as being a simple case of good workers against bad bureaucrats. We have tried to show that the aims and activities of Walesa, the Solidarnosc bureaucracy and the KOR were against the interests of the working class. They were able to substitute their own agenda for that of the working class. What we have not tried to show is that the working class were champing at the bit for revolution in 1980 and only held back by the bureaucrats. Such a view, favoured by many, pays no regard to reality.

The uprising was a result of the self-organisation of the working class. It wasn't the result of any planning by underground bodies. The initial objectives of the working class were economic, but we have seen how many workers had political objectives which included getting rid of the Stalinist state.

However, most workers saw Solidarnosc as being their own creation. Even after a year of backstabbing, Solidarnosc had a membership comprising 90% of the Polish working class. There was a very real tension between the centre and the branches, with rank and file members pushing demands forward, fighting for them and then the centre acting to diffuse the situation. Within the branches there was still a healthy tendency to struggle which had not at this stage succumbed to the ideology of trade unionism. It was the failure of the bureaucrats to gain control of the branches that led the army to seize control in the end.

It is hardly surprising that for many workers Solidarnosc was a creation they supported. For years they had been fighting against the Polish state. Each time they rose up their gains were snatched back. They were looking for something that would guarantee their gains. Because they knew no different, they believed that free unions were the answer. What they had in mind was the kind of idealised conception of unions that keeps workers supporting them throughout the world.

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

If workers here, who have years of experience of sell-outs still support the unions, is it surprising that Polish workers should see them as an advance?

Further, Polish workers knew that they were on their own. There were no similar actions in other parts of the Soviet bloc, and especially no similar activity in the USSR itself. They knew that if they pushed too far the result could only be Soviet intervention and massacre. This situation was made worse by a strong nationalist tendency which saw the situation as being a purely "Polish" one. Active revolutionaries would have tried to spread the struggle as internationally as possible.

LESSONS

Any attempt by workers to set up permanent organisations to negotiate with the state and employers will eventually go the same way as Solidarnosc. Trying to fulfil that role immediately raises questions of reaching compromises, doing deals, seeing the other side's point of view. For workers that means accepting speed ups, productivity deals, lower living standards, job cuts and so on. It means accepting the boss's right to own and control the means of production.

The logic of class struggle is the opposite of this. It questions the right of the boss to manage and ultimately brings into question who controls society. It is clear to us that the only way forward for our class is to get rid of the whole buying and selling system and the state and bosses who go with it.

Despite the failure of the workers in Poland, despite their setting up of Solidarnosc, their uprising shows us many positive things.

It shows us that even in the most unlikely of situations, up against ruthless enemies, the working class is capable of fighting hard and taking on the enemy. The way they organised themselves, in their strike committees and the ways their delegates reported their deliberations were an example for others. It shows the limits of struggles within national borders and the need to spread the struggle internationally. When our class is united and the struggle is international, there is nothing that can not be accomplished.

SUBVERSION 14, SPRING 1994

Timex Strike ~ Time For A Change



The courageous resistance of 343 Timex strikers in Dundee to massive cuts in their wages and conditions and the subsequent threat to close the factory has been well documented elsewhere.

They, along with other smaller groups of workers such as those at "Burnsalls" and "Middlebrook Mushrooms" have demonstrated a long overdue militant determination to stand up against the bosses ever increasing demands for cuts in our standard of living and the preservation of their profits.

But courage and militancy on their own aren't enough to win this kind of dispute in the current world economic crisis. If they were, then much stronger groups such as the printers, seafarers and miners would not be in the disarray they are today.

Although Timex strikers rejected the attempts of national union 'leaders' to negotiate shabby deals with their bosses, they were content, initially, to leave the wider struggle, away from the workplace and the locality, to what they felt was 'their' union.

The support for regular mass pickets from workers in Dundee and elsewhere in Scotland and England was indeed impressive and achieved some notable, if passing, victories. But those of us with longer memories couldn't help but listen to the echoes of previous failed disputes, like Grunwicks in London, which relied

heavily on picketing as a solution. The calls for "consumers" to boycott Timex products, however valid, also has worrying echoes in the Seamen's Unions efforts to derail the Channel Ferry strikes.

Timex workers recognised the need for 'solidarity', as other workers recognised the important knock on effect of a victory for the Timex workers on their own disputes. Support in the form of union resolutions, donations, demonstrations and attendance at pickets has been forthcoming.

What has been missing is the active solidarity involved in spreading the strike, not only to other workers in the multi-national of which Timex is just part, but across both industrial and geographical boundaries. The development of common actions, with common demands, directly under the control of those involved.

This isn't just the responsibility of Timex workers but something which we all need to take on board.

In the current situation 'isolation' means defeat and leaving things in the hands of the union, much less the political parties of all hues means isolation.

Timex workers have begun to organise themselves to seek active solidarity from others both in the multi-national and locally. This may prove to be too little, too late, but the fight certainly isn't over yet.

Whatever the outcome we should take heart from the determination and courage of our class brothers and sisters at Timex and learn both from the positive and negative lessons of this strike in the struggles to come.

SUBVERSION 13, SUMMER 1993

Pit Sense ~ or No Sense?

Pit Sense Versus the State - a history of militant miners in the Doncaster area, by David John Douglass. Phoenix Press, £4.50.

This thin volume unfortunately does not live up to its title. Most of the book is a recital of union resolutions and a commentary on the activities of Doncaster miners in the N.U.M. during the 1984/85 national strike. For those not familiar with the mining industry or the structure and functioning of the N.U.M. it is also quite difficult to follow, lacking as it does a preliminary chronology of the strike or annotated diagram of the N.U.M.'s organisational structure.

Indeed the purpose behind the writing of this book is difficult to fathom until you reach the last 3 short chapters which are largely a duplication of material previously published in the pamphlet 'Refracted Perspective'. It then becomes apparent that it is an attempt to provide some documentary evidence in support of Douglass's defence of trade unionism and the N.U.M. in particular against criticism by revolutionaries. Basically he believes that "unofficial" action is parallel to and supportive of "official" union action, rather than the beginning of a move outside and against the unions, as we believe. Partly this is done by falsely amalgamating the views of the "left" (particularly the trotskysts) with those of genuine revolutionaries. Douglass makes a reasonable job of exposing the left's contradictory and arrogant attitude towards workers in struggle but his position in the N.U.M. prevents him from dealing adequately with revolutionary criticism.

A reasonable demolition job on Douglass's arguments has already been done in the Wildcat pamphlet "outside

and against the unions" (60p from us, or direct from Wildcat, BM Cat, London, WC1N 3XX). Other useful material on this debate can also be found in "Echanges" (from BP241, 75866 PARIS CEDEX 18, FRANCE in English and French). We don't intend to repeat all these arguments here but a few points are worth making.

In saying that trade unions and trade unionism are a barrier to the successful extension and development of the class struggle we are not saying that unions will never support or even organise industrial action.

Firstly, the trade union officials if they are to maintain their role as the workers' 'representatives' and junior partners in the management of capitalism must be able to demonstrate their control of their 'constituency'. This means that in the face of militancy amongst their members 'action' of some kind has to be proposed - but the purpose of the action is to maintain their control not promote the workers' interests.

Secondly, capitalism is made up of numerous sectional interests. The ruling class is only united when faced with a potentially revolutionary opposition. In normal circumstances different sections of the ruling class are at each others throats. Different sections will be on top at different times. It is quite possible for trade union officials or a particular group of trade union officials to have to fight for their interests or even their survival within capitalism. That may even require wheeling in their members to do battle on their behalf. In some cases, and we suggest this applied to the miners and the NUM in 1984/5, both the workers and the union officials and their organisation

can be under threat at the same time. In this situation understanding the different interests of each when both are involved in a 'life or death' struggle is much more difficult, but none-the-less necessary. The old adage that "our enemies' enemies are not necessarily our friends" is worth remembering.

Thirdly, whilst we think it is necessary in any major struggle for workers to move outside the union framework, this process can often happen in practice, in only a halting and partial way. It is up to revolutionaries to encourage this process not try to tie it back into the union framework as Douglass wants to.

And lastly it is true to say that there are many aspects to the nature of the British coal mining industry and its relationship to miners and the union which make the case of the NUM not entirely typical of British and other unions. Douglass continually makes the mistake of generalising from the experience of the NUM rather than looking at the actual experience of other workers and the unions they belong to.

All in all we have to say that the writing of this book was a wasted opportunity.

SUBVERSION 15 - AUTUMN 1995



Beyond Rank and Vile Trade Unionism

First it is necessary to spell out what we do not mean - that is the myth of a 'rank and file' straining at the leash, only held back by a cunning and devious trade union bureaucratised leadership. Today it is obvious such a movement does not exist, but it is doubtful if in reality this ever was the case except for a brief period after the First World War. There have been rank and file groupings in many industries and unions, but except for isolated instances and in very specific circumstances they have not challenged the outlook or mentality of conventional trade unionism. So first we have to establish to some extent what constitutes a genuine challenge to existing trade unionism rather than merely a 'loyal opposition' to existing workers organisations. (In this regard we do not refer merely to the existing trade unions - but to the whole outlook and philosophy of what is known as 'the Labour Movement'.)

Today our contention is that what passes for the 'Labour Movement' is entirely reactionary. We do not mourn its passing, but wish to point out the necessity of recognising this reality. Everything that has in the past been presented as the socialist project is now revealed as part of capitalism's management of its crisis. All that has hitherto been assumed as being in the workers interests - the welfare state, post war consensus politics, the commitment to 'full employment' is now revealed as merely the result of the old movements' politics to tie us more closely to the system.

As such it must be rejected. Workers Movement versus the Movement of the Workers

Now this might seem a rather pessimistic conclusion, but we believe it is

as well to start off from a realistic appreciation of the situation so that anyone proposing either to start a 'rank and file' grouping or faced with one already in existence can begin to arrive at some kind of analysis of what they are doing. In our experience there has been and is far too much uncritical action simply for actions sake. We want to avoid the situation where militants end up isolated, left only to protest futilely at the latest 'betrayal' or even worse in the name of some mythical 'unity' obliged to present the latest stitch up between management and unions as some kind of 'victory'. Much of the present disorientation amongst the working class is not the result of the 'Thatcher revolution' (which we are convinced will soon be revealed as nothing of the sort,) but of the fact that a sea change has taken place in politics internationally and the old certainties (held in place by the Cold War) have gone. The traditional institutions that the working class looked to for help in times past, principally the Unions and the Labour Party, are now revealed for what they are - pillars of the system and defenders of the status quo.

We propose to look at 'rank and file' groups under five main headings which although they are treated separately here for the purposes of analysis are in fact inter-dependent and inter-related. It is our view that we are working towards a coherent outlook, and one of the main purposes of attending this conference is not only to broaden and deepen our own understanding but to see if what we have worked out strikes a chord with other participants or even if someone else has arrived at a better understanding than ourselves. However it would not be correct to give the impression necessarily that we are prepared to give up on what we have

fought so hard to understand. For instance our understanding of the place of trade unions in capitalist society or the role of the Labour Party is not something we are prepared to compromise.

That being said our five headings are as follows:-

- * The Distinction between Minority and Mass (or majority organisations)
- * A 'rank and file' populism against the development of a coherent political understanding and outlook (or reformism versus revolution)
- * The relationship between rank and file organisations and the existing trade union structure
- * The question of the creation of permanent institutions of a rank and file nature.
- * The relationship (if any) of rank and file movements to political parties

(i) The distinction between minority and mass organisations.

In modern capitalist society mass organisations of a genuinely representative type no longer exist. It is inconceivable that we will witness a rebirth of trade unions as mass organisations. It would be as well to remember that the original founding of trade unions in this country was by minorities of skilled craftsmen. Mass unionism is very much a product of modern society and modern unions owe their structure and organisation to the post Second World War consensus which is now breaking up.

In this situation it would be as well for rank and file movements to recognise

their necessarily minority character, rather than pretending to speak for the amorphous mass of workers. If this is the case then they have no need to hold back or pretend that initially at least they are anything other than political organisations pursuing a particular programme. It therefore makes no sense to hide this political character rather it should be openly acknowledged. Moreover it is our view that such movements will be obliged to take on an increasingly social dimension. It is no longer possible to maintain the old social - democratic split between 'political' and 'economic' questions on which the Labour Party was founded.

This leads us directly on to our second heading concerning the question of populism versus a coherent political outlook

(ii) Reform versus Revolution

In the past we have had cause to question what we termed 'money militancy'. By this we meant that whatever reforms we won in terms of money or working conditions, of necessity, such 'victories' always turned out to be short lived. Inflation always ate away at our gains. We always found ourselves in a minority shouting about a 'betrayal' - but if the union demands £10 should a revolutionary policy be to demand £20? Today although it is possible that a new wages movement might emerge, we doubt that it could achieve even the modest gains which were so easily wiped away in the 70s. So around what practical programme could a rank and file movement emerge?

Today the system itself constantly proposes reforms with which it hopes to draw in any opposition, so what attitude should a rank and file movement take to this process. Our answer to this is to reject the whole project for reforming the system and to argue for its abolition. This is not to dismiss anyone who finds themselves drawn into existing organisations - it is above all a practical question. In the past socialist groupings had to come to practical decisions on this point. The pre First World War SLP actually forbade its members from taking up union positions - again this leads us directly onto

our next point, the relationship of any rank and file movement to the existing trade unions.

(iii) 'Rank and File' and the existing Trade Unions

It should be fairly clear by now that we see no role for the trade unions in any future struggle. We do not want to make a fetish of this, it obviously depends on circumstances. But even where a movement utilises the existing union base machinery (for example combine committees, or local area committees) and it is looked on favourably by the local trade union bureaucracy (as regards funds, premises, printing facilities and so on) at crucial moments (that is the only ones that matter) this dependence will be the undoing of the movement. A classic example of this was the London Busmen's Combined Committee broken by Bevin and the TGWU in 1937.

Not only therefore do we see no positive role for the trade unions, but we believe of necessity that any rank and file movement can only emerge in opposition to them. This has been the experience abroad and especially we believe in Italy with the COBAS movement. Indeed in our opinion it is a good sign of the health of such a movement to see how much opposition from the existing unions it inspires. It also follows therefore that all attempts at democratising the unions or pressurising union leaderships to take action are futile and a waste of time and indeed positively reactionary.

iv) Permanent Organisation?

We have shown how it is impossible for new mass organisations to emerge except at times of exceptional crisis (indeed one of the ways you know you are in a crisis is the practical question of the emergence of such institutions). In our view it would be a mistake to try and artificially prolong the life of such organisations outside periods of struggle by making them permanent. If we accept that movements ebb and flow, that disputes are going to be resolved on whatever terms at least temporarily,

then the need for a fighting organisation fades away. Any attempt to artificially prolong it risks ossifying it at best and at worst turning it into a fully fledged capitalist organisation (by obliging it to maintain itself with finance, permanent staff or the usual risk with working class organisations - the treasurer runs off with the funds)

Prior to the dockers attempts to take over (by joining 'en masse') the 'blue' union (NASD) in the 1950s, rank and file organisation was kept alive as a political idea not by any organisational device. It was only the fact that some dockers influenced by Trotskyism wanted to take over a union (and ultimately to have some influence over the Labour Party itself) that made them believe that they could 'take shelter' under the umbrella of the NASD.

(v) Relationship to Political Parties

If you're not part of the solution then you must be part of the problem!

We have said already that any rank and file movement is by its nature the organisation of a political minority. How then does it differ from any one of the different Leftist groups which are also political minorities?

Only in the ways we which we have already outlined. We have already stated our views on the old 'Labour Movement', and as there are not many leftist groups which would subscribe to them so they are almost automatically excluded.

If only life were so simple!

Apart from those movements which are merely fronts for already established parties - a genuine rank and file movement would begin by trying to outgrow its sectional roots, by breaking out of the limitations that capitalist society imposes on it and become social in character. Other political groupings, who of course it is impossible to exclude from such a development either help or hinder such a process.

Graham
Subversion 14 - Spring 1994

Revolutionaries in the Workplace

The first thing to state is that the last thing SUBVERSION would want to encourage is the creation of a rank and file movement. Rank and file movements are always and without question union movements. They are inspired by the mistaken notion that The Unions have failed us, instead of the truth: which is that all unions are our enemy. [Unions are organisations that negotiate with the bosses over the ways and rates at which we are exploited, but in no way do they object to the principle of our exploitation. Unions support capitalism and work, and need capitalism to survive.]

DAM RANK AND FILISTS!

Take the case of the postal workers' COMMUNICATION WORKERS GROUP:-

The CWG was set up by members of the Direct Action Movement (DAM) and was a rank and file postal workers group. The DAM promotes anarcho-syndicalism as a means of working class organisation. Anarcho-syndicalists want to organise unions democratically and imbue them with anarchist politics. Such unions, imbued with anarchist methods and ideals, anarcho-syndicalists argue, will be revolutionary.

CWG never got to the stage where the DAM members pushed for it to become an actual union. CWG, through its bulletin, Communication Worker (CW), aimed to inform and radicalise postal workers, to emphasise that active solidarity across trade, industry and union divides was essential if victories were to be won. In the tradition of rank and file groups CWG was open to all militant workers, including low-level union officials, i.e. shop stewards.

For most of the time CWG worked on the basis of an agreement between the various political tendencies. These ranged from anarchist, or anti-state communist to trotskyst, as well as the original anarcho-syndicalism. As time went by these divisions became more pronounced. Eventually we had to re-emphasise the groups broader rank and file nature by drawing up a basic aims and principles. Due to the variance of views within the organisation these common denominators had to be fairly low and it was generally felt that the aims and principles were virtually meaningless as soon as we had written them.

COMPROMISING POSITIONS

This compromise didn't last long. Some of us felt we needed to make deeper and clearer criticisms of unions and rank and filism. We all saw the potential (however distant!) for a group like CWG to eventually replace the union - in small ways, over certain areas, or totally. To some this was highly desirable of course, but others had misgivings. We realised that we could only replace the existing postal workers union (UCW) with another union, and if CWG expanded and became more successful this is eventually what the group would become.

The question became: how to work in a rank and file workers group, clearly and consistently attacking the union, without letting the group turn itself into a reformist organisation or union. We liked to see ourselves as a revolutionary group, but what would happen if we were flooded with militant, but reformist-minded workers? What if these workers wanted the group to articulate reformist demands? What if we gained more support in a workplace than the existing union, would we then

participate in a day to day dialogue with the employers, would we help make deals, would we accept the "legality" of exploitation as long as it was a "fairer" exploitation and one we had actively agreed to? Would we behave in just the same way as the old union once we had become the permanent workplace organisation?

The first problem we tried to tackle was the old one about being swamped by different minded individuals.

KEEPING OUT THE RIFF-RAFF

There was no formal way of preventing people from entering the group, we just hoped that if we didn't like someone's politics then the rest of the group would agree and that person wouldn't be let in. Obviously this wasn't very satisfactory. Some thought we shouldn't let SWP members in, for example, because they were actively pro-statist/authoritarian and they might try to hijack the group. Others thought we should let them in as long as they didn't stray out of line too much or try to push their politics down our throats, thus causing interminable political arguments. Others thought we should let them in since they were militant workers.

This problem was never satisfactorily resolved, the reason being that it lies at the crux of the argument over whether a rank and file group can be revolutionary. That is, whether a group that attracts an increasing number of non-revolutionaries can remain revolutionary in all its publications and interventions.

Our temporary solution was to print our basic aims and principles in the bulletin and hope the "wrong" sort of people wouldn't want to join anyway! [In

This was the original programme of the Communication Workers' Group

PROGRAMME

1) We are not an electoral front for a political party or parties. We aim to build the strength of the rank and file. We do not aim to capture full time union positions. Full time officials may not join this group.

2) A living wage for a 35 hour week, which would make non-essential overtime and the bonus system unnecessary. The present IWM bonus system is divisive, splitting worker from worker, office from office. All workers in the industry should receive the same wage.

3) No speedups, no redundancies, recruitment of more full time staff with a view to a further cut in hours. No loss of pay.

