

CEASEFIRE

POLITICS
ART
ACTIVISM

SPRING 2008



What we can learn from Black Power

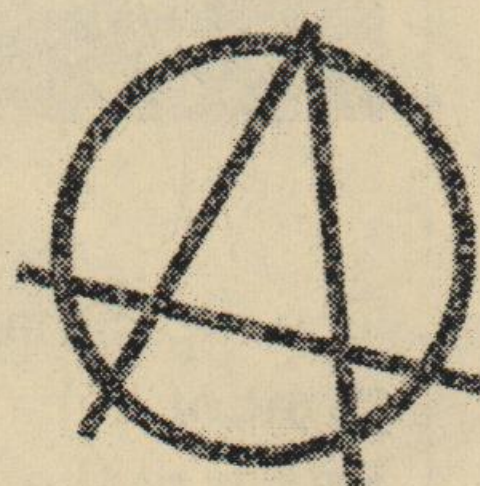
Cuba - what next?

**Totalitarian
Britain?**

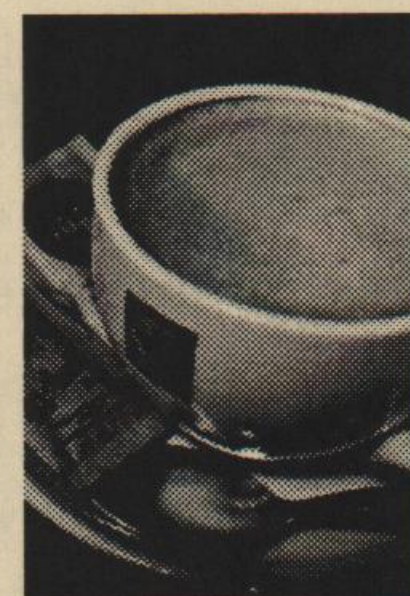
**Change on campus
apathy and activism**

PLUS

**Questions
on
anarchism**



**Starbucks
- victim or
villain?**



Letters: The anti-Starbucks bandwagon?

We know Starbucks is out to get money, argues John, and there's no great conspiracy. The anti-Starbucks campaign is well-meaning but ill-founded. Not so, replies Camille, as long as we stick to the principle of fairtrade.

To the anti-Starbucks campaign:

Everyone and his squirrel is signing one petition or other against the Starbucks incursion on campus. It seems such a one-sided clear-cut issue that one is made to stop in his tracks and think: is it really?

Starbucks is a company. Making money is not a hidden agenda - it's the very reason it's operating - so why hold that against it?

The University is a business - or at least the catering side of it is - so why should it not run according to business rules? The highest bidder and so on?

And in the end, what's the real beef here? The price hike? Well, it's better (and bigger) coffee that's being served, so is it that amazing that it costs a bit more?

We are forced to conclude that the anti-Starbucks action on campus a well-meaning but ultimately ill-founded and ambiguous knee jerk reaction against the corporatism of modern life.

John Borison

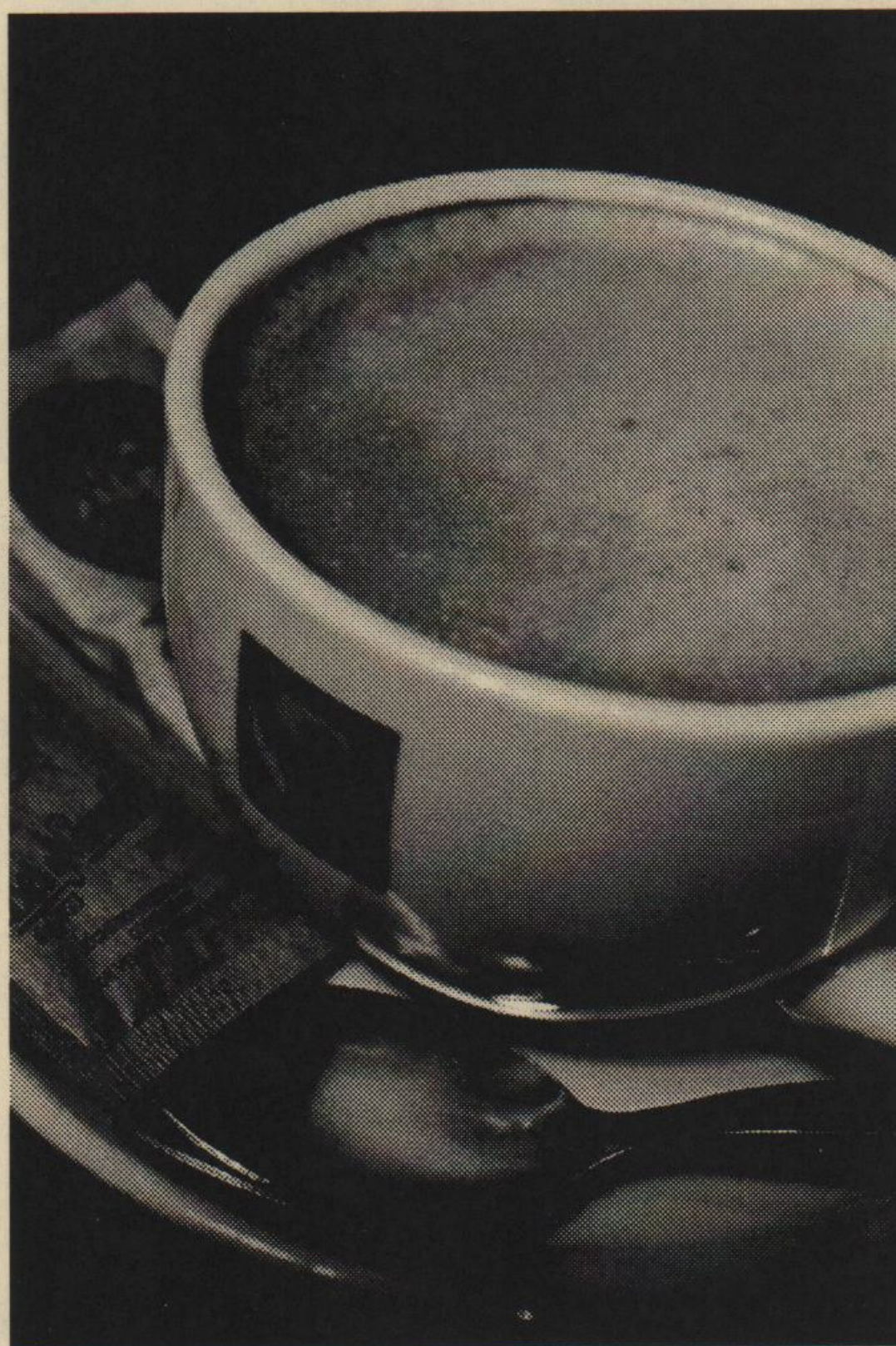
Dear John,

Creamy cappuccinos freshly served at Nottingham's central library provide a welcome break from work. Of a higher quality than previous filter coffees, Starbucks heightens the affluent, global status of the university and provides a familiar brand to those missing the high street within this campus bubble. Surely then, the loss of fairtrade in Hallward should

be a small fish in the university's fry?

Making money is certainly not a hidden agenda, but self-proclamation by Starbucks of itself as "an ethical company" is certainly devious, and fair-trade should be first priority in the campaign's rallying call. To center on price increases is to lose focus of the main problem with Nottingham Hospitality's new acquisition.

Excluding students from executive decisions is another point of contention and does encourage people to rally round, enthusiastic at the idea of protesting for democracy. But the absence of student consultation, and an undemocratic arrival to campus, should still not be the main focus of the campaign.



The topic that must be at the forefront of debate, criticism and protest is that of the loss of fairtrade. Starbucks' annual shareholder report notes that 6% of their coffee beans have fairtrade status. A Hallward

demonstration is for the attention of university officials, not Starbucks CEOs, and what must be an important result of this campaign is developing the idea of choice within the student population. This idea of choice has been eloquently illustrated though the 40p tea and coffee served outside by volunteers these last few weeks but this is of course not a sustainable course of action.

Whilst the continuing corporatisation of Nottingham University is a travesty, and any protest against it a welcome ripple in the seas of investment, what the Starbucks campaign needs now is an aim focused on a certain issue - one which cannot be waived away along with other, perceived utopic, student ideals.

And so one returns to fair trade, a social responsibility that many men, squirrels and conglomerates are trying to bandwagon. (For the image of course) This is an issue that Nottingham University may be swayed on - a swish socially responsible status to go with their snazzy new light fixtures.

Having effectively back-tracked on fair trade policy agreements made with the student's union is a platform of hypocrisy upon which activists may dance.

By teaching more students of the worth of fair trade and how easy it is to make a choice not just at hallward but maybe in Sainsbury's too, we might just find that the campaign makes larger waves than we had anticipated.

Camille Herreman

Spring 2008

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About Ceasefire

Ceasefire is an independent publication created in 2003, concerned with producing high-quality journalism, review and political analysis. We cover a wide range of topics - from Arthouse to Žižek.

We aim to provide intelligent and thought-provoking discussion and analysis on politics, art and activism. We are motivated by a belief in the free exchange of radical and ground-breaking ideas.

We are completely self-sustained and rely on our readers to cover our printing costs.

DISCLAIMER: We provide a forum for a range of views. Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily shared by the publication or its editors.

About NSPM

NSPM aims to increase the awareness of Nottingham students on issues of peace and conflict, and social justice, and to provide a space for Nottingham students to discuss issues of peace and conflict, and social justice.

Editorial

Hicham Yezza

Do you believe in free speech? Do you believe in open debate? Do you believe in in-depth analysis and no-nonsense opinions? If your answer to all these questions is to the affirmative then Ceasefire Magazine needs you.

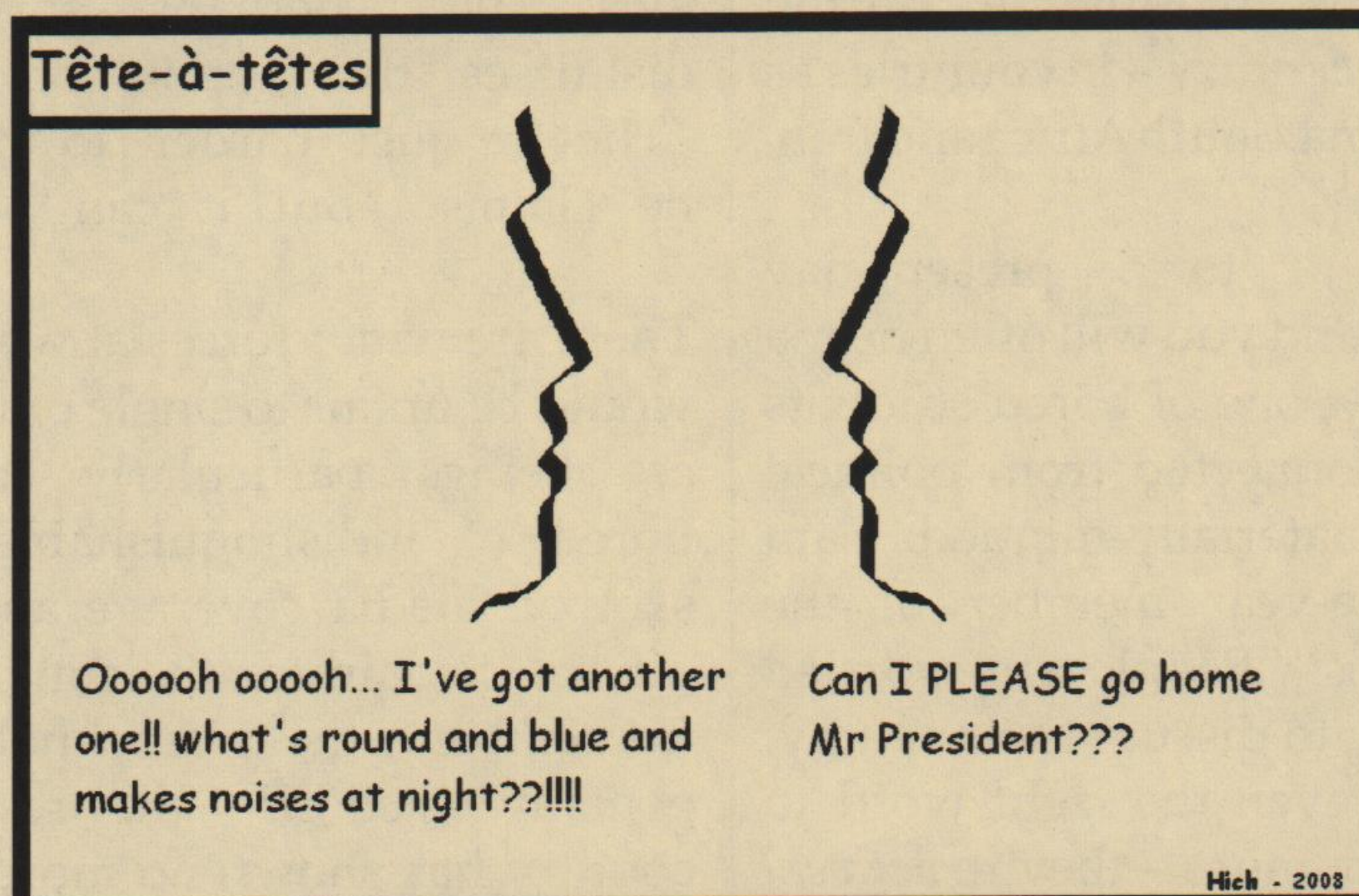
This is our fifth year and we believe the need for a radical forum of opinions and ideas is more acute and more pressing than ever. The fourth estate has always maintained an uneasy relationship with the powers of the day, but it's virtually impossible to be a truly independent journal these days when faced with the daunting pressures that afflict the press as a matter of course: financial strains, institutional pressures, censorship (including self-censorship) - all the way to the most overt kind of bullying.

But publish we must. "Speak truth to power" we shall. We believe in the power of ideas and we would like you, dear readers, to join us in our quest for a more sustainable, better-run world. Idealism is dismissed as an irrelevant luxury in a world dominated by cynicism and realpolitik - well idealism might be redundant, but idealists certainly not. From Martin Luther King to Mandela, it's the very people who think the unthinkable that make the impossible ... possible.

So join our team: write, design, report, and create for us. Subscribe to our magazine and help us make it a powerful beacon of free thought. Do it all, and do it now.

We'll be waiting.

**Peace, etc.
Hicham**



Change on campus?

Students arrive at Nottingham with pre-booked rooms, set reading lists, and organised club nights. Obsessed with drink, drugs and a 2.i, they are rendered an impotent force - about as political as a flock of sheep. Or are they?

Musab Younis meets some campus activists - with surprising results.