4) Union officials should be subject to a limited period in office, not exceeding 2 years. All officials to be elected by and constantly accountable to the membership. Officials to subject to immediate recall, and to be paid the average wage. No officials to spend the majority of time away from the shop floor.

5) All disputes to be controlled by the rank and file. Strikes to be run through regular mass meetings of all strikers. These meetings to co-ordinate picketing etc. Any and all delegates must be accountable to, and subject to immediate recall by the mass meetings. We are against postal ballots and secret negotiations.

6) A single union for all communication workers. We are against sectionalism and for the widest possible solidarity.

the event this never became a practical problem, partly due to the fact that the CWG didn't survive that much longer.

It has been argued that we should set up groups, encourage people to join, and hopefully their experience and learning in the group will turn them into revolutionaries. This might be alright if you have a hierarchical Party of thousands and are recruiting one or two

people a month. But if a drastically smaller group (a few people), with egalitarian methods, recruited that many people as members then they would soon find themselves outweighed by the new recruits and unable to brainwash them fast enough to keep the group on its original lines!

We have enough reformist organisations around already, we don't want to inadvertently create any more.

To cut a long story short, the anti-union tendency finally realised the impossibility of keeping, or rather making, this rank and file group revolutionary. By no means did this mean we had fully developed our ideas but we did know that we no longer wanted to make the compromises towards unionism that were necessary in working with anarcho-syndicalists and leftists.

WORKPLACE GROUPS

There is a knee-jerk reflex amongst a lot of revolutionaries when talking about "the workplace", they say that what we need are workplace groups. Beyond this though little practical is usually done or suggested. It's time to face up to the hollowness of this slogan and forget about trying (or talking about trying!) to set up our exalted Revolutionary Workplace Groups. What we need is more revolutionaries everywhere. If we have more revolutionaries everywhere a few, at least, are going to have jobs. Revolutionaries in their workplaces will respond to disputes, attempt to escalate workplace struggles and generally try to show other workers what a crap situation we are all in. They will argue against the economy (capitalism) and its union lackey, and during struggles they will actively participate in specific actions: like producing leaflets, secondary picketing, sabotage, setting up and speaking at unofficial assemblies, etc.

If we happen to be a few revolutionaries at one workplace and produce regular propaganda specific to work, this is fortunate, but obviously we are also acting as revolutionaries together outside work.

The time has come to finally put to rest the myth of "workplace groups" and their desirability - unless we are talking

This is the later and more radical version of the CWG Programme.

What We Stand For

- * We aim to build the strength of the rank and file. All struggles must be called and controlled by the rank and file.
- * We are independent of all political parties and trade union bureaucracies.
- * We aim to build an organisation involving all communication workers.
- * Our immediate aim is to build an organisation involving all communication workers.
- * Our long term aim is the creation of a classless, stateless society where everyone is free and equal, through the institution of workers' self management, and the destruction of the state.
- * We believe all struggles should be spread to as many sections of the working class as possible, and that solidarity is the key to winning any dispute.
- * We are against all forms of discrimination (such as sexism and racism) that cause divisions within the working class.

about temporary groupings of workers formed during struggles to perpetrate specific acts of propaganda or violence against the bosses, union and economy in general.

Some might say that this is all a bit too "purist" and that we should be involved in creating or sustaining reformist demands or campaigns in order to supposedly escalate the class struggle, however, there are plenty of reformist workers around, ready to demand a wage rise, or abortion rights, etc, without going further. Some lefties think we have to formulate reformist demands for workers to take up because otherwise they wouldn't think of any themselves. This is patronising and wrong. Workers are constantly making demands. For us to take part in putting forward demands would be merely to lapse into reformism, as we gave the impression that we believed a few more crumbs off our masters' tables would appease our real class interests.

Our message must be revolutionary, not reformist. We support the struggle of the working class to improve its living standards. We aren't interested in reform campaigns that, by their nature, are only aiming at modifying the economy, which means modifying our exploitation. However, just because some people want to turn a struggle into a reform campaign does not mean that we don't support the struggle. The anti-Poll Tax fight was an example of this. It was primarily a struggle of the working class to resist an attack on living standards. When there is a pay dispute we try to show the way to win it but also why pay rises will never be enough. When we go back to work, whether we have won or not, it is not the revolutionaries that should negotiate with the bosses, others can do this. Some might say this is "purist", to not negotiate with the bosses ourselves if we agree that, in the circumstances, such negotiation is inevitable.

Well, we may win the odd battle in the class war but the working class is always in defeat while there is wage-slavery - so revolutionaries should never lead workers back to work. To do such a thing is to help the bosses manage our oppression - which is what reformism is all about. If we have to go back to work we go as proletarians, not as "managers".

Just as we shouldn't take union posts we shouldn't encourage the creation of rank and file groups or movements. A revolutionary rank and file movement is a contradiction in terms, there can only be a revolutionary movement.

SUBVERSION 15 - SUMMER 1994



Section Two: Anti-Racism

What's Wrong With Anti-Racism?

Subversion Note: This version has been slightly edited before its inclusion here.

Subversion is not anti-racist because "we are all human beings" or "we all have the same colour blood" or "we should all be able to live together, respecting each others different cultures, religions, colour, etc". Subversion is anti-racist because racism is one of the ideological tools used by our rulers to keep the international working class divided and unaware of the thing which binds all the worlds workers together: the fact that we are the working class; that we must sell our labour power to survive; that we are wage slaves. Racism has been used to justify genocide and slavery in the past but now it is used to help keep class consciousness at bay. Instead of seeing the world as being made up of bosses and workers we are meant to see it filled up with "foreigners". We are meant to see all the people who live in France as one group, instead of as it really is: a small group of exploiters and the mass of exploited, just as it is in Britain. Just as we are encouraged to identify with the very same scum who rip us off, make us work, sack us, send us to war, we are also encouraged to identify "foreign" workers with the very scumbags who rip them off. We are meant to blame migrant workers for local unemployment. We are meant to fear everyone in Japan or Germany because they are surely conspiring to wreck "our economy", aren't they?

Divided and ruled

Just as racism in its basic forms helps

dilute and divert working class consciousness so does the "anti-racist" formula: "we are all human beings". This sort of argument tries to say that "we" are all in it together. "we" means bosses and workers, the leaders and the led, the powerful and the powerless. Once again we (the working class) are supposed to identify with our exploiters (the bosses/bourgeoisie) and THEIR murdering economy, capitalism. This use of the word "we" to describe all humans is a clever way of denying class, notice how Greensies say that "we" have ruined the planet. Are they stupid? Do they really think that all humans are to blame, all the masses of people who have been thrown off the land, all the masses of proletarians who have starved, been killed by poverty, forced to work like slaves all their lives? Anyone with half an ounce of sense can see that the great majority of the worlds population has never had any control over even their own lives let alone the actions of those people who live on our backs. Anyone who uses the word "we" to describe every person in the world either has no idea that there is an exploiting class and an exploited class, or wants to have at least some say in the ordering about and bleeding dry of the working class. And this is certainly the aim of left-wingers who say "we are all human beings", as well as the "green" movement.

Pro-capitalist anti-racism

The anti-racism of the Labour Movement is a pro-capitalism anti-racism, you won't catch the leader of the TUC saying that racism is a tool used by the ruling class to keep the international

working class divided. The leader of the TUC will say that racism is a cancer that divides society, and that it is stirred up by right wing elements. Yes, racism may be stirred up by capitalism's right wing defenders, but society is already divided into classes - only a defender of capitalism and the present order of things could call racism a threat to society. There is NOTHING about this society worth defending but it is essential for workers to fight racism in the working class as part of the struggle to raise class consciousness and unite against capitalism. While the Labour Movement might defend a "black" member of the boss class who is under racist attack we could not. What we would do is use the incident to point out the fact that racism is a tool of the ruling class to keep us confused and in our place, but we could never defend this "black" boss or her/his "right" to trade, give orders, make profits, etc. - if we defended the rights of anyone to lord it over us we would be anti-working class.

What is race anyway?

At the beginning of this article an example of racism was given which involved only attitudes between France and Britain. Some people might say that this is not racism because the "white" French and the British are of the same "race", they might call it "chauvinism" instead. The people who argue this obviously think that there are real differences biological between people in the world, they would categorise all people with a similar skin colour into a specific racial type (African, Eurasian etc.) therefore arguing that "racism" can only happen between these different coloured groups and that only "chauvinism" can happen between people of different countries but who share the same colour. Other people argue that racism can only be defined in terms of a "dominant country" exploiting a "minor country", or the legacy of this exploitation. Thus British, "white people can only be racist to people from all its ex-colonies, although in effect they really mean anyone in those countries that Britain is perceived to be superior to. In this philosophy people from the ex-colonies cannot be racist towards "white" British people, what whites might perceive as racism (e.g., "fuck

off, you "white" bastard") is, in fact, anti-imperialism!

Class

It's not worth trying to find your way around the torturous and inane logic of the proponents of the ideas described above. If we want to understand what racism really has to do with our daily lives, what the reality of it is, then we must look at it from a class perspective. We must understand who actually benefits from it and why it is an enemy of class struggle. Never mind all the dubious philosophical ins and outs of it: racism sets workers against workers and obscures who our real enemies are - the manipulators and benefactors of a divided and confused working class.

Papist Plots and Anti-Semitism

If you want any proof of the good work racism has done for the bosses you only have to take a cursory glance through history. In the 1840's and '50's the Tory Party began a campaign against Irish workers in Britain in order to divide the Chartist Movement. Tory henchmen carried out several atrocities against workers in the North and West, which were blamed on Irish workers. Meanwhile the ruling class tried to whip up fear of "Papist Plots" and migrant labour taking work from "the English". While the specific incidents have been forgotten the effects of this campaign to divide the working class are still evident in England. It's no coincidence that anti-Semitism began to be encouraged in Germany after World War One, things had to be done to fragment a proletariat that had created a revolution in 1919 and might try again in the economic depression of the 1920's. It was funny how a couple of years ago we heard lots about strikes in the new "unified" Germany but now most of the news concerns the "rising tide of racism". It has proved very handy for the German Labour Movement and the bosses in general to be able to urge workers to see "society" under threat from nazi types. It's a brutal way of diverting a rising class combativity, and who benefits? The bosses of course.

Recession

In general, it seems, we are likely to see

more racism when the economy is in "recession" and when it seems likely that workers might fight back. Since the Trafalgar Square riot and the defeat of the Poll Tax we have seen a marked rise in actual racist attacks, media coverage and the Labour Movement getting back on the anti-racist bandwagon. Is it a coincidence?

Today racism does have fairly deep roots in the working class but racism and nationalism tend to be pushed aside during rising class struggle. What we must ask ourselves is: who would benefit from a dissipation of the spirit of rebellion that was brought on by the Poll Tax? Certainly the bosses and certainly the Labour Movement, of which even the left wing (Militant) crapped themselves because of the riot. Instead of getting out of hand, thinking that if we beat the Poll Tax we could beat other things, instead of escalating the class struggle, it's much better for us to worry about rising nazism and go on well-policed and harmless marches where we can hear our Labour Movement leaders going on about the "threat to society" posed by racism. But they don't really want racism to go away, just as they don't want capitalism, oppression and wage slavery to go away either. And racism is so useful to world capitalism that only a fool could believe that they'd let it disappear. Racism can only be defeated in a struggle and only the destruction of global capitalism and the creation of true human community will put it to rest forever, because no longer will it serve any use.

Opportunity Knocks

It will be argued, of course, that things like Equal Opportunities [specifically, the Commission for Racial Equality, 1976] have done a lot to erode racist attitudes and allow "black" workers, as well as women and the disabled, to "do well" in the workplace. In fact bosses in large companies (including local councils, Royal Mail, etc.) see Equal Opportunities as a numbers game.

Managers are given targets for the percentage of "black" workers they should employ and if they achieve these targets they look much better to their superiors. It goes something like this: the

Government realises that "black" people need to be better integrated into the workforce (why does the State like "black" police officers?), so they set up things like the Commission for Racial Equality, which, very handily, makes the Government look like it disagrees with racism;

Employers are then encouraged to set up an Equal Opportunities policy, being persuaded that they don't really want to look like an old fashioned racist and sexist company, do they? And anyway, local councils and Government might not buy products and services from companies that don't pursue Equal Opportunities, they've got the "black", women and disabled vote to think of, after all. And so managers recruit more "under-represented" people, not because anyone in this whole chain is actually anti-racist but simply because everyone in the chain is looking after their own interests (i.e. their profits or power).

We mustn't let ourselves get caught up in their game. The very least that Equal Opportunities might have done for "black" workers in Britain is have made it easier to get a job now. But even this is not true, is it? There is a far greater percentage of "black" people unemployed than "white" people, let's face it, it was easier for "black" people to get work in the 1950's, when there was no such thing as Equal Opportunities!

The capitalists are playing games with us. "Black" workers are supposed to defend a "society" that has Equal Opportunities written into law. A society that says it is anti-racist, and yet "black" workers are worse off now than they were 20 or 30 years ago (as all workers are, of course), and for all this Equal Opportunities bullshit we now have another "rising tide of racism". Racism and "anti-racism": for our rulers both are tricks to keep us under the heel.

SUBVERSION 15 - SUMMER 1994

Burnsall Strike with friends like these, who needs enemies?

Subversion Note: this article has been slightly edited before its inclusion here.

For over a year the strikers at Burnsall Ltd in Smethwick, where the conditions workers have to bear are appalling even by capitalist standards, have had to contend with the double enemy of the boss and the unions.

The GMB, to which the strikers "belong", has been sabotaging their strike in the time-honoured fashion. It has now plunged the dagger deep into the workers backs and called off the strike.

Despite this, and despite serious intimidation by the GMB to make the strikers comply, it seems they are determined to continue their fight.

What they need is support from other workers.

The only way forward for workers in struggle is to link up, and gain the active support of more and more workers. The bosses and unions, despite their charades, are in the last analysis united against the working class and we must be united against them, and not be taken in by the unions pretence at being on our side. This is true in all strikes and all struggles.

The case of the Burnsall strike, however, reveals another false friend of the workers - left-wing groupings with their own political agenda to superimpose on the strike.

DIVIDE AND RULE

The Manchester Burnsall Strikers' Support Group has produced several leaflets which have been portraying this strike as a black issue (most of the

strikers being Asian women) rather than a workers' issue. For instance their leaflets have slogans such as "Black Workers Fighting Back" and "Black Workers Demand JUSTICE" (sic); one of the leaflets relates that on one occasion "the strikers were attacked by three white scab workers from the factory". As though the fact that the scabs were **white**, rather than the fact that they were **scabs** (or indeed **racists**) was the problem. An approach such as this "support group" is taking is practically calculated to strengthen "racial" divisions and hatred between workers.

If it needs saying, let us say it again - the working class can only free itself from present day slavery by uniting as a class, all workers together, black and white, male and female, whatever the divisions our rulers use to keep us weak. The dead end of "racial" or national identity will only lead workers to perdition, as it has always done in the past (e.g. the anti-colonial movements which have given the workers nothing but more of the same). Only realising our identity as workers with a common interest world-wide, against all capitalist factions, will lead us to victory.

Groups like the Manchester Burnsall Strikers "Support" Group should be roundly condemned. Their politics are a lethal poison for workers, and for the cause of liberation of the whole working class.

SUBVERSION 13 - SUMMER 1993

Section Three: What is the Working Class?

Unfinished Business

Book Review: UNFINISHED BUSINESS ... the politics of Class War. AK Press £4.50

This long awaited book represents a serious and welcome attempt by the Class War Federation to sort out its own politics and present them to the working class in a clear and comprehensible language.

Subversion shares some important areas of political agreement with Class War which are hammered home in this publication. In Summary these are:-

1. A clear rejection of 'reformism' as a way forward for the working class and a commitment to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its state.
2. A recognition that the overthrow of capitalism means the complete abolition of the wages system, money and the market in all their forms.
3. Rejection of the 'old labour movement' as represented by the Labour Party and the trade unions and a commitment to independent working class struggle.
4. The need to combat racism and sexism within the context of the class struggle.

They also reject, as we do, Leninist views on revolutionary organisation. Whilst they continue to use the term 'federalism' to describe their approach to organisation, they clearly do not mean by this the kind of 'every idea or tactic is of equal value' and 'every individual or group can go its own way' approach of traditional anarchism.

Having said this there are some important weaknesses in the book which are very much hangovers from traditional left wing politics and in particular, anarchism.

Firstly, their analysis of capitalist class structures is very confused. They attempt an amalgam of 'Marxist' and anarchist definitions of class, relating this to 'wealth or property' ownership on the one hand and 'social power' on the

other, rather than a straightforward 'relationship to the means of production' definition which we would use.

We wouldn't disagree with them when they say that capitalism is basically divided into three classes; the capitalist or ruling class; the middle class; and the working class. But their estimate of the size and importance of the 'middle class' is completely mistaken and their examples of who make up these classes reveals the muddle they've got themselves into. For instance, they say that rank and file soldiers are working class but rank and file policemen are not! Despite both being part of the state apparatus of repression. This distinction sees them reverting to an ideological rather than a material definition of class. They classify people like teachers and doctors as middle class but go on to say that in a 'revolutionary' period a large section of the 'middle class' will come over to the working class side, whilst sections of the working class will side with the capitalists. But if teachers and their like have distinctive and opposing class interests to the workers, why should they? They also imply that 'peasants', i.e. small agricultural landowners, could be considered working class, whilst small business owners are clearly middle class!

What Class War have failed to do is make a materialist analysis of the way capitalism has developed over the last 150 years and how this has affected its class structure.

Modern capitalism is based on a complex division of labour on an international scale. Putting it very simply, commodities are no longer produced in factories and surplus value extracted from individual factory workers, but are the social product of the 'collective worker' as represented by factory, transport, communication, educational, health, housing and other workers. For example, whereas teachers in the early days of capitalism were for all practical purposes 'outside' the production process and for all their low pay, 'middle class' today we have a mass education

industry fully integrated into the production process, with teachers playing their part in the creation of the social product of capitalism. Most teachers have become working class. This isn't to deny that the role of teachers inclines them to conservatism and places obstacles to their becoming class conscious. But this equally apply to other sections of the working class. It does mean that there is a material basis for teachers and other similar groups of workers to be drawn into the advancing class struggle when it reaches a certain pitch. Even today it is fair to say that there were probably more teachers actively involved in supporting the last British miners' strike than there were 'working class' soldiers!

There is certainly more chance of teachers and other 'professional' workers becoming involved in a revolutionary struggle or the overthrow of capitalism than there is the remnants of the peasantry or small time business people and others of the traditional middle class which still survives.

The important point for us is the relationship of people to the means of production. Thus many doctors running their own business might be 'middle class' whereas others fully employed in the NHS could more reasonably be considered working class. As Class War themselves say, there are many grey areas and it is certainly true to say that there is much more class mobility amongst some sections of the (mainly better paid) working class than others. The potential for upward mobility may detrimentally effect the ideology of some sectors of the working class, it doesn't alter their objective class position at any given time.

A radical, militant and collective working class movement may well develop initially amongst the traditional working class - i.e. average manual and office workers. A recognition of this is important to our political strategy. It will only successfully go on to challenge capitalism if it draws in firstly the unemployed and then the rest of the modern

working class. We can't expect more than a handful of genuinely 'middle class' people to become committed to the movement precisely because they have got more to lose than gain in the immediate situation.

Secondly, Class War have an extremely ambivalent attitude towards nationalism.

On the one hand they state correctly that 'Nationalism is one of the ways of keeping the working class divided', but then they say, '...in the face of often brutal oppression nationalism gives working class people something. That "something" is identity, pride, a feeling of community and solidarity....'

We would say it gives the working class a false sense of pride, a false identity and a false sense of community and solidarity.

We do recognise, as Class War say, that in places like Northern Ireland many of the struggles engaged in by the Catholic working class are not purely nationalist. But our job is to clearly split the nationalist from the class elements, both theoretically and practically, not fudge the two as Class War does.

Sadly, even the strengths of this book are not consistently carried through in the practice of the Class War group. This is shown starkly in their confused approach to the trade unions. One of their very few members to talk and write regularly about workplace struggle is Dave Douglass, but despite some interesting insights into aspects of this struggle he still promotes an outdated 'rank and file' approach which ends up defending the Trade Unions. (See the interesting Wildcat pamphlet "Outside and Against the Unions" for a criticism of his views.)