It may come as a surprise, witnessing the busloads of Nottingham freshers being nightly transported to pre-arranged club nights at pre-organised times, that students have often been viewed as serious threats to various establishments. Indeed, fear about radicalised students in 1930s America was so great, a right-wing movement began to force faculty members to take 'loyalty oaths' declaring their patriotism and commitment to 'American' ideals. (By the end of the thirties, twenty-one states had actually adopted such oaths.) Student strikes in Paris in 1968, originally about the issue of university funding and the closure of a campus, brought the country to a standstill and very nearly precipitated another French revolution. And during the American Civil Rights Movement, it was the explicitly *Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee* (SNCC) which organised the Freedom Rides and Freedom Ballots and eventually, frustrated with slow progress and systematic oppression, raised the banner of 'Black Power' for the first time. They were headed by the movement's founder, Stokely Carmichael, himself a student at Howard University. Students catalysed, assisted and were instrumental players in a number of revolutions, reforms and popular demonstrations worldwide during the twentieth century - in countries as diverse as China, South Africa and Iran.

Fast-forward to present-day Nottingham, and you will often hear a different story: one of bored students who are disconnected from political issues and materially-minded. Sam Walton, three-year member of the ESJC, explains: "People are worried that I'm going to disrupt their apathy. Apathy isn't even the right word to describe it any more - they're *actively*

not caring." Peter Blair, President of the Politics Society, notes with surprise the number of students reading for Politics who "really do seem apathetic." Young people "are meant to be the idealistic ones", says Chloe Cheesman the SU's Environment and Social Justice Officer, "but that seems to be less and less the case."

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And Nsikan Edung, the vocal campus activist who led the highly popular library card campaign last year (and recently became president of the SU) comments: "No one wants to rock the boat." He observes a large number of students absent-mindedly waiting to "roll into their graduate jobs" but, perhaps surprisingly, dismisses the notion of 'apathy'. "They're just harder to mobilise," he claims. "But it can be done."

There are wider forces at work, and it would be unfair to single out students as being particularly apathetic. Bored of indistinguishable parties, skewed media coverage and a clear official disdain for their involvement (remember the last half-hearted general election?), the rest of the country has shown no more appetite

for political participation than students. Many of those who were active during the so-called sixties heyday fiercely refute that apathy has set in: that's just a myth, they say. Activist idol Noam Chomsky quickly dismisses it as "part of the propaganda that's trying to get people back to passivity." The argument that it is getting more difficult to act against an overwhelming feeling of helplessness in the atomised, disconnected West does hold some weight - at least in theory. Guy Debord, the visionary French theorist, described the modern Western world as a 'spectacle', where a constant stream of amusements alienate us from ourselves but "show us a world than can no longer be directly grasped". All activity is simply channelled into the continuous construction of the spectacle. A lot of this strikes a chord with anyone who has witnessed the constant partying and detachment from reality at Nottingham. You don't even have to think abstractly to imagine Debord's all-encompassing spectacle of false reality - Ocean on a Friday night will suffice as an explanation. But as well as all this theory describes some sense of reality, it also reflects a kind of self-indulgent pessimism. You get a sense that nothing can possibly be done to change these social structures and cultural norms - and that's a decidedly non-activist way of looking at things.

If we move past our initial despair at the lack of a widespread political culture, we will discover a plethora of vocal activist groups on campus. There are about two dozen political societies that could be termed 'activist' officially registered with the Students' Union; each focussing on different things, each with specific concerns. Some, like the societies affiliated with mainstream political parties, want to



represent widely-held views whilst avoiding unnecessary controversy. Others thrive on debate and mixtures of opinion as a forum for discussion. But the majority are concerned explicitly with the question of *help*: they are activist because they attempt to address the question 'what can we do?' The recipients of this help vary: they can be refugees, AIDS victims, children, developing countries or the environment. Finally, there are the 'umbrella' movements, which seek to incorporate these groups into a broader structure, such as the Student Environment and Ethics Committee (SEEN) and the Environment and Social Justice Committee (ESJC) – not officially 'societies', but SU bodies – and the Nottingham Student Peace Movement (NSPM). The Politics Society is a good example of an society that challenges our notions about apolitical Nottingham. Its primary purposes are to encourage dialogue and education: incorporating social events, current affairs seminars and guest speakers. Peter Blair, who heads the society, is critical of the activist tendency to work in groups of similar-minded people: "we want to get people talking from all

different points of view," he says. "If you just talk to people who agree with you, you're intellectually patting yourself on the back." Holding a forum for conversation can be the first major step in countering political disinterest, especially as providing a space outside of the seminar room can remove some of the formality associated with political discussion. But does all this talking really achieve anything beyond intellectually patting other people on the back? "Yes," Peter says, noting critically the "grand gestures" of more outspoken groups. "You have to be realistic about what you're going to change." Putting pressure on the university and the SU can often be far more productive and realistic than trying to directly change global or international institutions. But this can still have the global repercussions you desire – for example, forcing the university to adopt a fully fairtrade policy, or a real ethical investment programme.

Conformism and the SU

There is sometimes a tendency to dismiss working within existing structures as intrinsically conformist.

The Student's Union is a case in point – it is a democratic body representing all students – and from the outside, it looks like it could be a powerful vehicle for change. Some of those who have tried to work through the SU are less enthusiastic about its potential. Nsikan Edung, who led the highly successful library card campaign last year told me: "They're more interested in talking and being friendly to the university than taking them on." But then he became president. Clearly, we should avoid dismissing its potential altogether. Chloe Cheeseman, who is the SU's Environment and Social Justice Officer, agrees that the union can be tentative: "There is a feeling that we don't want to wreck our relationship with the university," but points to Nsikan's library card protest of proof that official policy can change as a result of outspoken protest. She acknowledges a split "between those who want to work through the bureaucratic structure of the SU and university, and those who are alienated by the system and don't believe in it", and proposes a two-pronged approach. Working both within and outside of the system can

achieve the best results, although it does require hardliners on either side to soften their positions. "It's sometimes hard to bring those two sections of the activist community together," she says, "but the Starbucks campaign has proved that we can compromise between ourselves."

Although the union can be an effective tool, parallel structures are also necessary. The Nottingham Student Peace Movement is an example of a group with broad aims which has achieved notable victories on campus: "We campaign on everything," explains last year's president, Sam Walton. "We see something, and we feel moved to act." Groups like NSPM can be essential in countering apathy, or the appearance of it – they campaign effectively, on local and international issues, and often bring together a large number of people. "I think we can educate a lot of people," says Sam. This education is not purely about contributing to knowledge students already have; it's also about changing the way people see structures of learning, and teaching them to treat the mainstream more cynically. "There's a real 'deschooling' aspect to it," he adds, citing the misinformation propagated by a corporate-controlled media as something activists need to work to remedy. NSPM is an optimistic group, and Sam sees real potential for change, citing globally-thinking but locally-acting students who have successfully campaigned for recycling facilities on campus and persuaded the university to invest 'semi-ethically'. "At the moment, this is our arena," he points out. We can achieve global changes, but working through local means can often be the most effective and most rewarding method. Campaigning serves a dual purpose: you (hopefully) achieve your campaign goals, at least partly, and you enlighten people's minds along the way. "Everything serves a purpose to educate people," says Sam.

The veneer of nonchalance and detachment at university can be deceptive, but scratch the surface and you can be surprised at the passion and idealism you find. "We've achieved a big victory on recycling," Sam says confidently; "I'd like to see us winning the battles on media and education." The changes he wants are

not just material, but psychological: "more people believing they can change things." University is clearly an ideal arena in which to act – students are technically adults, but almost completely free from the real responsibilities of adult life which can make active participation so difficult for all but the most committed in the wider world. We have free time and little responsibility, but various structures open to us through which we can educate, engage in dialogue, and affect change. Although we may commit ourselves to one particular issue, it's important to recognise the scope of active work that can be achieved: in the Student's Union, in educative and debating societies, and in campaigning and volunteering groups, the avenues are open for exploration.