As worrying, is the 'idealist' tendency in Class War which sees many of their members worn out in an endless search for the 'right formula' that will get their ideas across to the working class. This was particularly evident at their final "Communities of Resistance" Rally in London where any critical discussion was deliberately squashed, with instant appeals for us to 'get stuck in' and 'do something' only to be told by Class War at the end that their idea of doing something was yet another typical lefty "Day of Action" stunt.

These are not by any means our only criticisms of this book of the Class War group, but we'll leave it at that for now.

SUBVERSION 11 - AUTUMN 1992

What's the Working Class Anyway?

Dear Comrades,

In your review of Class War's 'Unfinished Business' you quite rightly argue for a material definition of class as opposed to Class War's ideological mishmash. However, when examining our strategy as communists - in addressing different groups of the proletariat - surely we shouldn't discount all ideological factors? This 'strategy' means our identifying of which groups of people we should spend our time dishing out propaganda to, or talking to, or working with, etc. - and which groups we should be suspicious of and not waste our time on. Obviously we don't bother with our class enemies: the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. But I'd also say shouldn't bother with the professional army, police, etc., and a lot of 'professionals', who have often been university trained (the University itself is an ideological institution which extends beyond its campuses into our everyday lives, like the Church used to).

We are best talking to those people who have a more immediate experience of their class position, those to whom class struggle is, or often becomes, a daily reality - i.e. the working class (but not all those who are not the big or small bourgeoisie). Anyway, it is these people who engage in proletarian class struggle - it is not, for example, Managers and Experts (who generally act to defeat the working class, of course).

As you say, it is only through class struggle that class consciousness, and the eventual defeat of class society, will come about. How could the manager of a supermarket come to a communist perspective without abandoning his/her job? How could an architect (who decides on designs for proletarian living areas, for example), a journalist, a priest or a social worker remain in their profession if they became communists? More importantly, given the jobs they do, how are these people going to be involved in class struggle? The same also goes for members of the police or professional army, of course.

In non-revolutionary, and even revolutionary, times hardly any of these types would become communists. Our strategy as communists involves exposing the fact that these people are the enemy

of a class conscious proletariat - not by fact of their relation to the means of production (they are proletarian), but by the fact of their ideology and the actual job they do. The same also goes for the unions of course, and the fact that, in the final analysis, a shop steward fulfils a similar function for capitalism as does a foreperson.

Whereas the job of a car park attendant is basically 'neutral', the actual job and day to day existence of a journalist or social worker consists precisely of actively protecting the status quo. They do just the same job as priests used to do (and still do).

Nationalism, for example, is a purely ideological enemy of communism and the working class when it exists amongst the class - but a journalist or social worker is a physical enemy in as much as the person embodies the ideology s/he has accepted and made a living out of. In a revolutionary event people like these will be physically swept aside, however, there will be no revolutionary event if the escalating class struggle hasn't squashed the power of the ideology of nationalism.

The problem for us (strategically) is recognising that some sections of the proletariat are irrevocably lost to bourgeois ideology and that they will ultimately be smashed physically along with the machinery of state and the bourgeoisie itself. (Universities, for example, should be destroyed).

Some professional or 'expert' jobs seem more ambivalent though. University trained engineers, or NHS doctors, for example, may be 'neutral' - but socially and ideologically they would probably feel closer to journalists than to car park attendants.

Perhaps we need new labels for these different sections of the proletariat, so we don't resort to calling them 'middle class'.

You are right to argue that a material definition of class is essential, however, I think defining what the class struggle is, or could be, is at least as important, and part of that involves understanding and pointing out the real ideological divisions in the proletariat and exposing

everything that is the enemy of communism.

Having suggested all this I'm not, of course, saying that you don't already know it (or know better, which is more likely!), and I realise that your comments in Subversion 11 were only brief.

Pete Post, Sydney, Australia.

SUBVERSION REPLY

Although having some sympathy with your criticism of Class War, in particular its obsession with 'profile', a few other points I must take issue with. In particular your assertion that Class War in its book 'unfinished business' gets into a muddle over class.

You say Class War is wrong to put squaddies in with the working class when the police are then placed as (reactionary thugs of) the middle class. You consider it more accurate to place everyone in relation to the means of production.

As C.W.'s book correctly states though, mutiny within the army is an historical reality that has little parallel within the police force. Thousands of unemployed workers are cornered into taking up shit lives - bound to long contracts within the armed services. Coppers on the other hand are well-screened, well-paid and well-used to sticking the boot directly into the public.

Subversion, being seemingly unaware of this reality, leaves me wondering. Surely Subversion you are not peddling that naive crap that the police are only workers in uniform? If so don't expect sympathy when in an upsurge of struggle you're gunned down by a police force joyously wielding their Armalite toys. Does working class blood have to be spilt time and time again as testament to the failure of blinkered Marxist analysis?

Or, could it be that, having teachers making up [a large part of] Subversion, it is you yourselves who have the hang-up about class?

Arguing, as Subversion have done at length, how teachers are part of the production process, therefore share a common interest in revolution with the rest of the working class. Let's look at this.

Ignoring teachers relatively high salaries and function to condition and control the next generation of workers, there is some truth in what Subversion says.

But, despite the proletarianisation of the profession, teachers are still professionals and as such enjoy something of a cultural status. This acts as a link to middle class identification in a way not accessible to the majority of the working class.

I have no problem seeing teachers as middle class. This does not mean I declare them first up against the wall. Indeed I welcome thoughtful, committed members of such middle class professions who contribute constructively to the creation of international Communism.

Now if a copper was on fire I wouldn't piss on him. Class War is trying to put this reality into political terms. Not trying to bend reality to fit political theories.

In Solidarity

Harry Roberts junior, Class War supporter.

Of these two letters, the one from the Class War supporter is completely off the beam, whereas the first one makes some good points which we partly agree with. To answer all the relevant points we need to have a more precise analysis of "class" than the formula "relationship to the means of production".

The first point to consider is how we decide that one class rather than others has the potential to be revolutionary. Why does the communist strategy for revolution base itself on the (existing) economic struggles of the working class? After all, lots of other people suffer from the present system (Capitalism), such as poor peasants, street vendors etc.

The answer is that when workers need to defend their living standards, their immediate response is to struggle, together with their workmates, against the capitalists who employ them. The immediate response of, say, a street vendor would be to either raise their prices (creating a conflict with their customers, including workers), or alternatively to lower them and undercut the other vendors.

What is distinctive about the workers therefore is that they have an inbuilt and immediate tendency both to conflict with the capitalists and to collective action with other workers (at least in the same factory or same industry - but the potential is there for it to spread). We believe that this already existing conflict (which can never be got rid of by capi-

talism) is the seed out of which a revolutionary movement can grow. Naturally, this "seed" will have to grow immensely, but there's no other "seed" to rival it.

The key point here is the conflicts that are built in to various social relationships. This is not simply a matter of whether someone earns a wage or not, because certain types of job contain other conflicts in the job itself. So to take the most obvious example, being a cop means having a fundamental conflict with workers who engage in struggle - the fact that cops receive wages is just a "sociological" fact of little significance. To answer the Class War supporter, no, coppers are NOT workers in uniform! The distinction that this comrade makes between them and squaddies however is tenuous, as the army has always been (and always will be) used against serious manifestations of class struggle. There is indeed a history of mutiny in the army but we're talking here about draftees, which is a different matter.

There are other groups of wage earners who, in a less stark way, have conflicts with the working class at large built in to their jobs: teachers, with their role of social control and indoctrination of young workers; lower level bureaucrats whose job involves giving orders to others; people whose job involves taking money from workers, e.g. till operators, bar staff, bus drivers - try getting on a bus and saying you refuse to pay (a conflict between you and the owners of the bus company) and see whose side the driver will take. That doesn't mean that all these sections are our enemies, but rather that they are, to varying degrees, in a contradictory position (unlike cops who ARE our enemies pure and simple). We may not put much effort into talking to the more "dubious" sections (like teachers) but we don't write them off and we recognise that under the right conditions many of them will join in the struggle. This is not a question of "ideology" but of the position of these groups in society, in relation to other groups or classes.

All of this brings us on to the second point to consider - the distinction between the present-day working class, whose day-to-day existence is largely passive (acquiescent towards capitalism) and the revolutionary force that can overthrow capitalism. This latter will grow out of the former, but is not identical to it. The former (which can be called the "class-in-itself") is just a "sociological" category whereas the latter (the class-FOR-itself) is a revolu-

tionary category.

When workers engage in struggle their "nature" changes in that they reject their normal passivity and begin to become a class-for-itself. It is this "class-BECOMING-for-itself" that we support.

Referring to the "Working Class" is vague because there are really several "working classes" - the passive, sociological working class, the conscious communist working class of the future that is overthrowing capitalism and the struggling working class ("becoming-for-itself") - this last category is the most important one and shouldn't be confused with the first one (it may be argued that it's the same people but this is wrong because, apart from the fact that it's SOME of the same people not ALL of them, the key point is that it's not a thing that we're talking about but an action, or rather a thing in action - sociology deals in "things" but the "class-in-action" is a revolutionary concept).

Questions such as "are coppers part of the working class?" are therefore in some sense pointless since they refer to membership of the "sociological" working class. They are certainly not going to become part of the "class-in-action" which is the "class" that WE support.

To come back to the question of "relationship to the means of production" as the formula for defining class, the most important "defining" that we have to do is to define how the "class-in-action" will come into being (a constant, repeated event) and how it will develop. Among the factors which determine this, "relationship to the means of production" is the foremost, but is insufficient because it implies "relationship to property", i.e. being a wage earner or not, whereas the other factors considered in the first part of this reply can be just as important. The best way to put it is probably "relationship to the developing class struggle" - this being determined by all the factors mentioned above.

Subversion 12 - Spring 1993

Workplace and Community

Dear Subversion,

Thanks for issues 14 and 15 of the paper - nearly all of which have now been distributed. A lot of good stuff in both. I'd like to talk to you more about your particular class theory. Despite what maybe something of a conflict of emphasis between the Revolutionaries in the Workplace article, and your editorial reply to Mark in the current issue, I understand that, generally speaking, you perceive workplace struggles as the primary site of class struggle: because this is the place where surplus value is extracted. I'm not convinced by the apparently inherent distinctions which you see as separating and distinguishing work from community struggles, however. And while a vast amount of capitalist bollox (both academic and populist) has been churned out about the much maligned and feared underclass, I think you dismiss the idea a little out of hand.

The nature of employment, the organisation of work, and the management of the workforce are, without doubt, currently being re-shaped. Some of the changes the capitalist class is seeking are being contested - sometimes more consciously so than others - other changes are being forced through in the face of minimal opposition, despite the potentially devastating impact that they threaten.

It's not necessary to accept the post-Fordist class-is-dead bollox to understand that if the nature of capitalist work is being overhauled (evidenced by the growth of part-time work; team working; short term contracting; sub contracting; the growth of personal contracts; the loss of long-term security for many workers; the emergence in some sectors of a core-periphery split

amongst workers employed by an operation) then the structure of the working class - and relations between sections of it - may also be redefined as these material conditions change. In light of this, I think it would be useful for you to discuss the controversy of the underclass more fully in a future issue. You may of course argue that the real spread of such changes is minimal, and that growth of long term unemployment and precarious temporary work is more the result of cyclical rather than structural changes in western capitalism. Whatever, I'd like to see you elaborate your critique.

Trotwatch

REPLY:

The issues you raise were the subject of much discussion at recent SUBVERSION meetings. We are still a long way from drawing definite conclusions but there are some points we'd like to make.

You rightly detect some differences, at least in emphasis, in various articles that have appeared in SUBVERSION recently.

Our starting point is a recognition that it is the division between the working class - those excluded from control of the means of production and exploited by the minority capitalist class, which does control the means of production, which is at the heart of the contradictions of modern society.

It is the struggle between these two classes (alongside and connected to the struggle between different groups of capitalists) which is the motor of change in capitalism and which provides the potential for its revolutionary over-

throw and the creation of a communist society.

However the nature and composition of the working class has changed over time in the process of this struggle, and is set to change still further. To be effective as a conscious revolutionary minority we need to better understand these changes. Ignoring for the moment the misplaced use of the term community, it is our view that the polarised community versus workplace debate is false and misleading.

There is a strong case to be made for understanding the whole of the capitalist physical terrain, as the workplace, in so far as production has become more physically dispersed while at the same time more socially integrated.

To illustrate this simply, take a situation where one workplace might contain integrated production, from design, through processing, transport to sale and incorporating in-house training and medical attention etc, to a situation where each of these elements is carried out by different organisations in widely different locations, the workers nonetheless remain part of the same process contributing to the same end product.

In a broad sense capitalist production is much more social in practice than ever before. Thus the whole of the working class is exploited by the whole of the capitalist class in a very real way - it isn't just a marxist theoretical abstraction. Process workers, transport workers, teachers, hospital workers, communications workers, houseworkers etc etc all play a part in the production and reproduction of capital.

But of course struggle in practice has to start somewhere, either in a particular workplace or a particular geographical area. Whatever the starting point, it is important both for limited gains in the short run and ultimately for the revolutionary overthrow of the system, for struggles to extend both geographically and socially. It is the socially integrated nature of capitalism as described above which provides the material basis for struggles to extend and change character in the process - to become revolutionary.

Has the socially integrated nature of capitalism and the common interests of the working class as a whole been broken by the emergence of a so-called underclass? In parts of Africa, South America and elsewhere, huge numbers of people have been driven off the land through war, famine and commercialisation onto the fringes of major urban conurbations. None of this is new, but capitalism has found it more and more difficult to integrate these people into the production process and in some cases has created generations who have no experience of wage labour.

For those in the worst conditions such as some of the semi-permanent refugee camps, it is difficult to see any collective struggle emerging that might form the spark of anything wider. On the other hand, there is experience of collective struggle among some of the shanty town dwellers of South Africa which are more hopeful.

In Europe, North America and elsewhere there has also been a growth of long term unemployment, often concentrated in certain inner-city areas and extending to second generations. Whilst there are some similarities between the situation of these two groups of people, there are important differences. Firstly in numbers, the long term unemployed here are a much smaller proportion of the working class. They are also still at this stage more socially integrated into the wider working class. Ironically it is precisely the extension of more general insecurity among the working class through the extension of short-time working, part-time working, temporary contracts, home-working etc combined with the states' social programmes which may well limit the growth of any permanent hard-core group of long term unemployed.

These same trends may well also see a shift in emphasis from mass struggles focussed on the individual workplace to a more generalised geographical focus, although at this moment in time there are still, across the world, plenty of large workplaces that will continue to provide important starting points of struggle.

Clearly some groups of workers are more likely to enter into struggle than others at particular points in time. Equally some struggles have more potential to extend than others, depending on their objective relationship to the process of capitalist production and reproduction.

It seems to us that broadly speaking struggles focussed on work, wages and working conditions and on the social wage, whether in the form of benefits or services in kind will continue to be the backbone of class struggle.

In the past and up to the present day these struggles have taken the form of strikes, riots, occupations, rent strikes, mass boycotts and non-payments etc. New forms of struggle may arise reflecting the changing nature of work and its physical location.

Struggles focussed on other issues such as opposition to road building (the arteries of the production process) have less obvious potential for extension - though argument among revolutionaries on this still rages (see Aufheben no. 3 for a discussion of this).

At the other extreme for instance the opposition to live cattle exports, whatever you think of it, is clearly quite peripheral to the development of mass opposition to capitalism.

It also seems true that the more peripheral a struggle, not only is there less potential for extension on a class basis, but the opposite is true, they are more open to co-optation for capitalist interests.

The issue, in summary, is not where a struggle starts but what is its potential for extension geographically and socially - what is its potential to influence the wider class movement.

SUBVERSION 16 - SPRING 1995

Section Four - Unemployed Workers Struggles

Auld Reekie Anarchy

INTRODUCTION The following article was sent to us by a contact in Edinburgh. It is a good illustration of the anti-working class nature of the Labour Party and Trade Union bosses. The struggle also demonstrates the futility of playing the bosses' democracy game and the need for independently organised, collective direct action to defend working class interests.

Auld Reekie's unemployed got an early Christmas gift from the Labour-run Regional Council when, at dawn on 1st December, police and bailiffs battered down the barricaded back door of the former Edinburgh Unemployed Workers' Centre and evicted the rudely-roused occupation nightshift onto the capital's frigid streets.

The Centre's emergency phone-tree was immediately activated and within an hour scores of unwaged activists had gathered before and behind the building to prevent removal vans and council workers from plundering and boarding up Scotland's only autonomous, unfunded, self-managed community centre. By noon about 70 protesters were standing-off 9 vanloads of Lothian's finest and had determinedly but peacefully blocked 2 attempts to move the vans to the Centre's doors.

But at 2pm the police attacked in force, moving a hidden second line up behind the picket which they then encircled. As the circle tightened, protesters were knocked to the ground and some were crushed against walls. 21 were arrested and taken to the city's notorious St Leonards' Station, home of the Special Branch and scene of numerous mysterious cell deaths. Most of those arrested were charged with breach, some with police assault. All were held in sound-proofed single cells for up to 12 hours before being released on cognisance of attending court. During their incarceration, despite the stifling isolation, the unbowed protesters mutinied in concert, the men beating out a tattoo on their cell doors while the women's wing was rent by a 'scream-in', causing vociferous rage in their captors.

The spirit of resistance remained unbroken, but the 6-month occupation of the

Centre had been smashed, by the Labour council.

The Labour council might have won the battle, but the war rages on. The conflict has its roots in a transfer of power within the management board, from 'Labour movement' bureaucrats to the non-aligned grassroots unemployed activists who actually used and ran the Centre. Here's the story...

AND SO IN THE BEGINNING

The Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre Trust was set up in 1981 on Labour/Trade Union guidelines as part of that movement's miserable response to mass unemployment. Originally situated in the basement of the Trades Council building where it functioned as a small resource centre and where it was clique-riddled, the EUWC moved in the mid-80s to part of a disused church off the city's Royal Mile. Funded by the Region, and in a more accessible situation, the EUWC attracted unwaged activists and broadened out, and became known as 'the Centre'.

THERE WAS THE LABOUR PARTY

The Centre was, theoretically speaking, managed by a board of seven trustees. A full-time paid worker was employed by them, an ex-TU official who soon became the focus of a sycophantic clique. But the day-to-day running of the Centre and its activities were decided by users-group weekly meetings. The users group contained two broad factions - the 'Labour movement' clique and a growing band of independent unwaged activists, who were involved in the fight against welfare cutbacks, formed a thriving Claimants Union and became highly active. The Centre became a focus for the anti-Workfare campaign. Then came the Poll Tax.

In 1989 the Centre moved to a three-storey disused school, owned by the council, in Broughton Street, on the fringe of the city's affluent Georgian New Town. Things looked promising,

but the internal differences were increasing. The Labour controlled council was sending the bailiffs in against Poll Tax refuseniks. At the same time the Centre was an organising base for independent anti-Poll Tax activists. The Labour council was not happy, especially when the Centre's trustee board had four 'independents' elected to it from the users group, leaving the party bureaucrats in a minority of three. The Regional Council then cut off all the Centre's funding.

TRUSTEE WARS

By the end of 1991 the money was almost gone. The Centre's future became the subject of increasingly acrimonious rows among the trustee board. The war began in February 1992. One weekend when the Centre was empty, the three Labour trustees changed all the locks. Uniquely perhaps, the unemployed found themselves locked out. They were quick to rally and attack. Next month the users group and the majority of the trustees smashed back into the building, and reopened it for the unwaged public to use as was intended. On re-occupying the building, they discovered that the Centre's printing press had been used to produce a Labour Party manifesto, lucratively exploiting the Centre's charitable tax status.

Within weeks the ousted Labour clique was back. Their heavies broke in one Sunday morning in March. They weren't after the building this time, choosing instead to plunder all the Centre's equipment - £25,000 worth of computers, presses, cameras, washing machine - the lot, including the charity's accounts and minute books. They even took the teabags.