Graduation can be the end of all this work – like death, it barely crosses anybody's mind, but it eventually happens to everyone. Whilst we may have diligently given up our spare time for good causes at university, a quick visit to one of the careers fairs offered at business-orientated Nottingham can be depressing to a young idealist. They are generally composed exclusively of large corporations promoting undeniably conservative roles in management, law and accountancy. "I'm not a big fan of the fact that Nottingham seems to marketed to the FTSE 100," says Peter of the Politics Society. "There's absolutely no NGO or media presence." Will there ever be a chance for us to put this activist knowledge to the test, or are we merely living out brief, adolescent fantasies before relegating our goals of world peace to a partnership at Meryl Lynch? Is graduation the death of the activist? Sam disagrees: "It's incredibly easy to find a job that's good for the world and is socially conscious. You just have to have one thing – imagination." Corporate roles offer no real challenges, he asserts, and there is a variety of work available that will pay the bills and make a difference, providing you're willing to think outside the socially-constructed box. An ethical careers fayre, planned for early next year, could be an important step in the right direction.

You get a sense that activism is not merely goal-centred; it does not simply focus on minor issues of

political management that it dislikes and seek to change them. Instead, it seems to represent a fundamental unwillingness in its participants to compromise with and buy into the corporate consensus that appears to be pervasive at the university. Even in the face of slow progress and widespread disinterest, activists take satisfaction from the conceptual construction of alternatives. It is the process of thinking *idealistically* that those working for change gain a sense of achievement. To go back to Debord's pessimistic image of the spectacle: it is something that "falsifies reality" but "is nevertheless a real product of that reality." It is indeed impossible to deny the existence of a materialistic and market-orientated culture at the university. We cannot allow projected idealism to obscure our perceptions. But discussing the nature of this all-encompassing false reality, which represents "the dominant model of life", Debord observed that "the spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned."

Perhaps it is the very act of questioning that is the most 'active' of all.

ACTIVISM ON CAMPUS

AEGIS – to understand genocide and its causes

Amnesty – human rights support and awareness

Debating Union – provide a forum for debate

Dreams of Africa – for African development

Engineers without Borders – development issues in an engineering context

Friends of Africa – debates on issues concerning Africa

NSPM – practical measures for peace and social justice

Model United Nations – a simulation of the real UN

People and Planet – for world poverty, human rights and the environment

Politics Society – guest lectures, current affairs seminars, trips and socials

STAR (Student Action for Refugees) – help for refugees and awareness

Stop Aids – active against the spread of HIV/AIDS

UNICEF – for children worldwide

Young Greens – to tackle social and environmental problems

ZambiAIDS Society – support a HIV/AIDS charity in Africa

Cuba - what next?

After half a century as president of Cuba, Fidel Castro finally stepped down. What happens next? Rowan Lubbock analyses the history of Cuba and makes some sobering predictions.

The sheer flurry of recent speculation over the future prospects for a Cuba without Castro can seem almost overwhelming.

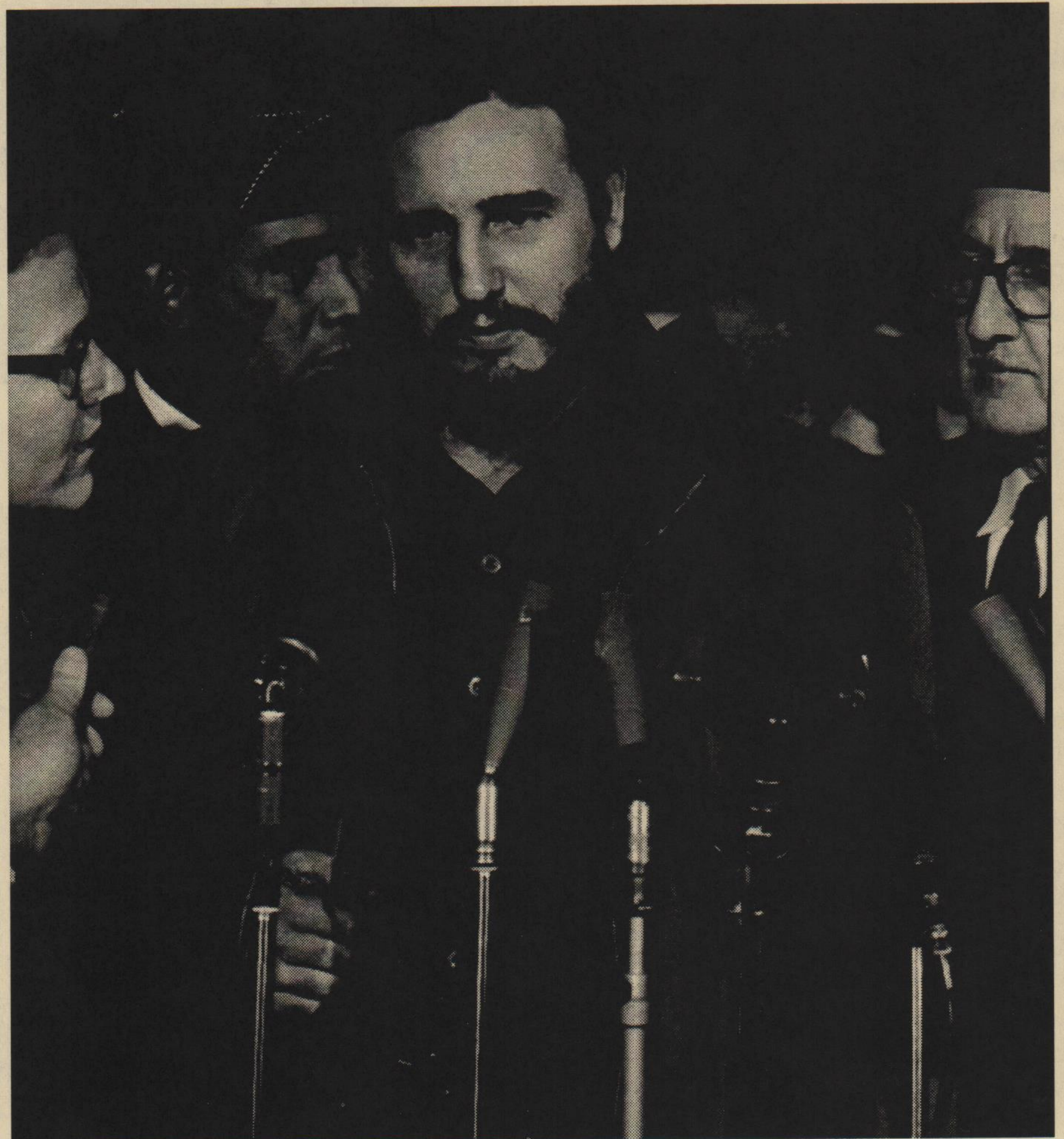
Much of the initial commentary in the West has consisted of exuberant victory calls, proclaiming a forthcoming of democracy and freedom. But it seems the Cuban people are rather less enthusiastic. Anthony DePalma of the New York Times (among others) has described ordinary Cubans as wary of "a savage capitalism" that seems poised to take away from them "the best houses, the best land, the best factories." Cuba's recent history sheds light on these contradictory views.

"Ensconced in his Communist-run island", the *Economist* observes, "Castro has weathered ten American presidents and their economic embargo against him". For many in the Third World, Cuba's defiance of imperial domination has earned a level of respect and solidarity that is almost unparalleled, largely because: "Cuban Communism always differed from that of Eastern Europe in being the product of a national revolution, not of foreign conquest."

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that Cuba has ever been an island truly unto itself.

Interventions

Under Teddy Roosevelt's rubric of the "proper policing of the world", Cuba became a de facto US protectorate, establishing a façade of independence following the withdrawal of US troops in 1902. The risks associated with granting this small Caribbean island its autonomy were sufficiently hedged through the drafting of the Platt Amendment, which was



inserted directly into the Cuban constitution and the permanent treaty between the two countries. This constitutional caveat permitted the United States the right to intervene in Cuban affairs for the sake of "maintain[ing]... a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty".

Roosevelt found an ideological ally in Tomas Estrada Palma, who was elected as Cuba's first head of state in 1903. But trouble quickly brewed after Palma's re-election in 1906, which received widespread accusations of fraud from both the Liberal party

and the majority of Cuban peasants, workers and members of the armed forces. Acting out of fear that other imperial powers might intervene in Cuban affairs for the sake of protecting their own investments, the US invaded for a second time in 1906 by sending US warships and troops to pacify the "insurgents" and establish the "political stability" necessary for protecting American property.

Roosevelt, despite his stated preference for non-intervention, maintained that US intervention would swiftly occur if "the insurrectionary habit becomes confirmed in the Island", citing

the prerogative of US imperialism, "which has assumed the sponsorship before the civilised world for Cuba's career as a nation." This pattern in US-Cuban relations would remain a near constant until 1959, when a small band of guerrilla resistance fighters, lead by Fidel Castro, joined forces with the vast majority of Cubans, including important sections of the capitalist class and petty bourgeoisie, who had lost faith in Fulgencio Batista's increasingly corrupt regime.

During this tumultuous time the US was happy to see a smooth transition from Batista to a new, more popular government, provided it was capable of preserving the structural integrity of the Cuban state, which was central to the security of US investments. "In a crisis or period of political upheaval in the Third World," point out James Petras and Morris Morley in their study, "the regime is expendable, the state is not". But with the overthrow of Batista came the dismantling of the entire pre-revolutionary Cuban state. The infusion of a genuine revolutionary movement into the state structure of Cuba brought a decisive blow to US imperial designs.

Not surprisingly, the Eisenhower administration immediately sought to subvert the new state-regime. In 1960 the CIA orchestrated an invasion that was to be executed by anti-Castro Cuban nationals, which was vigorously taken up by the incoming Kennedy administration whose nadir saw the notorious Bay of Pigs invasion end in catastrophe, at least for Kennedy. With both overt and covert attacks yielding little result, Washington switched to a campaign of economic warfare that saw the Cuban economy almost completely cut off from the world market (apart from the Soviet Union). Writing in April 1960, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Lester Mallory concluded that the only way to ensure the downfall of Castro was "through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship... [Using] every possible means... [the US should seek] to weaken the economic life of Cuba... to bring about hunger, desperation and [the eventual] overthrow of the government".⁷

Meanwhile on the island, the dream of bringing power and

control back to the Cuban people was never entirely realised.

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Democracy

While Castro's Cuba has been romanticised by many on the left as a bastion of worker power, the historical structure of Cuban politics tells a different story. The debate and formation of policy at first stayed within a tight network of 'declasses' and sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, and not with those the new revolutionary regime depended on for support: workers and peasants.⁸ Despite this odd mix of revolutionary and capitalist interests inhabiting the same cabinet, Castro's tight control of policy formation within his own revolutionary clique frustrated the more conservative elements in government, who eventually resigned one by one to find more lucrative pursuits in the United States. In the end, the most crucial decisions concerning social, political and economic affairs consistently flowed from the top down, without affording any political space in which the Cuban people might organise and implement their collective will.

After turning its back on US capitalism for the first time in Cuba's history, the revolutionary government was eager to begin the process of rapid industrialisation, in the hope that Cuba could break itself from the

shackles of cash-crop exportation. Ideological convergence (as well as the near absolute US blockade of world trade) made the Soviet Union a natural partner in Cuba's economic development, giving Havana some room for manoeuvre in diversifying its industrial development.

Yet by 1963, Castro had already run up a balance of payments deficit with the Soviet Union of more than \$300 million, mainly due to the government's miscalculated central planning and a drastic fall in world sugar prices. In the face of such a crisis, Castro announced a return to the specialisation of sugar production, in clear conflict with the stated goals of the revolutionary movement to break Cuba's dependence on single-commodity exportation.⁹

In the end, Cuba could not escape the very nature of its standing within a capitalist world economy – it was simply too small, underdeveloped and tightly integrated into world markets to successfully pursue policies of rapid industrial development. Having struck a decisive blow against the old system of oppression, the Cuban people were consistently denied any chance of establishing a truly collective system of autonomous worker associations that would be capable of responding to popular needs. Free speech was curtailed. Criticism of the revolutionary government was, and is, punishable by imprisonment or worse.

This tragic narrative of strangulation and subversion from the outside, and the centralisation of political power from the inside, has marred Cuba ever since.

Prospects

But now that the torch has been passed from one Castro to another, what are the immediate prospects for Cuba today? Two issues immediately emerge. Firstly, Cuba will very quickly have to learn how to swim among the deadly currents of global neoliberalism. Secondly, as a concomitant effect of this 'liberalisation', the Cuban people will likely see the continual economic restructuring of their country confined to a tiny policymaking clique, made up of elements from the old guard and larger foreign capitalist interests, and possibly leading to a further degradation of the social fabric that

began after the end of the Cold War.

During Cuba's 'special period' in the early 1990s, the economy opened up to global financial flows and other market reforms, leading to a sharp rise in unemployment and a drop in nutritional consumption. Income inequality almost doubled from the mid 1980s to 1999.¹⁰ According to the Cuban sociologist Mayra Espina, three factors continue to aggravate these regressive developments: "growing income differentials; an increasing disparity between the regions; and a new social hierarchy based on material wealth, the symbol of success".¹¹

Despite this painful experience, the US State Department remains adamant that without further exposure to the global neoliberal framework, Cuba will have no chance of reducing its crippling level of hard currency debt, standing at roughly \$11 billion. The report 'Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba' notes that addressing the debt "will allow Cuba to re-enter world capital markets... Should Cuba need debt relief from its Paris Club creditors, Cuba will likely first need an IMF program." This will no doubt entail a near total marginalisation of the population for the sake

of Western capital and financial speculators. As Anne Krueger, the First Deputy Managing Director of the IMF, has argued, an "efficient" model of sovereign debt restructuring should "draw... on the principles of well-designed corporate bankruptcy regimes"¹² Anyone familiar with the modus operandi of corporate restructuring will surely expect a rapid rise in unemployment, depressed wages and lower social spending within Cuban society, should the IMF be allowed to sink its teeth in.

In keeping with the Castro brothers' preference for market reform over political reform, Cuba is unlikely to see any substantial movement towards a more participatory political system, notwithstanding the recent adoption of two human rights agreements with the UN.

As *Time* magazine explains, Washington should "establish [with Cuba] the kind of diplomatic relations [it] has with other iron-fisted regimes, like those in China and Saudi Arabia", in the hope that it will be able "to exert some direct influence on the island's economy and politics". This widely shared sentiment among Western elites nullifies the predictably empty

rhetoric espousing greater political freedom for ordinary Cubans. The Wall Street Journal recently commented: "Raúl is expected to attempt to move the country toward a more competitive economic system, on the China model, something he has supported in the past."¹³ If China is intended as a model of social development, the Cuban people have good reason to be weary.