The pigs remained aloof from what they saw as 'a civil matter'. Legal aid was repeatedly denied to recover the stolen equipment which had all been bought with public money for public use, and was now locked in garages or installed in a party-run centre in Dalkeith, near Edinburgh.

AGAINST THE CENTRE

The persons responsible for the theft were Labour councillors Tony Kinder and Des Loughney, both of them members of the Region's social work committee - the Centre's landlords. The third was Jim Milne, boss of the Dalkeith centre where some of the stolen equipment was installed. The redundant paid worker, George Wilson, was involved. Des Loughney is also secretary of Edinburgh & District Trades Council. These were powerful enemies, and they were soon to exercise that power.

Without any funding or equipment the Centre users chose to fight on. The building was opened right up, space rented to a wide variety of non-aligned political and community groups. The upstairs hall was used for successful gigs. The money came in, the Centre survived. The council's attempt to strangle it had failed. So they adopted a new ploy.

At a social work committee meeting in February 1993, with two renegade trustees attending, it was suddenly remembered that a clause in the Centre's lease had been inadvertently left out. The clause stipulated that the Centre could not be used for fundraising activities of any kind, without express permission. The gigs were stopped and the bills accrued, but the Centre fought on, and survived.

SOCIAL WORKERS MOVE IN

With the five-year lease running out, the building was gone over by a sarcastic and hostile social work inspectorate in early 1994. The subsequent social work report, entitled 'Application for Lease Renewal, EUWC' was a blatant concoction of contrived and artificial evidence, accusing the Centre of being a firetrap and operating an unhygienic cafe. It recommended that the lease not be renewed.

The Centre collective swung into furious action and soon, using official documents, had blasted the damning report to smithereens in a glare of press publicity and a sympathetic piece on STV's news-show 'Reporting Scotland'. Depositions took evidence to the social work committee of the council. But the evidence was ignored, and the vile report adopted.

The lease expired in June 1994 but with a loud and unanimous "Fuck you!" the users decided to occupy, and started on fortifications. The war was heating up.

An article in the first issue of 'Scottish Anarchist' which, like its parent body the Scottish Federation of Anarchists, originated in meetings at the Centre, described the situation after the lease's expiry thus:

"The once-familiar wooden doors are derried now 'neath steel, sheets of steel shaped and bolted on by blacksmiths who refused all and any payment. 'Our donation to the Centre' said they. Solidarity lives.

"But the doors are open twixt noon and four every day bar Sunday, and the Centre is inhabited around the clock, seven days a week. Within opening hours a busy vegan cafe, famously cheap and substantial, is the hub of Centre activity and behind the chatting diners poster-festooned walls advertise gigs, meetings and actions, while the skirting tables sag beneath the mass of flyers and brochures explaining anti-VAT on Fuel, Criminally Injustice Bill. Stop the Fascists, community arts, homelessness, hunt sabs, gay rights, claimants' issues, women's issues, Poll Tax arrears, AIDS, Parks for the People...

"Above the cafe the pine-beamed mezzanine floor is being transformed into a snug reference library and reading room, while next door the Centre office advises callers, who phone in or drop in, on benefit rights. There's a well-equipped children's playroom and a basement darkroom.

"Upstairs, one end of the large hall is carpeted with defenders' sleeping bags while the other end is a mass of art and craft odds-and-ends with which the Creative Resource Network makes the puppets and props for its street theatre. The door of the small room opposite bears a hand-drawn sign - 'Cheap Claes Shoap'.

"The atmosphere is busy, cheery and sociable. No-one gets paid. Anyone can get involved. But when the doors are locked and blocked and the Centre quiets down, ears are cocked and nerves steeled for the baying of the bailiffs and the grunting of the pigs"

MUCKY STUFF AND FANS

On 1st December, as described, the shit hit the fan. It was, in a sense, a major victory. A collective of mainly unemployed folk had unprecedentedly occupied a building five minutes from the centre of Scotland's capital and had held out for six months, after having exposed the Labour bosses as liars and

cheats (In Scots law, squatting has always been treated as criminal trespass). Eventually the local state, Labour Party controlled, had been forced to send in scores of police and have 21 people, mostly unwaged, arrested and charged. It was a massive loss of face, especially with council elections looming large. Less than a fortnight after the eviction and arrests, hundreds demonstrated outside the shut-down Centre, which was by then well-graffiti'd. 'Viva la Centre!', 'Vote Labour-Vote Tory'

THE NEXT STEP?

What now? The Centre collective has regrouped in temporary premises and is still conducting a range of activities - including how to get the Centre back. A spokesman says: "We are asking community groups not to accept any offer of the premises. If they do they would be co-operating with the Region in closing the Centre down. We'll take peaceful action against any group who try to use the building. What's at issue here is the right of ordinary people to take charge of their lives"

Resistance to the harassment of claimants is being organised, with regular leafleting of benefit offices. A new initiative from the centre is involvement in the direct action against the building of the M77 in Glasgow, weekly minibuses travelling through to join the inhabitants of Pollock Free State and the nearby council schemes in defiance of the tree cutters and JCBs

Of those arrested on 1st December, two women and a man are soon to be tried, one woman on two charges of police assault, breach and resisting arrest.

Centre users demonstrated outside the year's first meeting of the Regional Council on 1st February. After the meeting, Cllr Brian Cavenagh, who had been instrumental in shutting down the Centre, boasted to the press and TV cameras that the council had just given £2,000 towards the publication of a booklet called 'Surviving on the Streets of Edinburgh' which is being distributed to homeless people

Some of them used to sleep in the Centre, which now lies locked and empty, guarded around the clock by security firm heavies. When asked by journalists about the Centre's future, Cavenagh replied: "It's a secret"

Death to all politicians! La lotta continua!

SUBVERSION 16 - SPRING 1995

Employment Service Strikes

Since the end of November 1995, a small selection of Employment Service Workers in various offices around the country, have been on indefinite strike against a miserable national pay offer and a further extension of performance related pay systems. This was before the recently announced budget cuts with their implications for jobs in the Service.

Up until February '96, the number of offices called out on strike, was being slowly increased alongside short "all out" regional strikes as part of the CPSA unions strategy of escalating action. Of course at this rate, it would have taken a further 12 months at least, to build up to anything really effective. Although the employers marginally increased the pay offer just prior to the first strikes, they haven't budged since. This is hardly surprising since the government, driven by the needs of a profit orientated economy in crisis, is determined to reduce the burden of state expenditure on profits. That means attacking the unemployed and the employed simultaneously. The connection between the two attacks is no more starkly shown than in this particular dispute.

In order to reduce the number of unemployed claimants and the amounts of benefit paid out, the state needs to force them in to any old crap, low paid job or else into the cut-throat competition of 'self-employment'. By doing this, the state also, at the same time, increases pressure on those in work to moderate their demands and do as they're told.

To be effective, the new Job seekers Allowance and associated regulations need to be strictly enforced by ES workers at minimal cost. This means attacking basic pay and the collective action in support of general pay claims and introducing more individual incentive pay, based on targets for 'benefit disallowances', 'suspensions' and so on. Ironically, the 'states' ability to do this, is strengthened by ES workers own fears of becoming unemployed themselves!

Ludicrous as it may seem, the state has sought to develop the ideology of a "customer based service" even though the unemployed "customer" clearly has no 'choice' to go anywhere else. One

small reflection of this has been the re-vamping of offices on a more 'user friendly' layout. Given the shit 'service' the unemployed get - and despite some bastards who get a kick out of humiliating the unemployed, this isn't the fault of ES workers - it's inevitable that some will occasionally lash out and not just with a few verbals! This in turn, helps promote a "hate the punters" mentality amongst some ES workers and a greater willingness to go along with their employers need to screw the unemployed even more. The unions are happy to enter into the fray at this stage, arguing for a return to screens and high level security etc, avoiding any serious confrontation over the real causes of the problem.

The 'Customer Service' ideology, is clearly an attempt to weaken existing or forestall the emergence of collective action by both ES workers and the unemployed - to get both to see their problems and the 'solutions' in individual terms, at the same time reinforcing the division between the two groups. This whole process forms a vicious downward spiral that can only benefit the employers and their state.

Such a spiral cannot be broken by Labour Party type reforms to the system or moral appeals to be nice to each other. The 'system' may not have been created by ES workers, but part of their job within the system involves 'policing' the unemployed whether they admit it or not. In normal every day circumstances, when unemployed claimant meets employed ES worker, there is a real and immediate conflict of interest which cannot be wished away by abstract appeals for class unity, however much the interests of both may be the same in the long term.

It is only in the abnormal circumstances of a strike, when ES workers are no longer carrying out the states function, that a small opening appears through which divisions can start to be broken down. That still won't happen if the real differences between the situation of the employed and unemployed are simply glossed over. It can only come through face to face confrontation of ideas and the building of mutual support based on an understanding of each others situations. It requires the building of common objectives and common

'demands', not just moral support for each others 'demands'.

In this process, the trade unions are a barrier. They have their own interests to pursue within the established order that require them to maintain sectionalism and parochialism within our class. Thus they typically 'appeal' to the employers on the basis that a contented work force will do the employers bidding more enthusiastically. They actually reinforce the division with the unemployed by pointing out to employers and the 'public', that failure to settle the strike is resulting in 'over payments' to the unemployed. A good reason, if for no other reason, where it's true, for the unemployed to support the strike in our opinion.

Since the unions really do want to get back to 'normal' working as soon as possible, they do their best to avoid any really effective action. The CPSA, under pressure from its members to extend the strikes, has decided to call a ballot whilst at the same time stopping the existing strikes! - effectively enforcing its own 'cooling down' period. We'll see if ES workers fall for that one! - or decide to take control of, and extend the strike themselves through their own direct action (both within the Employment Service and to others in the public sector threatened with performance related pay)

A move outside the control of the trade unions and an opening out of the strike to other workers, employed and unemployed, would be the most positive thing that could happen. In this situation, opportunities for some real class unity might emerge.

We are not saying that understandings and links forged in such a situation between ES workers and the unemployed are going to create any permanent basis of solidarity, but they can demonstrate what might be possible within the framework of a much more widespread escalation of class struggle in the future. Even in the shorter term, a victory for ES workers won in this way, with the support of the unemployed, could be beneficial to unemployed workers by making ES workers less reliable agents of the state for a time.

SUBVERSION 18 - SPRING 1996

Solidarity ~ Good and Bad

As an unemployed member of Subversion things look quite different to me. My quarrels with the other article are summarised in this article, sometimes in the form of questions.

The essential question is: what is the basis for unity among various groups of workers? It must be not merely a long-term interest in the abolition of capitalism but also a common interest in struggle here and now. This is where the structural relationship among groups of employees assumes an important role.

What I mean is most starkly manifested in the case of cops. It might be argued that a rank and file cop would a: benefit from the establishment of a communist society and b: be inclined to take industrial action for higher wages. But the nature of

the job they do means that whenever any class struggle breaks out, the cop is always on the other side (and indeed is very often the most immediate enemy of the workers in struggle). This means there is no realistic basis for unity between cops and ourselves. This is what I mean by the structural relationship of the jobs themselves. This is easy to see in the case of the cops, but the relationships are not always so clear cut in the case of various other professions.

So the next question is: how different are the Employment Service workers from cops? The amount of common nature they have is strongly understated by the other article, in my view.

This is something we have to think about properly, since we're talking about who's part of our class and who isn't (I'm quite sure that the cops are not part of the working class).

What the Employment Service workers have in common with the cops is essentially that merely by doing their job, i.e. regardless of their ideology or personal inclinations, they act to repress a significant part of the class.

It might be objected that all work for capitalist bosses means acting to reproduce capitalism and thereby help to oppress the working class. True enough, in the direct, active agents of oppression (an example often used here is the difference last analysis, but there's a difference between that and being between journalists who write reactionary, anti-working class bollocks and the printworkers who print it - the

former are in a quite different category because they have personal control over what they are doing, using their initiative and ingenuity in their role of conscious reactionaries).

Employment Service workers are often in positions where they decide exactly what to do with this or that claimant, whether to give them a hard time at an interview, whether to make them go on a course, and the like.

My personal experience is that individual workers at a dole office vary between some who are alright and some who are total bastards, but it is conceivable that there are one or two cops (somewhere in the world) who as individuals have good motivations.

It is no wonder, given this structural antagonism that, as the other article says, there often arises a "hate the punters" mentality among these workers. This is a telling phrase, because "punter" is of course a derogatory term used by the petty bourgeoisie for us workers in our role of "customer".

The article talks about how if the strike advances and forges links with unemployed workers then the Employment Service workers might stop being reliable agents of the state for a time. Hardly a prospect to inspire feelings of solidarity among the breasts of the unemployed, is it? To me, this is like asking slaves to support higher wages for the overseers in return for them going a bit easier with the lash for a few weeks afterwards.

I believe it is a fundamental principle that solidarity among workers must be on the basis of equality. As such, I think that any offering of support to the Employment Service workers dispute must be conditional. That means, we say to them: "We will support you, but only if you undertake to cease policing our class." That means not only not implementing the Jobseekers' Allowance, but not coming down heavy on us in Restart interviews, forcing us to go to Jobclubs, etc. One idea would be for a group of unemployed workers to produce a leaflet putting this forward, and giving it to the Employment Service workers involved in the dispute. At least it should make some of them think.

Solidarity which is not on the basis of equality is a pitiful thing, it is like kneeling and kissing the hand of a social superior in the hope of being looked on

with favour. Our class should have more dignity than that

SUBVERSION 18 - SPRING 1996

JSA and the Dole Workers Strike

Here, in Brighton, we have been involved in the rather uphill battle against the JSA for more than a year now

When the selective strikes in the Employment Service began last November all three Job Centres in Brighton came out on strike. We gave our full support to the strikers and took up the task of leafletting the entire two week signing-on cycle, explaining to claimants the reasons for the strike and its connection with the implementation of the JSA. Since the end of the strike we have established close relations with the more militant workers in the dole offices which are now being formalised in the 'Brighton Against the JSA' group that is to be formally launched on May 1st. This will bring workers in the Benefit Agency, the Housing Benefit Office and the Employment Service together with claimants and other people opposed to the JSA.

However before considering the significance and potential of Brighton Against the JSA and similar groups, we would first like to respond to the articles on the Employment Service Strike in Subversion 18 in order to clarify a few points

Firstly, we think it is important to emphasise both the immediate basis for unity between claimants and ES workers and the importance of the current changes that are being imposed within the welfare system. Performance Related Pay, the JSA, 'active signing' and Workfare projects are not simply another set of measures to cut costs and reduce the numbers on the dole. They are all part of a single concerted effort to radically restructure the administration of the welfare state and the class compromise embodied within it. A point that was soon grasped in the course of the strike by many of the strikers.

However, to understand the full impli-

cations of this restructuring it is perhaps necessary to place these changes in an historical context. (To do this properly would require more than a little research which we have yet to do. However, we can tentatively put forward a brief sketch which for present purposes should be sufficient)

The present benefit system for the unemployed was originally established as a central part of the post-war settlement of 1945. As such it expresses the post-war class compromise. The deal was simple: in return for benefits sufficient to cover short term subsistence the unemployed would have to make themselves available for any suitable work in their trade or profession. This deal presupposed two things, first the government's commitment to 'full employment' through the use of Keynesian demand management policies and secondly a general acceptance of wage-labour by the working class. Given 'full employment' most unemployment would be short term and cover people for the few weeks while they were between jobs. Anyone not seeking work, who was not completely unemployable, would soon be found work by the employment exchange, as it was then called. With the relatively small numbers of unemployed the costs of paying benefits were limited and could easily be paid out of transfers from the working class as a whole through National Insurance contributions or general taxation.

With the crisis of the 1970s, which saw the flight of capital in the face of increasing working class militancy, it soon became clear that Governments in the industrialised economies could no longer sustain a commitment to full employment. In Britain the initial response to the development of mass unemployment was to mitigate its effects as much as possible. The Labour Government at this time was committed to a strategy of defusing class militancy through a corporatist deal with the unions that came to be expressed in the now infamous 'social contract'. This demanded an 'equality of sacrifice' from all sections of the working class. To minimise conflict with those in work, wage restraint had to be matched by a commitment on the part of the government and employers to minimise compulsory redundancies and achieve the necessary reductions in the work force through 'natural wastage' (i.e. not replacing people who leave or retire). However, this 'freezing of posts' simply led to a dramatic increase in youth unemployment as those leaving school or college found it harder to find work. In response to this

increase in youth unemployment, which threatened to place a whole generation outside the experience of wage-labour, the Labour Government introduced the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOPS), which was later extended and made compulsory as the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), the first in a series of dead end make-work schemes which pretend to offer training or work experience for crap money.

The Labour Government's strategy was eventually smashed in the winter of discontent in 1979. The new Tory Government under Thatcher adopted a radically new strategy. Abandoning the old social consensus it sought to use mass unemployment to impose a substantial restructuring of British capital. Within little more than a couple of years of Thatcher coming to power unemployment doubled to over three million.

Mass redundancies decimated whole industries leaving vast industrial waste lands in many areas of the country. Yet the Government was careful not to exacerbate the situation at this time.

One of the first acts of the new Tory government was to abolish earnings related benefits to prevent an explosion in benefit payments following their proposed policy of mass redundancies, but beyond that the first Thatcher government for the most part maintained the conditions and levels of benefits. At the same time the policy of mass redundancies was cushioned by substantial redundancy payments, particularly to older workers who had worked for a long time in the industries that were being wound down. For the government at that time the consequent expansion in the welfare budget was seen as a price worth paying for the major restructuring of British industry. Inefficient and 'overmanned' industries could be closed down while the threat of redundancy and mass unemployment encouraged those still in work to accept the eradication of restrictive working practices and greater 'flexibility'.

In order to curb the increasing costs which resulted from the policy of mass unemployment the government attempted to hold down administration costs. This resulted in a significant relaxation of the benefit regime. Firstly, the increase in the numbers signing on was not matched by a corresponding increase in the numbers working in the DSS or the Unemployment Benefit offices. With the consequent increase in work load the welfare departments had to increasingly concentrate on their

core activities of paying out benefits and reduce their policing and snooping activities.¹ Secondly, along with most white collar public sector workers, pay was held down further undermining the notion that it was middle class work. As a result of both the increased work load and the demotivation of dole workers through the decline in their relative pay and status, combined with the fact that for most people there was little if any 'suitable employment', the pressures on the unemployed to find work diminished substantially during this period.

Having defeated the miners in 1985 the Government felt confident enough to tackle the problem of the high costs of mass unemployment. This resulted in the Fowler review under which Supplementary Benefit was replaced by Income Support and special allowances for laundry and heating were abolished in 1988. In order to prevent the young becoming too accustomed to not working benefits were withdrawn from 16-18 year olds and the level of benefits were cut by 30% for those under 25. In addition significant changes were made to the conditions of entitlement for benefits. It was now no longer sufficient to be 'available for suitable employment', it was also necessary to be 'actively seeking work' even if there was no work to be had!

It was also at this time that regular Restart interviews were introduced to pressure the unemployed to accept places on the various training Schemes.

During the late 1980s periodic drives were made, mainly it seems to reduce the unemployment figures before an election. As a result a cycle emerged. Before an election the government would expand training and various make-work schemes, and issue directives to the employment offices to fill the new vacancies so as to reduce the unemployment figures. The long term unemployed would then face repeated Restart interviews until they accepted a place on a scheme. Then following the election the Government would face the need to cut back on public spending and the training schemes would be cut back, Restart interviews would be curtailed, and it would become very difficult to get on a scheme even if you wanted to.

So, as we have noted, in the early 1980s, with the aid of mass redundancies and high unemployment the productivity of British industry was transformed and with it the profitability of British capital. Whereas in the 1970s Britain had been the 'sick man' of Eu-

rope prone to the 'English disease' of industrial unrest, in the 1980s Britain became the cutting edge in the restoration of capital's profitability.