The 'enlightened despotism' of Cuba's Cold War past is likely to soon give way to a new 'enlightened polyarchy', which seeks to support the imperatives of competitive accumulation. When Fidel Castro addressed the UN General Assembly in September 1960, he boldly proclaimed that, "imperialist financial capital is a prostitute that cannot seduce us". Yet with the twin transitory features of an increasing openness to the world economy, and a lack of popular power, it would seem that the seduction of Cuba is a very real and dangerous possibility. The Cuban people need our sympathy and solidarity now more than ever.



Q&A: Anarchism

Anarchism is an oft-misunderstood political ideology - it's not mainstream, it doesn't seem to have a set of defined principles and to many, the word means 'chaos'. Here, Usayd Al-Khashab answers some common questions.

Why do anarchists object to the establishment?

The establishment is the current system in place. It usually refers to the organised bodies of the state (e.g. the police), and concentrations of private power (e.g. corporations).

"It only makes sense to seek out structures of authority," says Noam Chomsky "and to challenge them. Unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled."

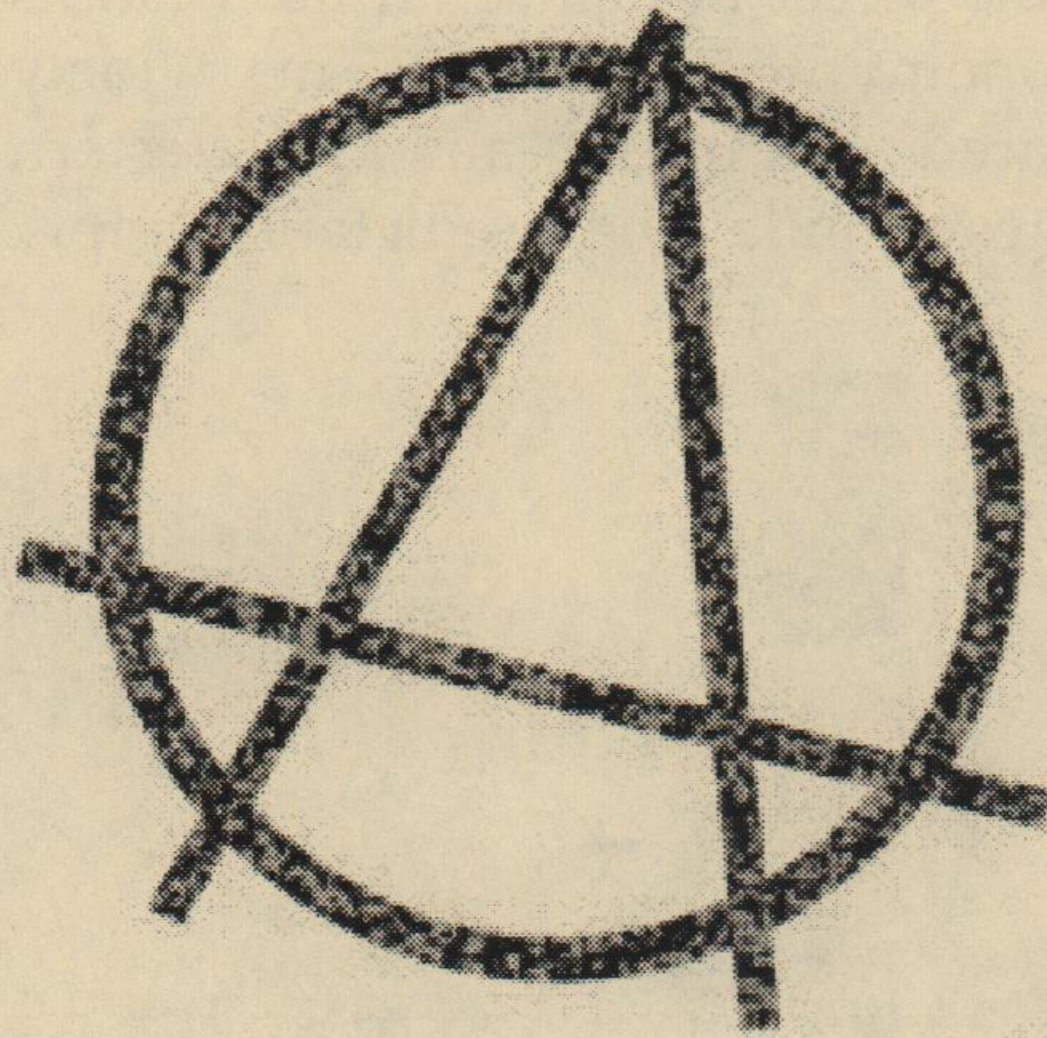
This implies is that anarchists are not dogmatically anti-establishment - but that that onus is on the establishment to justify its authority. If the establishment cannot justify the reasons for its authority, then it should be dismantled. Thus, in the Chomskyan example, some instances of the use of authority and coercion - like pulling a child back from a road with heavy traffic - are justifiable. Most are not.

Anarchists generally believe that people are quite capable of fully participating in meaningful decisions which affect them, and the society. They pit themselves against the traditional conservative view (dating back to Plato) which argues that some kind of an elite is necessary to preserve the good of the society as a whole. To an anarchist, everyone who is involved in society must have an equal say in the way it is run.

In the U.K., as in other 'polyarchial democracies', the voter is presented with a selection of representatives to make decisions on their behalf. To an anarchist, this is the wrong way wrong. Anarchists would push for consensus decision-making, where no power is disproportionately vested in certain people.

Why do anarchists believe that the state is unnecessary?

One of the central themes running throughout anarchism is anti-statism. The state is a sovereign body that exercises supreme authority over all individuals and associations living within a defined geographical area. Either forcibly or by non violent means, the removal of the state plays a crucial role in defining anarchism against other ideologies that it can be related with, notably socialism and liberalism.



Sebastien Faure, in *Encycopédie Anarchiste*, defined anarchism as 'the negation of the principle of Authority'. He saw 'Authority' as an offence against the principles of freedom and equality. By rejecting the state, anarchists endorse instead the principles of absolute freedom and unrestrained political equality. Authority with the right of one person or institution to influence the behaviour of others enslaves, oppresses and limits human life. It damages and corrupts both those who are subject to authority and those who are in authority.

The state is automatically a possessor of high authority. It is only by this

concentration of authority that states could carry out the crimes of slavery, mass genocide and illegal occupation that are widely witnessed in both recent history and in the present day.

To be in authority is to acquire an appetite for prestige, control and eventually domination - giving rise to a 'psychology of power' of which Paul Goodman (1911-72) said, 'many are ruthless and most live in fear'. This is especially true when political authority is backed by the machinery of the modern state.

Other ideologies, though they dislike its ill-effects, recognise the state as a necessary evil. Anarchists, in contrast, see it as a negative and destructive force embodied in institutions of law and government.

The 'social contract' is largely a myth, say anarchists. You become subject to a state by being born there, not out of free choice. And the massive coercion used to get you to obey the rules of the state does not constitute a fair contract, agreed to without duress. The state is a coercive body whose laws must be obeyed because they are backed by the threat of punishment. You can dress this up in the term 'social contract', but its essence doesn't change. Since the advent of the state system (caused largely by the needs of European capital and constant fighting in Europe), point out anarchists, we have seen extreme ideologies of fascism and Stalinist communism run vast swathes of the world. We have seen every imaginable atrocity, genocide, and catastrophic war. We have come close to destroying every living thing on the planet - indeed, this possibility is still far from unlikely. Isn't it time we lost trust in the state?