Yet sustaining high unemployment together with a relaxed benefit regime meant that increasing numbers of the unemployed had little incentive to compete in the labour market. As the 1980s wore on increases in productivity through more flexible working conditions had to be paid for through increasingly high wages. Indeed, for most people in work the 1980s saw wages rising far faster than prices in contrast to the real cuts in wages which were experienced under the last few years of the previous Labour Government. Even in the boom at the end of the 1980s unemployment did not fall much below 2 million yet even these levels did little to curb the demands for pay increases significantly above the rate of inflation. It took another severe recession, and with it another substantial increase in unemployment, to break rising real wages and introduce the increased job insecurity of short term contracts and part-time work necessary to maintain the profitability of British capital. But with this recession of the early 1990s has come the burden for the state of increased long-term unemployment. Even now, after 4 years of 'economic recovery', unemployment is still higher than it was in the late 1980s. Furthermore, attempts to press down the wages of lowest paid workers are now running into the floor of benefits.

As even Peter Lilley admits, following the Fowler Review there is little scope for cutting the level of benefits since they are so low already! The strategy of the government to reduce the welfare bill has consequently been twofold. Firstly it has sought to withdraw entitlement to benefits from increasing numbers of people. As a result benefit entitlements have been progressively withdrawn from students and from foreign workers, and most recently from asylum seekers. The habitual residency test and the all work test have been introduced. Secondly, the government has sought to tighten up the benefit regime. This has led to the requirement that claimants expand their job search after three months and the provision for more regular Restart interviews to check up on the unemployed's job seeking, and the introduction of compulsory Jobplan and Restart courses after one and two years of unemployment.

However, these efforts by the government have repeatedly run into problems

due to the entrenched working practices and workers resistance in the Dole offices. Seeing themselves as overworked and underpaid many dole workers have been reluctant to work harder to discipline the unemployed on behalf of the government.² This entrenchment has concrete expression in the common experience amongst claimants of being helped through some of the trick questions by counter staff and by the need for the government to instruct workers not to give claimants advice on how to claim the most benefits. It has also been demonstrated in the repeated failure of the Department of Employment to impose more regular Restart interviews. The Department of Employment had to repeatedly initiate drives to impose stricter benefit controls, only to have the situation revert to normal once the drive was over.

It is in this context that we have to grasp the significance of the implementation of the JSA and the recent Employment Service strike over Performance Related Pay. The JSA is part of a concerted attempt to radically restructure the administration of benefits in order to break the long established working practices and workers resistance. The Benefits Agency and the Employment Service are to merge, resulting in the relocation of many workers and widespread redundancies for others. The overall effect will potentially be a significant assault on emergent class re-composition in this sector. With this restructuring the government not only hopes to increase efficiency in the administration of benefits but also open the way for the imposition of stricter benefit regimes which will force the unemployed to compete in the labour market and thereby undermine the pay and conditions of those in work.

Already, along with other government departments, the DSS and the Department of Employment have been formally constituted as semi-autonomous agencies that are supposed to have an arms length relation to national government at Whitehall. Instead of the old command structure these agencies are supposed to have contractual relations with central government and are expected to fulfil certain contractually agreed performance targets as if they were a commercial enterprise. These performance targets, which are mostly based on cutting costs i.e. the numbers claiming benefits, now have to be imposed on the workers. The old civil service system of pay and promotion based on seniority has now to be replaced by pay and promotion based on perfor-

mance - which in this case is largely based on the numbers that can be forced to sign off or accept workfare schemes.

Originally, management sought the loyalty of dole workers through the security of employment offered by civil service pay and conditions, limited career prospects for those who stayed long enough, and to some extent the middle class aspirations then typical of white collared workers. As we have seen, over the past 20 years this arrangement has already been significantly undermined. But now the whole agreement is to be torn up. Instead the government hopes to use the stick of casualisation and job insecurity and the carrot of performance related pay and promotion to encourage dole workers to do its dirty work. But this is by no means assured of success. As has already happened it can lead to increased hostility and antagonism from the workers as they become more and more proletarianised. The contractual relations of the various benefit and employment agencies may place the onus on local management, but what happens if the contracts become impossible to implement? The stakes are therefore fairly high and success by no means assured.

Hopefully this brief historical sketch, incomplete though it may be, goes some way towards giving a context through which we may be able to grasp the full significance of both the recent Employment Service strike, the JSA, and their connections with other current changes to the benefit system. It may also allow us to shed a little more light on the controversy raised by the second article, 'Solidarity, Good and Bad', in Subversion 18. This article raises the problem of the class alignment of dole workers given the repressive functions they have to carry out in their work for the state. This is of course an important question and one we can not hope to deal with adequately here.

Yet what we must say, and a point at least implicit in our historical analysis, is that in addressing this question it is vital that we are not too rigid or dogmatic. Firstly, we have to bear in mind how peoples reaction to their function and position within both capital and the state can change in certain historical conditions. Clearly many factory workers who have no repressive functions to perform on behalf of the state or capital can be 'anti-proletarian' in that they scab on strikes for example, on the other hand in very exceptional circumstances

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those in overtly repressive functions, such as the army or even the police, might revolt and come over to our side! Secondly, it is important to recognise that the structures of the state and capital are the embodiments of class struggle. They are expressions of given class compromises and are transformed when such class compromises are renegotiated. (Thus, for example, for the state Restart interviews are a means of pressuring the unemployed off the dole but up until now they have had to be presented and organised as a means of 'helping' the unemployed to find work).

Apart from taking too rigid and dogmatic a view, the problem of 'Solidarity, Good and Bad' is that it seems to be based on the false assumption that the Employment Service is faced with a mass of claimants who are refusing work so that its primary function is to force them all into work. Although it is true that over the past 20 years mass unemployment has led to increasing numbers who use the dole to refuse work, it is still true that the large majority of the unemployed want work if only because they need the money. The primary function of most dole workers, particularly those on the front line, is not repressive but simply the administration of benefits i.e. registration of claimants and paying out of benefits. Of course this may mean that some dole workers distinguish between 'genuine' and 'non-genuine' claimants or have a 'hate the punter' mentality, whilst others may be careerists and hope to curry favour by being overzealous in those 'repressive functions' that they do carry out. But the important point is that these attitudes are not given in stone. They are open to change, particularly in a period of change such as the present! Indeed we can see the strike and the ongoing resistance to the JSA by dole workers as being against the intensification of the policing aspect of their role.

Many dole workers recognise the sharpening of the contradiction in their position and have attempted to resolve it by striking. Our common interest with the strikers is that they don't want to behave like cops just as we don't want them to. At meetings with strikers a common sentiment they expressed was that they had joined to 'help people not to police them'. This reflects a certain patronising attitude to claimants but one that began to be undermined by our engagement with their struggle. Our shared interests were immediately obvious to the many other workers who

have been virtually conscripted off the dole and who can still see themselves on the other side of the counter.

But perhaps the weakest part of this article is the picture it conjures up of a powerful movement of class conscious claimants being able to impose conditions on its solidarity! The problem is that at present we have little to offer in return for such conditions! From our experience the vast majority of claimants were sympathetic to the Employment Service workers strike - once it was pointed out that it would not affect their benefits - but virtually no one, apart from ourselves, was prepared to do anything more about it! This is not to say that the unemployed cannot organise themselves. Indeed here in Brighton Justice?, the group set up to oppose the Criminal Justice Act, is more or less entirely made up of claimants. But there seems to be a reluctance amongst this milieu to organise themselves as unemployed. Apart from a few individuals, Justice?, dominated as it is by liberal and life-style politics, has failed to become involved in supporting the Employment Service strike or in the anti-JSA campaign. That this problem is widespread was clearly evident in the recent demonstrations in London and Kent which could only muster a couple of hundred people. Finally, we would like to make a few comments regarding the Employment Service workers strike. As your other article anticipated the Employment Service strike was successfully undermined by the Union. But it is perhaps important to examine how the union were able to do this. As far as we could see it was clear that there was a lot of anger across the country at the current changes occurring in the Employment Service as a consequence of the introduction of the JSA and this became focused on the question of performance related pay. However, it was not the case of militant workers committed to industrial action being pulled back on the union leash. On the contrary it seems that in most offices there has been limited experience of industrial action and many workers are a bit apprehensive at the possible consequences of taking action.

As a result most militant activists, isolated in their particular offices, have tended to gravitate towards the Broad Left. It was the Broad Left which pushed for the strike, but could only coax the workers out on the basis that all strikers would get full strike pay. It was on this basis that the ballot for selective strike action won a 2-1 majority

last November. No doubt the Broad Left, who control the Employment Service section of the CPSA, hoped to escalate the strike from the original 40 offices. But they were resolutely opposed by the national executive who pleaded insufficient funds to finance an escalation on this basis. Perhaps ironically, the national executive were able to 'outlet' the Broad Left in the final ballot which ended the strike by balloting for an all out indefinite strike but with no guarantee of full strike pay. This was rejected by a 2-1 majority.

It seems at present that most Employment Service workers are unwilling to break with the prevalent white collar worker mentality and strike on less than full pay. This may change or other tactics may develop. Local strikes are now breaking out in the Benefits Agency and it will be interesting to see how these develop. Faced with the obstacles placed in the way to action by the union some of the more militant dole workers are looking beyond the union to claimants and other workers through the recently established London against the JSA and Brighton against the JSA groups. The question now is whether, through organisations such as Groundswell, claimants can make a contribution/intervention in these new groups or whether they will eventually become overwhelmed by the leftist baggage many of the union activists bring with them!

Ivan Boesky for Brighton Autonomists

1 Another important change at this time was the transfer of the administration of housing benefits from the DSS to local authorities. This meant that there was no longer routine inspections by the DSS of claimants' houses, which had been an important means for checking that people were not cohabiting, working on the side, or making false claims.

2 As well as the differences between individuals there have been significant regional variations in how enthusiastically workers have enforced the benefit rules, which has affected how claimants have seen their role.

3 This doesn't mean that we believe the police are 'workers in uniform' or any other such nonsense that would prevent us attacking them when we have the opportunity!

4 That is not to say that we would support any strike unconditionally or even any strike by employment workers regardless of the issue. The point for us was not an abstract ideological issue of whether or not to announce our support based on what side of the class line we judged the workers to fall but an attempt to seize the practical opportunities offered by the strike. Our extensive practical support for this strike was on the basis and condition that it was in our immediate interest that it succeeded.

SUBVERSION 20 - AUTUMN 1996

Three Strikes and a Funeral

Comments on the anti-JSA struggle



Elsewhere in this issue can be found the article "The JSA and the Dole Workers' Strike" by a member of Brighton Autonomists. The final part of it is an attack on an article of mine entitled "Solidarity, Good and Bad" which appeared in Subversion 18. The controversy between us links-in to an important debate within Groundswell (the network of anti-JSA groups throughout the country) so I will use the Brighton criticism as the starting point for this commentary.

The first thing I want to say is that the bulk of "The JSA and the Dole Workers' Strike" was unexceptionable and indeed extremely interesting. However, towards the end the tone was sadly lowered by the appearance of swear-words like "rigid" and "dogmatic", signalling the start of a volley of (in my view) hasty and ill thought-out criticisms lobbed in my direction.

There are four points I want to make in reply:

First, what's this crap about dogma? What dogma is it, exactly, that my article conforms to? I am not aware of any one or any group having expressed the viewpoint that I put forward in it - it is simply an attempt to synthesise my own experience and thinking on the matter;

Second, the presence or absence of a mass of claimants refusing work is not relevant in my view. You might as well say that the police are not primarily a repressive body on the grounds that the majority of working class people do not break laws on the whole. The point is of course what happens if they DO break the law;

Third, I am of course as aware as anybody that there is no mass movement of claimants "able to impose conditions on its solidarity" but so what? Revolutionaries, and class conscious workers, shouldn't accept things which are un-

supportable because we lack strength. We pursue our class interest to the best of our ability. Indeed, the article's own footnote on this point (no. 4) admits this, rather contradicting the main point.

And Fourth, the remainder of footnote 4 presents the further point that the determining factor should be an assessment of what is in "our immediate interest" rather than an "abstract ideological issue". On the contrary, if there is a conflict between immediate and long-term interest, opting for the former is precisely the definition of opportunism.

Having said that, I think it would be precipitate to accuse the article's author of opportunism. And indeed, the above exchange may exaggerate the difference between us, since we both believe an attempt should be made to forge unity between claimants and (some) ES workers.

However, the devil is most certainly in the detail, and a fearsome devil it is.

Knickers in a Twist

Throughout the movement of opposition to the JSA there has been a ferocious disagreement between supporters and opponents of the "3 Strikes" policy which has been adopted by a number of local anti-JSA groups.

For those not au fait with this, it con-

sists of the targeting of a particular manager (or in special cases an ordinary staff member) who goes out of their way to harass claimants. The 1st Strike is to send them a warning letter, the 2nd Strike is to send a final warning letter, and the 3rd Strike, if they still don't "mend their ways" is to put their photo and whatever personal details can be obtained on a poster which is then fly-posted all over the place. This can be accompanied by demos against them personally or whatever, but the above is actually a quite "moderate" response

And the Funeral?

The fact of the matter is that the greatest danger to ES managers (and other staff) will come from individual violent acts from claimants whose money has just been stopped.

Moderate or not, it has still got some people foaming at the mouth, most notoriously Militant Labour, who have openly sided with management over the issue.

The existence of the 3 Strikes policy is naturally being used by the ES management to try to force a wedge between claimants and ES workers and combat any resistance among the latter to the JSA, but there's no reason for them to succeed in this, and anti-JSA activists have begun to issue leaflets explaining to staff our desire for a joint struggle, and countering management propaganda. In this, people like Bonner are an immediate enemy (openly siding with the ruling class is getting to be quite a tradition among Militant members).

Within the Left as a whole there is division over the policy, with some supporting it and some opposed. Sadly, this is also true of the revolutionary movement. People involved in the Brighton Autonomists/Aufheben "mini-

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milieu" have consistently opposed it from the beginning

Groundswell

Groundswell was originally formed by anarchists, but now, and increasingly, contains people from the Leninist Left, such as the SLP, the RCG, various Trot groups and the like

The 3 Strikes was adopted as a nation-wide policy and publicised as such, but following this, letters were circulated within the network by Brighton Autonomists and Co. arguing for its rejection.

The argument was that it would frighten the ES workers and bind them closely to management. Subversion believes this is completely false because

a) The policy is NOT aimed at ordinary workers but at particular individuals known for harassment of claimants, the sort of individuals moreover who are likely to be held in contempt by any workers who are (potentially) sympathetic to our aims.

b) It is a part of the strategy of Groundswell to issue leaflets which make this clear to the workers.

c) There is a "carrot and stick" element in decisions about whether to join a strike or other struggle. Fear of being attacked as a scab can balance fear of the bosses. The knowledge on the part of ES workers that compliance with the JSA will mean lining up with their own bosses against the unemployed, and being SEEN to do so, and thus being an object of class fury and violence, should in our view help to concentrate minds wonderfully

Unfortunately, the following Groundswell conference abandoned 3 Strikes as a collective policy because of the arguments of Brighton. In this they were aided by some who invoked the autonomy of local groups against the idea of a nation-wide policy. This rather fetishizes the concept of autonomy - if we can agree on something collectively we should do so. There's a fine line between autonomy and fragmentation

The upshot is that the majority of

groups and individuals in Groundswell support the 3 Strikes but that the policy has no "nation-wide face" and thus will be less widely publicised and some of its potential targets will find it easier to ignore

Workerism

The reasoning of Brighton and Co. derives from the fact that the Brighton against the JSA group has from early on had better connections with local ES workers than any of the other Groundswell groups. But this has led them to bend the stick too far in the direction of "caution" in their anxiety to keep the workers "on-side" at all costs.

This approach bespeaks a "workerist" mindset (something the comrades have not been guilty of in the past) - the simple fact is that we are all part of the working class (whether we be claimant, employee, housewife...) and the struggle of one part of our class must not be spurned in the (vain) hope another part of the class maybe struggling later on.

It is a sad fact that, of all the political tendencies in Groundswell, the Brighton people formed the most right-wing in the 3 Strikes argument. The result of their intervention was to partly demobilise this aspect of the struggle. Fortunately, all is not lost, as 3 Strikes is still supported by most activists, and is being implemented increasingly. Accordingly, we should be able to give it more and more publicity.

What a difference "A-Day" makes

This article has focussed on what is only a part of the struggle against the JSA. It will be for future issues of Subversion to deal with other aspects, such as reports of our activities, and more analytical pieces.

The 7th of October (A-Day) is the official implementation, but opinion is divided as to how big the change will be on that day, as the JSA has been gradually being phased in long before that, and this phasing in may continue until the spring

This is a struggle that is going to escalate, so watch this space

SUBVERSION 20 - AUTUMN 1996

Subversion

We produce the magazine Subversion roughly three times a year. It is distributed free of charge. If you would like to receive a copy, or to see some back issues, then please send a stamp or an SAE (and a large envelope), to our group address - on the back of this pamphlet.

We never refuse a donation! Make cheques, postal orders etc payable to Subversion.

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The Best of Subversion a collection of articles from the first eleven issues - the perfect companion to this volume! Just £1.00 inc. postage and packing.

Ireland - Nationalism and Imperialism, the myths exploded. Our analysis of the war in Ireland. £0.50p inc p&p.

Labouring in Vain - why Labour is not a socialist party. 50p inc p&p.

Section Five - Anti-Roads Protests

The class struggle hits the road

Why are struggles against Motorways so important?

Why is the struggle against the state's plans for motorway expansion important?

If we are to believe the Leninist Left or the "Left Communists", it is a side issue to the "real" struggles in the workplace. If we take the views of greens at face value, then it is a struggle for sanity against motorway madness.

It is our contention that the struggle against the motorways is an important aspect of the class struggle today.

This is true for many reasons.

Expand or die....

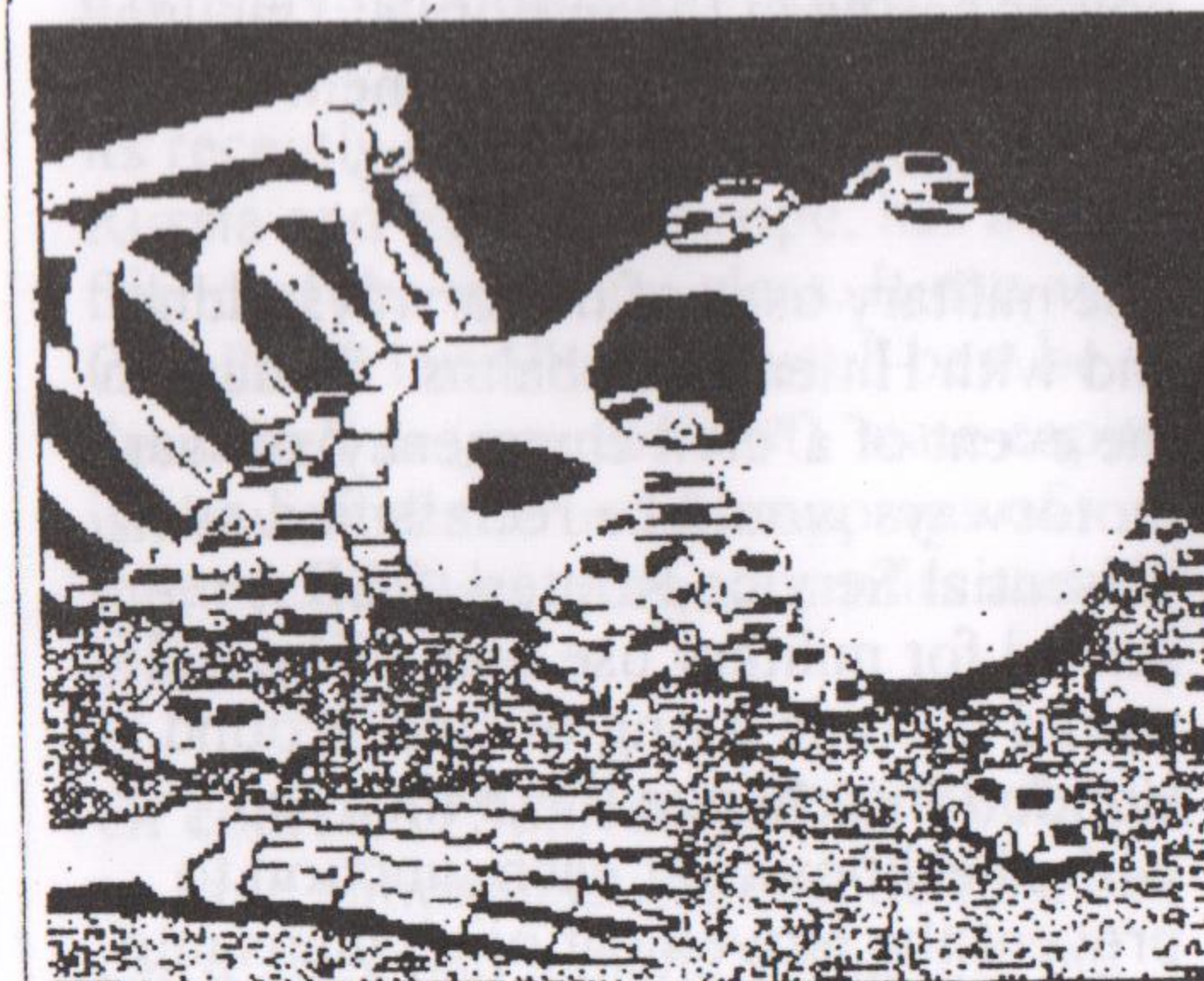
It is beyond the scope of this article to explain why, but capital (and the economy of nation states) quite literally needs to expand or die. When the government talk about expanding the economy being essential to the needs of Britain, they are quite literally stating the truth as far as capitalism is concerned.