Serious Resistance

The ever-increasing infringements on civil liberties in Britain, the widespread acceptance of imprisonment without trial, and the rise of the ubiquitous CCTV camera, have seen calls for increased checks on the state's power.

But what if the state itself is the problem? Otto Nomus discusses serious resistance.

It has become a banal observation that social control in the UK is all pervasive. The liberal media is frequently worked up into impotent fury about some aspect or other of state surveillance, repressive legislation or closure of public space. Broadsheet commentators rail against a government that has gone a bit too far down the road to 1984, without ever mounting any serious opposition to the mindset that has led to these developments in the first place. The liberal position has always been that we, the masses, need a strong state to keep us in line. Forever trying to distance these ideals from the increasingly ugly reality of neoliberalism, apologists for our fucked up system have nothing but fantasies to offer those who resist state control. We are told that we need independent watchdogs to keep the government in line, a strengthening of the powers of the data commissioner, feeble calls for a cap on CCTV development, etc. Anyone with even the most rudimentary of bullshit detectors will realise that these 'solutions' are just more of the same, strengthening one arm of the repressive state to keep the other arm in check. What none of these commentators dares to suggest is that it might be precisely this excess of policing that is the problem in the first place. From Liberty to The Guardian to David Cameron, the consensus is that the police will be empowered to watch over us, and take strong action where necessary. None of these twittering corporate flunkies have anything to offer to those who want to be free of this shit for good.

From council CCTV in the Market Square, to the all pervasive surveillance culture encouraged

by Facebook, it feels like our every move is being watched and recorded somewhere. Those who might want to do something subversive and spontaneous are in constant fear that such acts will not go unnoticed and will be archived in a file somewhere, labelled with their name, biometric details and national insurance number.

We must
attack the
culture that
insists that
the state
has benign
intentions

With a National Identity Register on the cards we can be certain that there really will be a centralised file on everyone in the next few years. Whilst we can only dream of having some of the freedoms people of previous generations had, it seems likely that future generations will look back on what we have now with envy. It seems essential that we use what little free space is available to us to fight against the rising tide of authoritarianism, and attack it at its foundations.

The drive for social control, that is

made flesh in the ubiquitous cameras, the crackdowns on demonstrations and the snooping of email and phone communications, originates in the hierarchical organisation of society. Capitalist ideology, enacted through the state and the corporation, results in the stratification of society, such that a few profit from the immiseration of the many. This relationship would be incredibly unstable were it not for the massive powers of social control and manipulation that are wielded in order to enforce and justify this arrangement. Having armies and police to smash those who take issue with these economic and social relations helps to prop up this unbalanced system. So too does control of the mass media that ends up influencing how we view these relations. Those who oppose the parasitic forces that rule in our society have to fight both the culture that idealises the status quo and the apparatus that defends it. The battle against social control takes place on these fronts.

On the one hand we must attack the culture that insists that the state has benign intentions. So often are we told that 'they' only want to root out the anti-social elements and the terrorists, that many of us have started to believe it. The truth is that the state wants to smash or discipline all of its enemies. The first response of many people to arguments against social control is that "If you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear." The attitude seems to be that the state is inherently incorruptible and has our best interests at heart so shouldn't we just let them get on with it? This conditioned reflex is a very dangerous one that needs to be overturned before we find ourselves at the gas chamber door, still convinced that it is all for the

greater good. The culture of our society is one that is saturated with the ideas of those who run it. These ideas must be debunked and subverted in order to liberate ourselves from their yoke.

On the other hand, we will have to disarm the state's policing of our actions. Whether it be through deactivating security cameras and stealthily sabotaging police operations, or resisting our arrest and suppression through more confrontational means, we won't change society until we can shake off the repression of our movements. We will have to engage in subversive activity, whether it is squatting to create autonomous spaces, rioting to keep the police out, or hiding our friends from the authorities. Anyone who claims to be able to change society without confrontation is kidding themselves. To survive, radical social movements have to vigorously defend their oxygen supply of free space. Otherwise they get snuffed out.

The most successful autonomous cultures have been those who have most successfully resisted their repression. This has not come about through people sitting back and pretending that they can just carry on doing what they've always done, a mindset that seems prevalent in the UK activist scene, but in constantly adapting to and responding to their movements' ideological and physical enemies. Whether it is the Zapatistas creating autonomous communities outside the state in rural Mexico, the squatters movements liberating urban spaces, or Greek anarchists trashing CCTV cameras, there are many movements that are making serious attempts to live outside social control that we can learn from. Let's not wait a moment longer before resisting.

Defy-ID
Resist social control!

Meetings 1st and 3rd
Wednesday of the month.
6pm, Sumac Centre.

Starbucks: a narrative

A new American corporate presence on campus greeted students eager to start the new academic year. No, this wasn't McDonald's (which would never be accepted) or Coke (which has long been accepted) but something between the two - Starbucks. For those who don't know, Starbucks is a traditional vendor of fine coffees which has been greeted warmly by the café cultures on the continent. You can hardly go a day without hearing of another dozen *caffès* going bankrupt in Rome and Milan, as Italians flock to the superior American rival. Meanwhile in France, the quality of philosophical conversation in the Parisian Starbucks has been so high, it has developed a new post-Marxist school of thought ("Qui est le 'Star'," asks one of its most prominent thinkers, "et qui est le 'Bucks'? *Ca, c'est la question.*") To those who would refute this meta-narrative, and instead opine that Starbucks is frequented by the private- and public-schooled in Britain (who have lots of money, but little taste) and not in many places where people actually drink coffee, and know what it should taste like - I can only say, counter-snobbery is not very productive. The debate was not, of course, about the coffee. The traditional activists were outraged, and launched an immediate campaign to smash the corporation, or at least shut down the outlet. Whether this campaign was to be launched as an integral part of establishing peace, justice and happiness in the world, or as a minor side issue, was not really addressed. But Starbucks would be demolished and power would return to the people. Eager activists grabbed their laptops and set up a Facebook group, thus confirming the campaign as an *issue*. Hundreds joined the virtual campaign. Almost ten joined the real one. A Fairtrade alternative was set up outside the library and staffed by dedicated volunteers. The great representative body of students, composed of its most worthwhile and excellent members, passed a motion recommending a Fairtrade alternative. The revolution had arrived.

But, as always, the revolutionary gusto failed to take into account the inevitable counter-revolution. And so it came. A private schoolboy set up a pro-Starbucks facebook group. Hundreds of reactionaries joined. They were the silent majority, they claimed. Even though they were apathetic about everything, we still had to take their opinions into consideration. This, their political advisors told them, was the beauty of democracy. And thus it was that two rival Facebook groups came into existence, with over one and half thousand members between them. Meanwhile, there was consternation within the anti-Starbucks camp. Someone had artfully daubed 'Starbucks supports apartheid in Israel' on the library. This was "offensive, disrespectful vandalism", said the anti-Starbucks organisers - we do not "wish our peaceful and non-disruptive campaign to be tarred with those who support such offensive tactics." Many ardent supporters of Israeli apartheid must have gone home in tears to learn that Starbucks have been propping it up all along. How dare a lone graffiti artist suggest that state oppression is this fragile? But the disgust was mutual, and many labelled the self-appointed organisers of the campaign as establishmentarian, or worse, conservative. The group splintered. Militant fringe groups set up, only to leave the campaign and focus on worldwide socialist revolution. The pro-Starbucks camp, untainted by ideology, has remained strong (it would be grossly immature to use Mussolini's phrase 'united in Fascism' here). The results of a referendum have since recommended a fairtrade alternative to the university - yet the Starbucks flag remains solidly perched on the library wall. And so we come to a tentative *finis*. There is a parable here somewhere, possibly about good versus evil, but I doubt you'll be able to find it.