An economy that does not "grow" cannot compete with its rivals. A company that does not constantly seek to cut costs and boost profit margins will see itself going to the wall. One of the main needs of capital; whether local, national or international is to drive down costs.

One simple way to drive down costs is to reduce the time it takes to make something. This means that investments are quickly turned into profits. The production process divides into two parts: production, and distribution. Distribution includes selling things and getting raw materials to factories and then the products to wholesalers and shops. A more "efficient" trans-

port system (in terms of the time taken), a quicker turnover, means that the transformation of investment into profit is quicker too. Less is spent on storage, less on waiting. Money is available more quickly to buy the next lot of raw materials, to transport them, to make new products and then to move them again to sell them

The need to cut down this time means at present that more and faster roads are constantly needed.



Just In Time

A good example of this is the delivery of materials according to the "Just-in-Time" principle.

Before the advent of the motorway network, factories all had large warehouses which stored the components needed in the production process. This was very costly as considerable investment sat around "doing nothing" until it was needed. The growth of computerisation changed this. Now it is possible for a factory to know exactly when a particular component is needed. A sub-contractor can be told to deliver on such-and-such a date, at such-and-such a time. Now there is no need for large warehouses. In effect the lorries have become mobile warehouses constantly moving on the motorway network. As a result, multi-

national companies are able to produce components where they can do so most efficiently. Thus if one needs labour intensive production it can be done where labour is cheapest, if it is hi-tech, then somewhere like Germany is preferable. The motor industry typifies this approach

Not only are motorways needed to distribute materials to factories, they are also needed to circulate commodities. This includes the commodity that each of us has to sell, our labour power. Put it another way, capitalism needs roads to get us to work! These are often not motorways, but are urban routes that make life hell for those living near them and drive us mad trying to use them. As part of this, the car industry is probably the most important industry in developed economies, with interests of its own that it has the power to push

Crazy Carrots

The growth of bar-codes has led to this spreading to the food industry. No longer to supermarkets source their products locally. Instead it is cheaper for them to centralise packing at one point, to distribute to warehouses for redistribution to individual supermarkets as their computer generated models predict the food is needed. A recent Granada TV programme showed carrots being produced in Suffolk, transported to Preston for packing, then to Hertfordshire for loading onto lorries, before being delivered to a store in Ipswich - over 700 miles to do a 20 mile journey! Nonetheless it is more profitable to do this.

Euro-Roads

The European Union talks about an "Internal Market". What the EU wants is to integrate the various local and national capitals into one whole, the

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better to compete with other global capitals. "Efficient" communications is a vital part of this process. The talk is of a European Route Network. This allows for the greater efficiency of transport moving around the EU. To do this roads must be upgraded and widened - like the M6, M1, M42 and now the M66. Projects like the Channel Tunnel are undertaken with the eventual aim of providing a network linking Europe from Cork to Moscow.

A hundred years ago, production on the whole took place locally. Raw materials may have been imported, but power was locally produced (from coal), components were either produced on site or locally. This is no longer true. "Just-in-time", the roads and computers mean that everything is spread out to where it can be produced most cheaply. The various states take on the role of providing the warehouses, in the form of the road networks. In a sense, the whole of society has become the factory. Everywhere we go we are confronted with it, nowhere are we free from it.

So the road network is important for the current needs of modern capitalism. Unfortunately, those needs are in direct contrast to our needs. We need peace, quiet, fresh air and open spaces. All of these are threatened by the roads. We need good health - instead we get asthma. We need safe places for our kids - instead we are forced to keep them off the streets for fear of accidents. Over 4500 people a year die in Britain alone due to roads, world-wide the figure is nearer to one million. Our whole lives are becoming dominated by the needs of the roads and the motor industry.

When we fight back against road development we are hitting at capitalism's expansion needs. That is why the struggle is at the bottom a class struggle - a struggle by working class people against the needs of capital to dominate every aspect of our lives. By fighting the roads we are beginning the struggle to assert our own needs, a struggle that must eventually lead to the overthrow of this whole rotten system.

Footnote: If you want to read a more detailed analysis of the struggles against motorways, then we recommend you read Aufheben. Issues 3 and 4 contain excellent articles. They cost £2.00 each. Write to Aufheben c/o Prior House, Tilbury Place, Brighton. BN2 2GY

SUBVERSION 17 - AUTUMN 1995

Gridlock

Voices from the M27 Corridor

The following piece is a brief exploration of strategies of control and resistance around motorways. It will avoid the issues of pollution and environmental destruction usually associated with the roads battle and look at no less real struggles with more fundamental implications for the direction of class conflict.

ROAD WARS

A key component in the reorganisation of space for the needs of profit and power has been the motorway, facilitating both economic development and administrative/military efficiency.

The military uses of motorways didn't end with Hitler's autobahns. Today, in the event of a 'civil emergency' or war, motorways would be reclassified as 'Essential Service Routes' (ESRs) reserved for military use only. The M25 would become a ring of steel around London [no change there then -ed.] with checkpoints at each junction to prevent the movement of civilians into and out of the city. Other cities would face similar restrictions. The desperation to complete the M3 between Winchester and Southampton and get on with the Newbury by-pass is partly due to their need to link the military port at Marchwood with army bases to the north. Indeed, one of the arguments raised by the security services against tunnelling under Twyford Down was the risk of sabotage.

Motorways are fundamental to the circulation of commodities - the lifeblood of capitalism - whether it's goods and services, workers or consumers. Along their routes supermarkets appear, alongside 'business parks', industrial estates and suburbs, providing new configurations of conformity and different possibilities for resistance.

While motorised transport and the infrastructure built for it is an example of capitalist technology, its subversion and use for purposes other than what was intended is always possible. As early as

1911 the Bonnot gang, a group of Anarchist bank robbers, were the first to use stolen cars for quick getaways. Meanwhile, motorways provide a rapid means for certain city folk to get out to the country whether it's for raves, festivals or turning over the odd stately home or golf clubhouse. Nor should we forget the mobile looters of the LA riots, loading the contents of blazing supermarkets and warehouses into the backs of their cars before heading back onto the freeway.

Motorways have also been used in the extension of industrial warfare. Recognising their economic importance, striking miners in 1984 took to driving in convoy across all three lanes of the M1 at a snail's pace to hold up the traffic. In Cleveland, USA, a partial reorganisation of space for proletarian needs was achieved during the Truckers' Strike of 1970. For thirty days truckers disrupted capitalist circulation with a mobile blockade of the roads in and around the city. The drivers took a part in the regulation of the city's affairs by sustaining the circulation of food and medicine. A lorry driver involved in a blockade of Southampton docks in 1991 was asked how it could be organised: 'It's easy, we just use the old CB grapevine'.

It is against this backdrop - the need to restrict working class mobility to acceptable limits like going to work - that we should look at such measures as police roadblocks, tolls on motorways, satellite and video surveillance of traffic and the campaigns against tax and insurance evasion. Class conflict occurs in all sorts of situations - this is one of them.

So, even within the dominant architecture and geography of capitalism the possibility for subversion is always present, even in the 'model communities' clustered along motorway corridors. Motorways - those arteries of profit and power - can also carry the virus of class warfare. Let's spread it.

SUBVERSION 18 - SPRING 1996

Section Six: Capitalist Strategies of Control

Bollocks to Clause Four

The Miners lead the way

What a sight, 239 miners, relatives and their supporters marching up the hill singing triumphantly (in Welsh), the Internationale and the Red Flag, as Tower Colliery was re-opened under employee ownership!... just as their predecessors had in 1947, when the coal mines were nationalised! Each miner had invested £8,000 of redundancy money and in addition collectively taken on huge additional debts to launch this new venture.

Tyron O'Sullivan - NUM official, a driving force behind the buy out and now personnel director (no change there really!) said of all this, in confused comment to the press:

'...yesterday was a triumph for a different kind of socialism and for a fight back against old-fashioned state capitalism.'

'...this is what I call real nationalisation.'

'Making a profit has never been a problem for socialists...here we've got equal shares.'

Ann Clwyd, Labour MP, added for good measure:

'It's not the Union Jack that's going to be raised over this pit but the Welsh dragon.'

So there you have it. The 'new venture' is 'real socialism' not 'state capitalism', but also at the same time it is 'real nationalisation'. It also apparently combines the best spirit of both workers' internationalism and Welsh nationalism!

One of the miners on the other hand (not one of the new directors) had a more pragmatic view:

'I don't really feel I'm an owner of the pit. I don't see myself as a capitalist but

as a lucky man who can go back to work at last after nine months.'

Well fair enough - but for how long? At Monktonhall colliery a good deal further along the road with its own employee buyout they've just gone on a wildcat strike in a dispute very reminiscent of the old NCB days.

What's it all about then?

Certainly nationalisation either as part of the so-called 'mixed economy' or in its recently deceased full-blown form in Russia and Eastern Europe, has been no friend of the working class. It can as O'Sullivan initially suggested best be described as (one form of) 'state capitalism', with all the usual trappings of money, markets, wages, profits and hierarchy.

Of course, O'Sullivan and his ilk fought to save nationalisation despite this, because they had a niche within the old system to protect. The revelation that it was really a load of crap only came after the battle had been lost and he'd got himself a new niche in the workers' company.

Nationalisation of the coal mines and other key industries in the past had its role to play, but for capitalism not the workers. As Victor Keegan, a supporter of past nationalisation put it:

'...because public ownership provided a humane and efficient umbrella for the rundown of the mines that would have been impossible to achieve with the old owners.'

Well, we're not sure redundant miners and their families would agree with the 'humane' part of that, but you get the drift.

Apart from anything else, nationalisation in Britain involved generously buy-

ing out the old owners, largely with government bonds on which the state continued to pay interest. So profits in the re-structured industry went into the state coffers and then out again to the capitalists the state borrowed from. The new coal industry also continued to provide a secure source of power to the rest of capitalist industry in the post-war period and released capital investment for the reconstruction of other sectors of the economy.

So-called revolutionaries like Militant and the SWP of course saw through this and demanded 'nationalisation without compensation'. The fact is this would prove disastrous if carried out by an isolated national government, as a result of market isolation and military intervention. In the case of Russia where the state nationalised industry already taken over by the workers or abandoned by its capitalist owners, the party bureaucracy simply substituted itself for the old bosses at the expense of the workers and then sent them off to fight a war on their behalf.

Mr. Blair and the Modernisers

When you think about it, that nice Mr Blair is right - nationalisation is out of date. It served its purpose (for capitalism) in the past, but in a world of major economic power blocs, like the European Union, NAFTA and APEC etc. spanning many countries, and with industry hungry for huge sums of capital investment beyond the scope of nationally-based organisations to provide, nationalisation is a hindrance to the expansion of capital.

There's another problem though. Nationalisation (or public ownership, if you prefer) whether by the central or local state (sometimes called municipalisation) was dead useful to capitalism to get its own way, while kidding workers

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that they were on the road to socialism, or at least a 'fairer' society. Tories as much as Labour recognised the value of all this. There was pretty much a consensus between them in post-war Britain, backed up by the common assumptions of Keynesian economic philosophy.

Now they need to perform the same sort of trick without nationalisation, which is where the Tories 'people's capitalism' and the Labour Party's re-definition of socialism and the debate on Clause 4 come in. We are witnessing the emergence of a new consensus.

The New Fools' Gold

We now find the Labour Party very interested in promoting employee ownership schemes. For inspiration, they are looking to the widespread systems of co-operative ownership in Europe, particularly in the agricultural sector, the employee ownership of industry in the USA (like TWA and North West Airlines) where some 10,000 companies are at least partially owned by those who work in them and even to some older established systems in this country like the consumer Co-operative Society and the John Lewis Partnership. Other ideas about worker share options and worker directors are also being explored.

It's a short step from this to suggesting, as Andrew Bennett MP and the Guardian's Victor Keegan do that workers' investment in pension funds and more directly in the likes of British Gas etc. is already well on the way to some new form of social ownership.

Stephen Pollard, head of research for the Fabian Society (didn't they have something to do with the original clause 4?) now says that, on paper at least, Britain already has 'common ownership' via the Pension and Insurance Fund Industry. Socialism really has come 'like a thief in the night' after all! Of course for Daily Mirror pensioners the thief wasn't 'socialism' but Robert Maxwell.

Andrew Bennett, who by the way thinks it's a mistake to re-write clause 4, has already re-written it in his own mind by referring to '...shared ownerships' of the means of production, distribution and exchange' in line with the new philosophy.

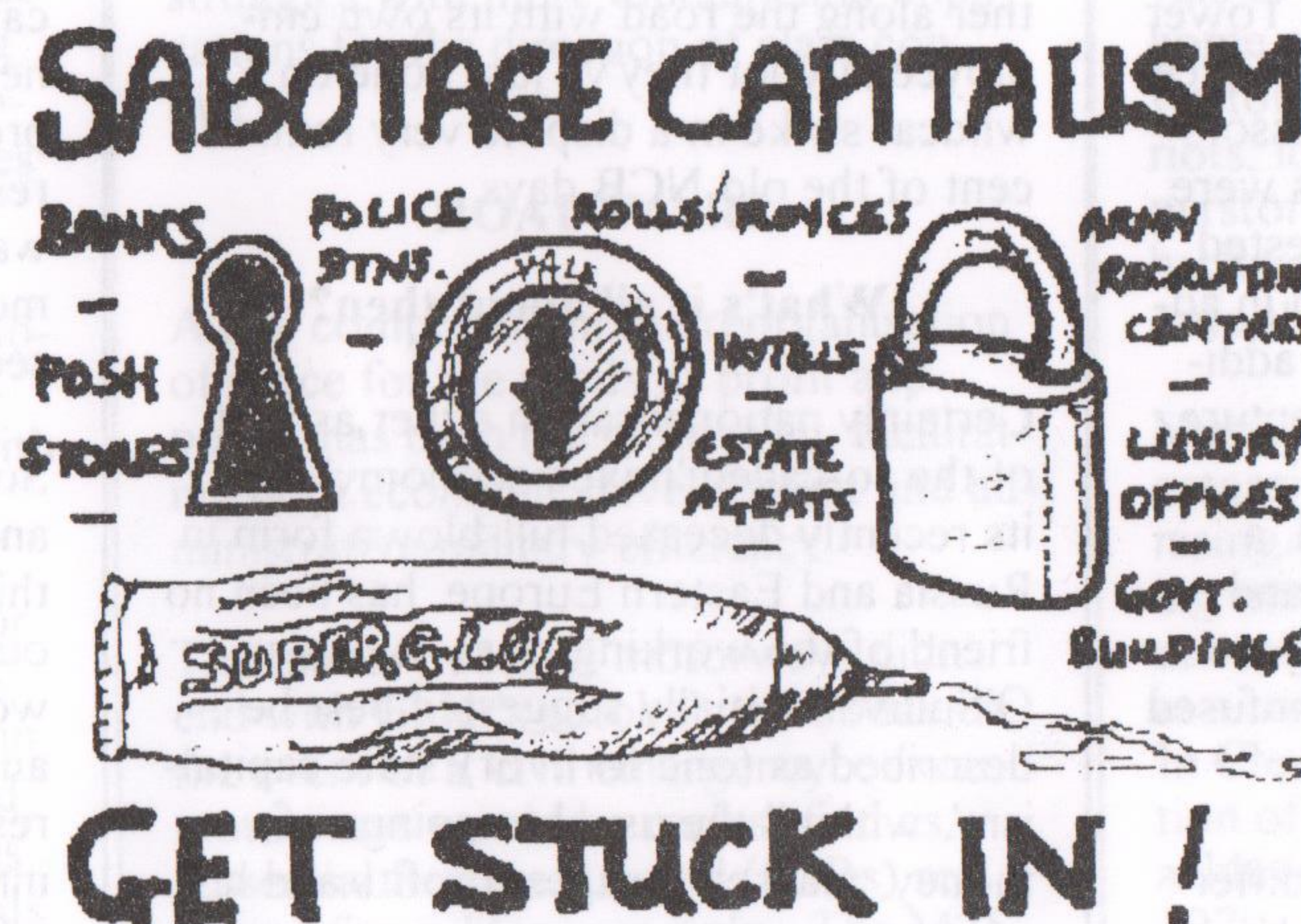
Turning in his Grave

Peter Hain MP, being a bit more of an intellectual, tries his hand at providing a few historical precedents in support of the new approach when he says:

'An alternative libertarian socialism, embracing figures as diverse as William Morris, Tom Mann, Robert Owen and Noam Chomsky, stresses decentralised control, with decision making in the hands of producers and consumers.'

Though his real reason for opposing nationalisation is the more mundane one of its 'costing too much.'

Hain obviously isn't a Radio 4 listener.



otherwise he would have heard the serialisation of William Morris's 'News from Nowhere' in which the view of Socialism as a moneyless, wageless, marketless society of free access is made quite clear. In this story of a futuristic society, the Houses of Parliament are put to good use as a store for manure. So in one sense at least things are the same - the contents of that place still stink!

Ownership and Control

Apparently behind Hain's support for New Labour's ideas is his belief that 'control is as important as ownership' (in fact he opposes one to the other). But this differentiation only makes sense if 'ownership' is perceived in a purely formal or legalistic sense. In the real world, ownership can only be defined in terms of control. Private ownership means exclusive control of something by a private individual, group or section of society to the exclusion of all others.

In Russia for instance, where the state used to own most industry and agriculture, the 'people' were legally the owners, but it was the bureaucracy which had exclusive control of the means of production and therefore they who in PRACTICE owned the means of production.

Equally, a workers co-op whilst instituting common ownership amongst its members (if we ignore for the moment the rights of its creditors), is a form of private ownership as against the rest of society.

So long as the relationship between workers co-ops (or any other forms of worker controlled units) is governed by money and the market or indeed by any means of equal EXCHANGE, then so long will people as a whole fail to exert conscious social control over society as a whole. So long as production remains primarily geared towards exchange on the market rather than towards directly satisfying peoples self-expressed needs then 'common ownership of the means of production and distribution' will not have been achieved.

Furthermore, in time, the pressures of production for the market inevitably take their toll of any innovative attempts at equality within individual co-ops or other similar set-ups.

As an aside, you'll note that we don't talk about common ownership of the 'means of exchange' since as you have probably already gathered we consider this to be a totally contradictory statement. You can't exchange that which is held in common or the products of that held in common.

Thus, Clause 4 is in both theory and practice a statement of state capitalist aims and has nothing to do with socialism in its original sense. Labour's 'new' ideas are a just a mixture of traditional and worker-administered forms of capitalism regulated by the state. Just a different form of state capitalism really!

Just remember, painting America's TWA airline red didn't make it part of a communist transport system!

SUBVERSION 16 - SPRING 1995

Technology and Class

NOTE: The following two articles were originally discussion documents for a day conference we held in Salford in June 1995. The conference was held jointly with the 'Liverpool Discussion Group.'

Capitalism is a system of social relations. In its simple form this is represented by a CONTRACT between the worker who only has his or her ability to work and the OWNER of certain means of production. The worker is then placed into the capitalist plan of production, that is the LABOUR PROCESS.

Capitalism is at one and the same time both a CHAOTIC and a PLANNED system. In the chaos of the market place the capitalist attempts to sell his products [for despite the fact that they are made by workers they remain HIS products]. But in order for him to be successful he has to sell his products at a competitive price, or a price that is dictated by the international market. He therefore seeks to obtain this price by paying the lowest possible one for labour and materials, AND by organising the labour process so as to minimise the socially necessary labour time that goes into making products. The workers for their part seek to get the best possible price for their labour [power] and to minimise the effort expended. Here commeth the CLASS STRUGGLE.

One of the means which capital has used to extract surplus value is through the development of science and technology. Scientific development has ALWAYS been used as a weapon by capital to attack and break up concentrations of working class power. The problem for capital is that what replaces the old class composition can become an even bigger threat. Henry Ford's introduction of the production line process was designed explicitly to break the power of the skilled craft workers, but in the process there was created a NEW and MORE ANTAGONISTIC composition of the working class. This was the MASS WORKER, the worker of the giant production factories. Some of us taking part in the discussion are the remnants of that composition.

Fraud 2000

Today by contrast, with its new project called 'Ford 2000', that company is attempting, once again to be the 'cutting edge' of capitalist development. In addition, as the 'Fordist' model of production developed it also brought about changes in the 'state form'. What emerged was the 'Planner State', with Keynesian economics at its heart. The economies of capital were to be planned rather than left to the vagaries of the market.

The Keynesian project was an attempt to balance the unbalanceable. That is it attempted to contain the class struggle within defined limits AND to use it as the MOTOR for capitalist development of the economy. Wage rises and the 'social wage', that is the benefits of the welfare state, were to be paid for by increases in productivity, which in turn would provide the mass of goods and the consumers for this new market.

In the period after World War Two the 'Planner State' became the norm in all the major Western economies, and oversaw what has been called a golden age of accumulation or 'growth'. The 60s and 70s also saw however the emergence and growth of a new militant and political class struggle as the proletariat increasingly refused its part of this bargain.

The struggles of the 60s and 70s, which spread out of the factories and into the communities, undoubtedly threw capital into crisis. The demands of the working class forced capital to look for newer and more radical solutions. These were sought in the fields of technology and economic policy. The production systems of the big factories were to be dismantled and a 'monetarist' approach to economic policy AND the state form became the priorities.

Multinational Capital

This project of MULTINATIONAL capital is dispersing the old concentrations of the working class.

Within the workplace the attack is not

just technological but also involves changes in the length of the working week / year and in the status of workers. Increased 'casualisation' of work and the creation of 'core' and 'peripheral' work forces has helped to disperse our class. Some workers have become almost invisible. And the INTERNATIONAL division of the labour process, whilst creating for perhaps the first time a truly world wide working class, is making it correspondingly more difficult for workers to organise resistance. This attack is also not confined to the 'industrial' working class, but affects all sections of workers and all spheres of our lives.

Crisis for the working class

These truly revolutionary changes that have been and are taking place have thrown us into a crisis. They pose problems for the organisational forms and institutions developed by the working class and its revolutionary movement. For some they have proved insurmountable, many people have been physically and psychologically damaged by this current stage of capitalist development. Some have even been destroyed by it.

One final point by way of introduction, capital has made a determined effort to change the gender balance of the international working class. It believes [in so far as it consciously thinks about this at all] that women are more docile and therefore more easily controlled. Here I believe it is making a serious error for when the working class fights back [as it most assuredly will] the solidarity of women will be a major weapon in our armoury. I also believe that the necessarily increased involvement of women will lead to the development of new forms of organisation. *'Modern industry makes Science a productive force distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital.'* Karl Marx.

Technology is an arm and a product of that Science. Technology therefore IS NOT NEUTRAL, it is a weapon of capital pointed at the working class, and it has enabled capital to disperse

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production around the globe and thereby create a genuinely international division of labour. The struggles of the 60s and 70s pointed to a horizon of separation, that is a separation of the working class from capital. It was those struggles which produced the technology and the political state form we face today.

It is actually workers struggles that provide the dynamic of capitalist development. Capital does not produce new technologies on a whim, but rather it is driven by its internal antagonism, it reacts to the THE OTHER that exists within itself - us, the working class. We are like the alien in the movie, striving to break out and destroy that which contains us. Capital has a constant need to forestall, disrupt and defeat the collective power of the 'enemy within'. And one of the methods it uses is technological innovation. Capital's tendency to increase the proportion of dead or constant capital as against the living or variable capital involved in the production process arises from the fact that living capital, the worker, is AN INSURGENT ELEMENT with whom management is constantly locked in battle.

This struggle has historical antecedents. In the first quarter of this century the dominant forces within the working class were largely the craftsmen, the highly skilled engineering workers who provided the nucleus of Bolshevism and Council Communism. Faced with the threat of these revolutionary movements and fearful of the spread of their ideas, capital undertook a drastic reshaping of production with the aim of deskilling the labour force and separating it from its political vanguards. There were two main components to the project. Taylorist based organisation of the labour process and Fordist restructuring of the working day and wage. In this capital was successful.

Thatcher, Regan and Ned Ludd

At a later stage those who resisted in the 60s and 70s faced a new state form by the beginning of the 80s - the 'crisis state' as Toni Negri calls it. We know it better as Thatcherism or Reaganism, two names which I believe actually mystify and personalise CAPITAL's attack upon the working class. Welfare provision was dismantled in favour of discipline by austerity as capital refused any longer to bear the costs of the reproduction of labour power. Monetary policy assumed a central role in driving down real wages, and the ability of the

class to fight back was hampered by legal restraints. We didn't roll over and play dead, we resisted, but WE WERE DEFEATED, and not just in Britain but on a world scale.

At the level of production, multinational capital started to reorganise itself, to disperse and decentralise the locus of its productive activity. When capital began to realise the possibilities that existed within the new technologies it had called into being, it was unsure at first how the working class would react to these self same possibilities. Would a new form of Luddism arise? Would the working class see the technology as something designed to defeat them? It must have seemed likely for IBM for one ran a series of advertisements criticising Luddism and Luddite practices - and this 150 years after the real thing.

As well as the harsh economic policies of monetarism, capital used the 'fifth column' of the 'fourth estate' - the press and the media - to break down resistance to technological change. The propaganda machine went into overdrive. We were told that the end of drudgery was upon us. We were going to spend less time in work and have more time for 'leisure' pursuits. And anyway the growth in the leisure industries would pick up any fallout in terms of unemployment from the manufacturing sector. We would learn new skills as old ones disappeared, life would become one continuous educational journey.

Some even posited the 'end of work' - and how we looked forward to that! But for four million people at least in this country, they were right! With paradise on the horizon how could there be any need for archaic notions like socialism or communism? Surely everybody was going to share the fruits of the technological tree. Because for so many of us in the 60s and 70s the struggle had centred on the 'refusal of work', the scam was bought.

As the media distorted the true nature of the changes that were about to take place our class was faced with another problem - the attitude of the trade unions to technology. Those grey minds in grey suits whose job it is to 'sell' us to capital had a grasp on it straightaway however. As the TUC put it in 1979,

'There is the challenge that the rapid introduction of new processes and work organisation will lead to the loss of many more jobs and to growing social dislocation. Equally however, there is the realisation that new technologies also offer great opportunities, not just for increasing the competitiveness of BRITISH industry but for increasing

the quality of working life and for providing new benefits to working people.' Well, 'quality of life' and 'new benefits' don't come easily to mind when trying to sum up the last sixteen years. This ambiguity is a constant factor in trade discussion of the subject, whether at national or local level. It is located in the totally mistaken belief that technology is neutral. In addition the 'Left' for the most part takes this view as well. But as someone said, 'The tool integrated into the system of machinery becomes a machine tool, a machine which incorporates social relations. The social relations of capitalism. Technology is not neutral because it incorporates in its mode of operation the dexterity and skill of the worker who is henceforth deprived of her skill and subordinated from the point of view of social production to that technology.'

We are today in the period of 'real subsumption', where the urge to generate a surplus results in the wholesale reorganisation of work, with the aim of profiting from economies of scale and cooperation. Science is being systematically applied to industry, and technological innovation become PERPETUAL. The focus is on the relative intensification of productivity rather than the absolute extension of working hours, and consumption is organised by the wholesale cultivation of new 'needs'. The technological weapons we face today, based on the silicon chip, fibre optics and satellite communications, interact with one another to divide us AND the labour process up. Thereby making it easier for capital to control the cycle of accumulation.

The giant factories are coming to the end of their life span as capital 'hives off' more and more work to subcontractors. And they in turn hive some of it off to smaller outfits, including homeworkers, who sometimes utilise the labour of their children. And in saying this I am speaking of this country as well as the so called 'third world'.

Sweatshops are a fact of life throughout the world. It is only by the use of technology that capital can at the same time disperse the division of labour around the globe AND at the same time increase its control over the labour process. The Ford Motor Company is at this moment centralising its control over the whole Ford empire. Alex Trotman, head of international operations and an ex-member of the English working class, has said that they now have the technological means to centralise everything at the company's Dearborn headquarters. They can now

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build the 'world car' and anticipate savings of between \$2 or \$3 billion from the Ford 2000 project.

The stark goals of the 'information revolution' are the control and reduction of the costs of labour. The rundown of the Welfare State has to be seen in relation to their ability to move production around the globe. Multinational capital is no longer prepared to pay the costs of reproduction of labour in the old economies of the West. When they can hire twenty Phillipino workers for the price of one European, why should they?

The fear and uncertainty that have been produced by the changes in world capitalism are being used to push through strategies and tactics designed to further fragment us. The development of 'core' and 'peripheral' workers is one element; the precarious situation of peripheral workers is the price paid for the relative 'security' of the core workforce. And in the workplace the introduction of quality circles, continuous 'improvement' meetings and team working are designed to get us to police ourselves and talk our mates out of their jobs. Fear permeates into the public sector where the law of value is being applied.

Decline of the unions

In fact capitalism is now everywhere, in every aspect of our lives, it is a totally socialised system. Every aspect of our lives, not just work, is geared to the production and extraction of surplus value. The changes outlined that have and are taking place have had and will continue to have a profound effect on the 'labour movement' and the 'Left'. A 33% reduction in the number of unions in this country between 1981 and 1991 and the slump in membership figures reflects a world wide crisis for the trade unions. Increasingly capital has no need for the mediating role of the trade unions. With the technology at its disposal it can switch production around the globe if there are strikes or other forms of 'disruption'.

The response in this country has been for the TUC to cuddle up to the CBI. They do this in order to convince management that they still have a useful role to play - in 'adding value'. And only when they can add value to the product will capital work with them. In other words the only role for the trade unions is to assist in the continued exploitation of the working class.

We have in addition seen the disintegra-

tion of the Stalinist economies of the former 'Eastern bloc' - this means there is now a huge pool of labour available for exploitation by multinational capital. The major barrier to this exploitation apart from political instability is the lack of suitable infrastructure especially in the field of communications. So communications capital, including our 'own' Cable and Wireless, owners of Mercury who have just pulled OUT of providing a public service in this country, are presently working on a system of financial and technological support for the old Eastern bloc and other states with similar 'infrastructure' problems. Billions of potential workers will then be ready to flood the world labour market. Ford's by the way, have opened two component plants in China in the last six months, with two more due to come on stream shortly.

The problems posed by these developments for the Western working class are perhaps, akin to the ones faced by the handloom weavers during the Industrial Revolution. These workers saw their wages drop by some 80 odd per cent in a thirty year period. The weavers and their families starved as they were replaced by machine minders. The experience of being on the periphery is a painful and disorientating one for the Western working class. The steady employment that many have taken for granted is disappearing and high levels of unemployment are becoming a permanent feature. The developments in technology and the access that multinationals have to a world labour force means that these levels are not going to fall. But the people in the dole queues will be constantly changing as they move in and out of jobs that are increasingly casual.

Multinational capital constantly demand lower costs and their suppliers must meet these demands. Casualisation of the labour force is one answer open to them. This is why work contracts tend now to be for less than two years, so that even the meagre state 'protections' against redundancy is of no use. And companies like Ford are cutting back on the number of suppliers they use - in the case of the Mondeo this has been reduced by 65%. With the life-span of new models continually getting shorter, the work 'guaranteed' to the chosen suppliers will be further reduced.

Labouring in Vain

To those who think that the Labour Party will be able to do something about the movement of multinational companies and finance capital I say -

GET REAL. The last Labour Government's ability to manoeuvre against the demands of the IMF and World Bank in 1976 was limited, but those difficulties will be as nothing compared to what they will have to face next time round. We have a truly international capital which now has the technology to circumvent any of the restrictions that nation state might want to impose on production or capital flows.

In fact the nation state is fast becoming an anachronism. Multinational capital like the first bourgeoisie, demands a state form that truly represents its interests. Of course the internationalisation of capital also means the internationalisation of the working class.

The nationalistic parties of Social Democracy and the sectionalism of trade unions are blockages and obstacles that the newly reemerging working class must CONFRONT and DESTROY. In the last two hundred years or so, driven by the motor of the class struggle, capital and the working class have continually changed their compositions. Can anything like the same be said for the revolutionary movement? In the main the answer has to be NO. In fact most of what claims to be revolutionary today is also anachronistic [at best]. It is somewhat ironic that the groups of the 'Left' can only offer our class forms of organisation and institutions that are rooted in the past.

Capital changes, the class changes, but the 'Left' is still living in the first twenty years of this century. The 'Left's' forms of organisation - democratic centralism and council communism, were rooted in and products of a particular composition of the working class - that of the skilled craft worker. It should be obvious that that particular composition has long ceased to exist, as SHOULD ITS ORGANISATIONAL FORMS. Both forms were created by white, male, skilled workers and yet they are continually offered as a model for a modern, multi-ethnic and increasingly female dominated, INTERNATIONAL working class. Our class does and will continue to fight back, but it can only do so in ways that reflect its new composition.

SUBVERSION 17 - AUTUMN 1995

The City, Social Control and the Local State

"Modern civilisation has crowded the destitute classes together in the cities making their existence thereby more conspicuous and more dangerous. These already form a substantial part of the population, and possess even now, though they are still ignorant of their full power, great political importance... Almost every winter in London there is a panic lest the condition of the poor should become intolerable. The richer classes awake for a moment from their apathy, and salve their consciences by a subscription of money... The annual alarm may some day prove a reality, and the destitute classes may swell to such a proportion as to render continuance of our existent social order impossible" - Sir John Gorst, Tory MP in the 1880s.

Charles Booth in the same period was also to articulate these fears and to promote a combination of charity and social reform aimed at containing the situation.

Periodically the ruling class has become alarmed at the reaction of the working class, and in particular sections of the poorest workers concentrated in the large urban conurbations, to the effects of capitalism.

At its most basic it has been the fear of general social disorder and lawlessness spreading to the wider working class and beyond that, fear that consent for the established order might break down amidst growing organised collective action by sections of the working class with literally "nothing to lose".

Similar fears began to emerge during the late sixties, as rising working class expectations hit the beginnings of the economic crisis to create an explosion of resistance across Europe and the rest of the world, in which rulers and revolutionaries alike saw the seeds of revolutionary change.

Our rulers had problems enough with the expressions of that resistance in workplace struggle but they did have in place flexible and experienced organisations of recuperation in the form of the trade unions. Outside the workplace,

things were different. The traditional modes of instilling respect for authority, in particular organised religion and the family, were beginning to break down. 'Community' ties built up over generations on the back of stable single industry employment in heavy engineering, shipbuilding, coal extraction etc were also breaking down as these industries were consciously run down in the 'white hot heat of technological change'.

There was also the beginnings of open racial conflict in some areas as black workers began to flex their muscle and some white workers, uncertain of their future, began to resent this. Many young working class people brought up on full employment and the 'welfare state' and without the memory of the privations of war were less grateful and more challenging than their parents. There was the emergence of the 'generation gap' and the 'youth revolt'. Our rulers began to feel very uneasy about this seeming 'Pandora's box' which they had opened themselves.

But the ruling class in Britain is one of the most experienced in the world. They had come a long way since the 1880s and were certainly not going to sit around until the simmering revolt in the cities could only be contained, if at all, by simple armed suppression.

The apparatus of the state - central and local government and the 'institutions of learning' - were soon put to work, firstly in research and practical experimentation, and then into the task of both shoring up the old institutions of recuperation and creating new ones. They launched an ideological and organisational first strike.

Already in the early sixties, there had been a series of government commissions which had raised alarm bells: Milner-Holland on London's housing, Ingleby on children and young persons, Plowden on primary education and Seebohm on personal social services. All of them were concerned not with poverty and its attendant effects on the working class as a whole but with the way poverty was particularly concentrated in certain working class areas.

They recommended the setting up of 'special areas of control', 'priority areas' and so on where the central and local state apparatus would apply 'positive discrimination'.

At this stage the officials were stressing the need for extra financial resources to be applied as a worthwhile investment by the ruling class against worse and more expensive problems in the future. But as the economic crisis grew worse and the relative burden of state expenditure increased, it became more a matter of 'prioritising' scarce and reduced resources. Over the next ten years there were many more commissions and official reports looking into different aspects of the poverty problems of the inner cities. One of the earliest saw the setting up firstly of the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants and then the Community Relations Commission, whose overriding concern was to 'integrate' the 'newcomers' into British society.

What was to emerge from these reports was a series of state-funded programmes and special area initiatives promoted by a range of government departments at the forefront of which was perhaps not surprisingly the Home Office who became very interested in extending their role from 'hard cop' into 'soft cop'. They were to set up one of the more enduring initiatives known as the 'Urban Aid Programme'. The first Urban Programme circular in October 1968 spelt out their objectives:

"The government proposed to initiate an urban programme of expenditure mainly on education, housing, health and welfare in areas of Special Social Need. Those were localised districts which bear the marks of multiple deprivations, which may show itself, for example, by way of notable deficiencies in the physical environment, particularly housing; overcrowding of houses, family sizes above the average; persistent unemployment; a high proportion of children in trouble or in need of care, or a combination of these. A substantial degree of immigrant settlement would also be an important factor, though not the only factor, in determining the exis-

tence of special social need."

These were pretty much the determining factors which were to be used for all the various schemes which subsequently emerged, although as concern increased about the financial burdens of caring for the old, large concentrations of elderly persons was also added to the list.

The Reports and programmes also started to conform to a pattern of pseudo-scientific language supplied by the newly fashionable Social Science departments which sought to define the problems in terms of the inadequacies of the people living in the areas rather than the effects of state-sponsored economic restructuring on those areas or the inadequacies of the competitive market economy etc. It is from this era that terms like 'multiple deprivation', 'cycle of deprivation', 'social malaise' etc originate. The definition of the problem as something related only to certain isolated areas implied that the 'system' was basically doing its job fine for the rest of us! The solution then lay not in wholesale social and economic change but in administrative and technical adjustments to the system.

A particular concern at this time was to draw people in the defined areas back into the system of 'democratic representation'. For instance, working class participation in local government elections was low at the best of times but one of the defining features of the areas which concerned the state was the even tinier proportion of people voting. The state has a continuing need to keep its fingers on the working class pulse but the absence of established channels of communications was preventing this from happening. Many of the schemes funded from the Urban Programme or set up separately were particularly concerned to establish new local forms of representation, which would include residents' associations, community groups, government funded agencies, councillors, council officials, the police, churches and so on, and which would act as a kind of bridgehead into the reformed local and central government structures. 'Neighbourhood Councils', 'Community Forums', 'Area Management Committees', 'Local Steering Groups' were just some of the names used to describe these experiments in 'democracy'.

Many of the early schemes were in the nature of 'action-research', applied to very small areas indeed, and intended on the basis of experimentation with different models of administration and technical applications to provide feed-

back to governments on the need for broader legislative change and ways of 'cost-effective' management of the 'poverty problem' and of the working class itself. The finance doled out in these cases was piddling, barely enough to cover the wages of a few administrators and researchers and fund a few public relations exercises.

In the housing field, some schemes did bring in real money but always there was always far more schemes bidding than actually got resources allocated. This was the beginning of a more intensive competitive approach to obtaining funds for 'special areas'. Local authorities had long been used to this on a broader scale but now local working class people were to be actively drawn into this process of competing with each other, usually on the demeaning basis of proving how much more rotten 'their' area was than anyone else's!

Obtaining 'community involvement' was not just about shoring up 'consent' to the system and its ways of doing things, it was also aimed at getting the poor to 'do for themselves' at minimal cost to the state. As usual, it was often women who were expected to do most of the 'doing'. Small amounts of money were aimed at various self-help organisations - playgroups, gardening clubs, advice centres, youth clubs, daycare, recycling workshops, crime watch, voluntary language classes and a host of others. The purpose, in summary, was to "take some of the load off the statutory services by generating a fund of voluntary social welfare activity and mutual help amongst the individuals, families and social groups in the neighbourhood, supported by the voluntary agencies" (CDP Objectives and Strategy, 1970).

These small sums of money were seen as 'seed corn' which through a lot of effort by other people would grow into something which could actually be 'eaten'. Another term often used was 'pump-priming', basically facilitating others to get things moving. Much was made also of the 'multiplier effect' - the idea that some initial finance could attract both money and effort from other organisations or the 'community' itself to make something much more effective than the initial sum would itself have provided for. Of course, any group which got a grant or a loan had to provide progress reports and accounts etc which kept the paymasters in touch with what was happening on the ground.

The various special area schemes came and went providing the state with much useful information along the way.

Some new ones were set up with different names and in different areas and the whole process repeated. As for the multiplier effect, many groups suffered severely when the special area schemes disappeared and they had to rely on mainstream government or local authority funding which was being cut back. Many had to close down altogether.

In terms of any real impact on the social and economic conditions of people living in the special areas, the results were pretty negligible - where anything was achieved in a particular area, this was more than matched by serious decline elsewhere. In Liverpool, for instance, which in the late sixties and early seventies had more poverty initiatives than any other city, almost every indicator had got worse and seriously worse in the inner city areas.

Clearly none of the schemes was aimed even collectively at altering the general poverty suffered by our class. At best the more naive social reformers thought they might spread the poverty more evenly - but even here they failed miserably.

The EEC had joined the bandwagon in 1974 with its Social Action Programme, demonstrating that the same problems and concerns of the British state (under Labour and Tory) were shared by states in the rest of Europe. The thinking of the Eurocrats was along familiar lines - the objectives of one of their projects - a network of family advice centres - was to "help the poorest families come to terms with the particular ill effects of extreme poverty". They followed the same path as the nationally inspired schemes, gathering intelligence for the state, deflecting independent class-based opposition but providing little in the way of new resources.

Although most of the 'action-research' type projects came to an end in this period, others like the Urban Programme and Housing Action Areas achieved a degree of permanence and continued to selectively fund various local schemes around the country.

Things had tended to settle down into more of an administrative routine until, in 1981, various inner city areas - Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Brixton, Birmingham and Bristol - exploded into riots. The initial spark for many of the riots was confrontation between the police and black youth. This in itself said much about the failure of various programmes to integrate particularly sec-

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ond generation black youth into the system. More worrying for the state was the fact that many other, young and not so young, working class people, black and white, working and unemployed, either actively joined in or gave support.

Suddenly the spotlight was again on the 'poverty stricken' inner cities and the 'failure' of twelve years of the 'poverty programme' was highlighted for all to see. After an initial period of government tough talk and then reflection, decisions were taken to both tool up the hard cops and reinvigorate the soft cop approach. Some extra resources were made available but generally existing programmes were re-prioritised towards the riot-torn areas.

Given the experience of the previous 'poverty programme', you might have expected some fresh thinking, but for the most part it wasn't forthcoming. The same concepts, approaches and strategies using the same language were simply beefed up a bit and relaunched.

If there was a change it was only that now competition for the scarce resources was even more extreme. The government's 'Estate Action Programme' for run-down council estates was expanded. There was a reemphasis on local corporate management and the need to promote 'employment and training' as part of the process of physical regeneration.

As time went by, there was a shift to fewer but larger, more radical schemes with the birth of Housing Action Trusts, City Challenge and Urban and Industrial Development Corporations. Although, in line with Tory thinking, private business has become much more involved with these schemes, the approach on the ground in terms of 'community involvement', 'self-help', 'building a consensus' etc was much the same as far as the inner city housing areas were concerned.

The objective of transferring responsibility to local people for administering themselves at reduced cost to the state and effectively making working class people themselves prioritise the resources doled out, received new impetus. On the one hand, through a process of atomising estates through pressure on people to buy their council houses, and on the other by dividing council estates through schemes for tenant management or even tenant co-ops. Needless to say, local Labour-controlled authorities, after expressing some initial concerns, have enthusiastically

cally taken up all these ideas.

Having sold the need for 'local corporate management' approaches and 'multi-disciplinary' working in the special areas, the government, under increased pressure to cut public spending, cleverly repackaged most of its various schemes into one pot called the 'Single Regeneration Budget' and in the process cut the overall spending. In future, special areas might be larger but there were a lot less of them, with EEC money also being 'prioritised' into the same areas.

The picture painted here is of a fairly consistent state policy being carried out throughout the period 1968 to the present day, with more or less enthusiasm, depending on the level of working class revolt in the cities. To the extent that some local working class areas have benefited from extra resources, this has generally only acted as a break on the deteriorating social and economic climate and has been at the expense of workers elsewhere.

From the state's point of view, the problems associated with the breakdown of 'community' and family support structures relate to the conservative role these have played in reproducing authoritarian pro-establishment values and maintaining at little cost to the state a sufficiently tolerable condition for the 'poor', to avoid open revolt. For workers there are also problems associated with these changes, including the effects of 'anti-social' crime, which predispose them to the enticements of the state, in the absence of anything better.

But it would be wrong to see the workers in these areas as simply being acted upon by the authorities. First of all, their selection has usually been a response to local revolt, local organisation and activity. Workers don't just give up in situations, even of extreme poverty, many fight back and try to do so collectively. If the form of that collective action is limited and stunted by capitalist ideology that is perhaps to be expected. Workers recognise and fight for (or at least campaign for!) more resources. Even where organisation is localised, the workers in many cases do not see their struggle as being at the expense of workers elsewhere. But the state does not hand back resources without having control over them, or at least ensuring the structures set up, and the 'thinking' of those entrusted with the resources are such that it can rest easy they will be used in the 'correct' way.

In the process, the very moment of victory, when hard fought-for money or

other resources are won by local working class people, is often also the point at which the organisation set up to use the resources becomes an agent of the state rather than an expression, however deformed, of working class aspirations. If the state manages to suck in local working class leaders from amongst the activists, it has succeeded in containing opposition, but since it can't actually solve our problems, revolt will inevitably reemerge. The state hopes when it does, that it has the right people and structures in the 'community' to deflect it - but there are no guarantees.

There are risks in the state's approach, that local working class people won't be sucked in and that promises made, skills developed, and organisations set up supposedly within secure state tutelage, will turn "against the hand that feeds them". It has happened in a number of cases. Even the state-paid workers employed to encourage this whole approach can turn out to be unreliable. A whole network of 'Community Development Workers' employed by Manchester City Council, for instance, had to be closed down when they turned into local agitators. Even more impressive were the national network of Community Development Project workers funded through the Home Office and local authorities who got together to expose the whole racket in a series of excellently informative pamphlets, one of which ("Gilding the Ghetto"), supplied much of the inspiration and information for this discussion paper! They were eventually closed down.

Unfortunately, there are many self-proclaimed radicals whose ideas around concepts of 'self-management', 'anarcho-syndicalism', 'local autonomy' etc are easily co-opted by the more experienced ideologists of the state. Credit unions, LETS schemes and so on, popular amongst many anarchists and greens, are already being eyed up by local representatives of the state - political and professional - as a useful adjunct to their machinery of incorporation! We need to be much more aware of the subtleties of the state's local management policies, if we are to try and help revolt turn into revolution rather than a means of reforming the existing system to help it survive a bit longer.

Subversion 17 - Autumn 1995

Something about ourselves

THE REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE TO LEFT-WING POLITICS

The Left has not failed. And that is one of the greatest disasters ever to befall the working class.

Most people think that the Left is the movement of the working class for socialism (albeit riven by opportunism and muddle-headed interpretations on the part of many in its ranks).

Nothing could be further from the truth.

We in Subversion (and the wider movement of which we are a part) believe that left-wing politics are simply an updated version of the bourgeois democratic politics of the French revolution, supplemented by a state-capitalist economic programme.

Consider:

In the French revolution, the up and coming capitalist class were confronted not only by the old order, but also by a large and growing urban plebeian population (the working class in formation, artisans, petty traders and the like), who had their own genuine aspirations for freedom from oppression, however incoherent.

Bourgeois democracy was the device that enabled the capitalist class to disguise their own aspirations for power as the liberation of everyone outside the feudal power structure.

The notion of the People (as though different classes, exploiters and exploited, could be reduced to a single entity) was thus born.

The notion of Equality and the notion of Rights possessed by all presented a fictitious view of society as a mass of individuals who all stood in the same relations to the law - completely ignoring the difference between the property

and finally

owners and those whose labour they exploit.

And, above all, the notion of the Nation - that the oppressed class should identify with those of their oppressors who live in the same geographical area or speak the same language, and see as alien those of our class who are on the other side of "national borders".

By means of this imaginary view of society, capitalism was able to dominate the consciousness of the newly forming working class. Bourgeois democracy is the biggest con in history.

Consider also:

As capitalism developed more and more, the material position of the working class forced it to engage in struggle despite its bourgeois consciousness - thus enabling this consciousness to be undermined.

The existing capitalist regimes often came to be hated. Thus there was a need for a more radical version of bourgeois democracy with a more specifically working class image. Left wing politics fulfilled this role in the 19th and 20th centuries, first in the form of Social Democracy or Labourism and then in the form of Bolshevism. Both of these variants managed to dress up support for capitalism in working class language, and became major players in the full development of capitalism (this was especially true in Russia, where State Capitalism, introduced by the Bolsheviks, a supposedly working class party, was the only way capitalism could be developed).

So what does Leftism consist of?

At first blush it seems to be about supporting the struggle of the workers, but when you look more closely everything is on the terrain of capitalist politics. The main features of Leftism are:

Support for radical capitalist Parties

Such as the Labour Party in this country and the ANC in South Africa (precisely because its goal is to widen bourgeois democracy - the vote etc.), and support for Parliament. Some "revolutionary" groups who don't support the Labour Party nevertheless still support participation in parliament - thereby helping in practice to uphold the ideology of bourgeois democracy.

Support for State Capitalism

Already referred to above, State Capitalism (a term with various meanings, but here we mean the form of society that developed in Russia and its imitators) collects all property into the hands of the state. And this is a capitalist state, not a "workers' state" because capitalist property relations still exist - wage labour, money, the market - and of course the workers do not control the state. The state, indeed, confronts the workers as the 'collective capitalist', extracting surplus value from them for the ruling bureaucrats, who are themselves the "collective bourgeoisie".

Let us be clear about this: the only way capitalism can be dismantled is for the working class to immediately abolish money and the market, and distribute goods according to need (albeit with scarce goods being rationed for a time if necessary). Those who argue that this cannot be done immediately are in fact arguing for retaining the very core of capitalist social relations - if that is done the revolution is as good as dead.

The idea that state capitalism is not capitalism doesn't merely justify support for anti-working class dictatorships like Russia, China, Cuba etc., but creates the very real danger of such a society being created in any future revolution.

Support for Nationalism in its "radical" form

Left wing groups routinely advocate support for weaker, e.g. 'third world',

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nation states - meaning the governments of nation states, against stronger ones (Iraq in the Gulf War etc.). This is described as anti-imperialism (1) as though the victory of the weaker country would do more than slightly alter the ranking of states within the world imperialist pecking order. Imperialism is a historical stage of capitalism and opposing it, as opposed to opposing capitalism itself via working class revolution, is meaningless.

The most common form of this "radical" nationalism consists of so-called "national liberation movements", such as the IRA, who don't yet have state power. As soon as they do come to power they always crush the working class - that is, of course, the nature of bourgeois state power.

Often the line will be used that, even if one disapproves of nationalism, that nevertheless nations have a right to self-determination, and one must support their rights. A purer example of bourgeois democratic double-talk could not be imagined: Rights are not something that actually exists, but are a bourgeois mystification (see above). The working class should not talk about its rights but about its class interest. Talking about a right to national "self-determination" (as though a geographical grouping of antagonistic classes can be a 'self') is like saying that workers have a "right" to be slaves if they want to, or a "right" to beat themselves over the head with a hammer if they want to. Anyone who supports the 'right' to something anti-working class is actually helping to advocate it, whatever their mealy-mouthed language.

Siding with the working class against all capitalist factions necessitates opposing all forms of nationalism whatsoever. Any wobbling on this will lead the working class to defeat yet again.

Support for Trade Unionism

Seemingly the most working class activity of all, Trade Unionism is above all a movement to reconcile the workers to capitalism. Its stated aim is to get workers the best deal within capitalism, but it's not even that.

The mass of workers have bourgeois consciousness, but because capitalism forces them to struggle, they can resist despite that consciousness and thereby begin to change that consciousness.

Struggles of the working class are the seeds of revolutionary change. But because Trade Unions are made up of the mass of workers (with bourgeois consciousness) and exist all the time - i.e. when there's no class struggle (and although the day-to-day life of workers can well be called a struggle, we are of course talking about collective struggle) the said Unions inevitably fail to challenge capitalism, and furthermore become dominated by a clique of bureaucrats who rise above the passive mass of workers. These bureaucrats get their livelihood from the day-to-day existence within capitalism that is Trade Unionism. They are thus materially tied to it. That is why when struggle breaks out, the Union machine sabotages it and stabs workers in the back in the time honoured tradition. This will always be the case - the workers can never seize the unions. The very nature of Trade Unionism produces anti-working class bureaucratic control.

We believe the workers must create new structures, controlled from the bottom up, to run every struggle that occurs, outside and against the Unions, if the struggle is to go forward. Left wing groups' support for Trade Unions is just one more way in which they help shackle the working class to capitalism.

And last but certainly not least, advocacy of the Leadership of "revolutionaries" over the working class

This division between a mass of followers and an elite of leaders mirrors the divide in mainstream capitalism (and indeed all forms of class society) between rulers and ruled, and serves well the project of constructing state capitalism, after the future revolution.

None of this means that all workers will come simultaneously to revolutionary ideas, because to begin with only a minority will be revolutionaries, but their task is to argue their case with the rest of their fellow workers as equals.

What the left do however, is to perpetuate the sheep-like mentality workers learn under capitalism and harness it to their aim to be in charge after the revolution. We say that if anyone is in charge, if the working class does not lead itself and consciously build a new society, then it will fare no better than in Russia and China and all the rest.

We believe that all left wing groups, whether Stalinist or Trotskyist for

Maoist or Anarchist or whatever they call themselves) are merely radical capitalist organisations who, if they ever came to power, would erect new state capitalist dictatorships in the name of the very working class they would proceed to crush.

This is not a matter of the subjective intentions of their members, whose sincerity we are not questioning here, but the objective result of their policies.

This is why the Left has not failed. Its aim was never more than to save capitalism by disguising it as something it was not - just as the original form of bourgeois democracy did in an earlier age.

In opposition to the Left there exists a political movement, consisting of both groups and individuals, some of whom might call themselves Communists, while some might call themselves Anarchists (the Marxist-Anarchist split is an outdated historical division that bears no relationship to the real class line, which cuts across it), but who all stand united against the fake radicalism of the Left, and for a genuinely communist alternative. We in SUBVERSION area part of this movement.

What is the Alternative?

We believe that, despite the obstacles put in its way by both Right and Left, the working class has the power to destroy capitalism for real, and create a society without classes, without the state, national boundaries, oppression or inequality. A society not based on money or other forms of exchange, but on collective ownership of, and free access to, all society's goods on the part of the whole of humanity.

This society, which we call Communism or Socialism or Anarchism interchangeably, will be the first truly free society ever to exist.

The social movement that will create this society will grow from the existing struggles of the working class. As part of this process, our class must surmount the barriers put in its way by bourgeois ideology, including left wing ideology. Our task in SUBVERSION is not to be leaders (see above), but to be part of the process of creation of a revolutionary working class movement that will put an end to our world's long history of oppression and exploitation, and begin the long history of the free, world human community to come.

SUBVERSION 16 - SPRING 1996

What We Stand For

We meet regularly for political discussion and to organise our activities. The following is a brief description of our basic political principles:

- We are against all forms of capitalism; private, state and self-managed.

- We are for communism, which is a classless society in which all goods are distributed according to needs and desires.

- We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion, sexism and racism.

- We are against all expressions of nationalism, including "national liberation" movements such as the IRA.

- The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.) is the revolutionary class, only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis.

- Trade unions are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses and sabotaging our struggles. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.

- We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.

- We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishment of organisations of working class power.

- We are against sectarianism, and support principled co-operation among revolutionaries.

- We exist to actively participate in escalating the class war towards communism.

Subversion - every issue!

So, what do you do?

This final piece is a reply we sent to a guy in Ireland. He'd asked us what activities we got involved in. The reply is slightly edited.

Dear A,

You asked us two questions. First you wanted to know what struggles we support and how we support them. Many groups pay lip-service to 'supporting struggles', this usually takes the form of printing articles in their magazines, collecting petitions and going on demonstrations. I suppose we do some of this - inasmuch as we do print articles about struggles and do go on demos. However, this is hardly meaningful support, is it? At best it's a case of expressing solidarity. You must appreciate that we are a very small group, so the amount of real support work we do is limited. However, the following are some of the issues we've been active in over the past years. By being active I mean helping organise things, meetings, pickets, leafleting, fundraising and the like. Years ago we were heavily involved in the Anti-Poll Tax movement, organising local groups where we could and elsewhere participating in established groups. Since then we've been active in our workplaces - a few of us are teachers and we had some success organising industrial action against cut-backs and some failure in organising resistance against redundancies - beaten in those instances by the unions rather than the employers. Others have been active in council worker and postal worker disputes. A couple of years ago we got involved in the local anti-motorway campaign - the M66 - and some of us helped organise the support group as well as camping out at times, taking part in direct actions and being present during evictions. We set up the Anti-ISA groups in Manchester and Oldham and continue to be actively involved there. We've also been heavily into the Manchester Dockers Support Group. There have probably been other issues too, but over the years you simply forget everything you've done.

I would sum it up as saying that our support has been practical. We don't think that simple expressions of solidarity amount to supporting people, though we have been on demos for this and that - like folk facing expulsion from the country due to the racist immigration laws. I give those activities low status because they are easy to do and I'm not sure what real impact we had.

You also asked about 'armed struggle' and 'terrorism'. Our answer has to be for what and by whom? We are convinced that revolutionary change will involve violence. Equally, when groups of workers find themselves attacked by the state we think they are doing the right thing if they fight back. So, for example, during the miners strike of the early 80's, we think that miners who took violent action against scabs and the police did the right thing. However, these are occasions when the 'working class' in whole or part are involved in violence. We do not support elitist/vanguardist politics. This can be the posturings of Leninist groups or the actions of those who think that by letting off a few bombs they can galvanise the working class into action. At best such actions are misguided. There are no short-cuts to revolutionary change.

We oppose all those who seek to replace one state with another or one set of bosses with another. The working class needs to get rid of all states and all bosses, not replace them with different ones who smile more nicely or who speak a different language or who have a different accent. We see little to distinguish between those who do this legally and those who do this through violence. Having read Subversion, you must be aware, for example, of our views on the IRA.

Subversion