What we can learn from Black Power

The Black Power movement is often portrayed today as an unfortunate, militant and violent byproduct of the struggle for civil liberties in America during the 1960s.

- Musab Younis examines *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967) by Stokley Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, and finds a call for genuine democracy and an appeal to grassroots activism that we could do well to learn from today.

It may seem odd to review a book that was published in 1967 and is now (shamefully) out of print. But in less than 200 pages, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, written by Stokley Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, virtually decimates any book published recently in terms of perception, understanding and potential. Its significance is difficult to overstate, and certainly impossible to adequately convey in one article. It is a fiery and impassioned call for the most oppressed group in America – those descendants of slaves, brutally and violently kept in a position of subservience and dependence for hundreds of years – to rise up and claim freedom through political action. But it is couched in the language of the anti-colonial struggle, and at its heart it explicitly seeks the freedom of all people, and the establishment of real democracy and independence around the world.

thousands of people demonstrating across America. Muhammad Ali refused his draft in the same year, and was stripped of his title and jailed. The 'long hot summer' of race riots in American ghettos, echoing frus-

onisation of the Third World was finally ending, following long and bloody wars of independence. The first generation of independent, post-colonial leaders in Africa and Asia was emerging. Change was in the air, and everywhere.

In this context, Stokley Carmichael and Charles Hamilton set forth a radical blueprint for the ending of racial problems and freedom for the oppressed of America. They had one simple, revolutionary idea: Black Power. The genuine emancipation of black people, they said, would come from the throwing off of American institutional racism, ingrained in the political and economic system for hundreds of years. "Black people," said Carmichael and Hamilton, "must get themselves together."

Regaining Control

The authors were well aware of hostility to their ideas.

"When the concept of

Black Power is set forth," they note, "many people immediately conjure up notions of violence." But their aim, as eloquently explained and studiously referenced, was the political organisation of an oppressed, perse-



History

Black Power was published two years after the assassination of Malcolm X and one year before the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. A growing public outcry about the Vietnam War was taking place, with hundreds of

tration at grinding poverty and racism, was underway. Years of passive, peaceful resistance had led nowhere; many were becoming increasingly radical, inspired by worldwide events. The lengthy period of European col-

cuted and exploited group, with the aim of attaining genuine control over their own lives. "If we fail," they state emphatically on the first page of the book, "we face continued subjection to a white society that has no intention of giving up willingly or easily its position of priority or authority," but "if we succeed we will exercise control over our lives, politically, economically and physically." This search for genuine freedom and autonomous development was intimately connected to the anti-colonial struggle and literature of the time. "Black Power means that black people see themselves as part of a new force, sometimes called the 'Third World' ... we see our struggle as closely related to liberation struggles around the world." Everywhere, "black and colored peoples are saying in a clear voice that they intend to determine for themselves the kinds of political, social and economic systems they will live under." The choice of quotations early in the book is indicative: Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Frantz Fanon. The latter's *Wretched of the Earth* is one of the book's major inspirations, and provides a quotation that needs no adjustment to bring it up to date: "We do not want to catch up with anyone. What we want to do is go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man, in the company of all men." As with the struggle for freedom in Africa and Asia, it was recognised that freedom is not a gift bestowed by the powerful, but a right won through action and organisation. "Left solely to the goodwill of the oppressor," they state, with a dry wit that permeates the text, "the oppressed would never be ready."

Africa

Inspired by this new understanding of the colonial situation, Carmichael and Hamilton see the situation of black people in America as intrinsically colonial; not simply a poor minority, black people are an institutionally oppressed group. Quoting *The New York Review of Books*, which described the situation of black people in America as "an instance of internal imperialism", they explain that "there is no 'American dilemma' because black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate them." The economic subjugation of black people in America – like

working long days picking cotton in order to be able to afford to buy cotton dresses from whites – mirrored the relationship of African and Asian colonies with the white, colonial powers. The exploitation of labour and resources in the ghetto was seen as an explicitly colonial relation, and when the exploiters arrived with messages of goodwill, they were no different to the missionaries who participated in the "economic deprivation" of Africa. "As in the African colonies," say Carmichael and Hamilton, "the black community is sapped senseless of what economic resources it does have." They articulately document the poverty and social alienation in the ghetto; little of the situa-

"There is no 'American dilemma'," wrote Carmichael, "because black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate them."

tion is, unsurprisingly, out of date. Carmichael and Hamilton also find echoes of colonial 'indirect rule' in the relationship of the white establishment with local black leaders. They see the co-option of black elites into white power structures as identical to the process that occurred in African and Asian countries under colonial rule. Their argument is forceful, and convincing. When tokenism was widely heralded as the way forward, Carmichael and Hamilton saw the few black political leaders as little more than African chiefs submitting to colonial rule: "They have capitulated to colonial subjugation in exchange for the security of a few dollars and dubious status"; they cannot

hope to challenge the colonial status of the system itself. The assertion that "black visibility is not Black Power" sounds almost prophetic today.

Institutional Racism

Black Power is perhaps most well-known, at least in Britain, for coming up with the term 'institutional racism': "When white terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children," explain Carmichael and Hamilton, "that is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of the society." But when, in the same city – Birmingham, Alabama – five hundred black babies die each year because of the lack of adequate food, clothing and shelter, "and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community," – that, the authors point out, "is a function of institutional racism". The phrase crash-landed on British soil with the Macpherson report published in 1999 after the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, castigating the Metropolitan police for 'institutional racism' using a definition virtually identical to Carmichael's (Black Power was the major work referenced in the report.) And the method of institutional analysis adopted by Carmichael and Hamilton, who examine with real methodological thoroughness the structures of oppression in America, contributed to a tradition that has informed the work of countless thinkers (most notably, perhaps, that of Noam Chomsky). But Black Power is not just a conceptual call to arms and freedom – it documents the exciting and challenging attempt to engage genuine participation in the political system of America and the terrific racism and resistance that faced this struggle. About half the book is dedicated to documenting on-the-ground struggles for political organisation and mobilisation. One chapter describes the voter registration drives of Lowndes County, Alabama (a majority-black county where eighty-six white families owned ninety percent of the land) with an infectious passion and real narrative drive.

Little has changed since Black Power was published forty-one years ago. At that time, the percentage of black children in America born into poverty was 43 percent. Today it is 45 percent.



The income of the poorest black households has actually decreased since the mid-sixties. And so on, across the world. The search for genuinely democratic forms of government continues, with renewed strength. The increasing poverty, alienation and desperation of most of the world's population is well known, and the activist movements of today could learn countless lessons from the call to independence and democracy in Black Power. When many people saw the future of black people as integration into middle-class America, Carmichael and Hamilton rejected this vision – “the values of that class are in themselves anti-humanist,” they declared. Instead, they called for the reorientation of the values of American society. This was

to be “an emphasis on the dignity of man, not on the sanctity of property.” It meant “the creation of a society where human misery and poverty are repugnant to that society”; a society based “on ‘free people’, not ‘free enterprise’.” To do this, stated Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, meant “to modernize – indeed, to civilize – this country”, and work for “the move toward the development of wholly new political institutions.” And today, across the world, many seek the civilising of society; the dismantling of illegitimate authoritarian structures and the rebuilding of democratic ones. Carmichael and Hamilton realised in 1967 the difficulty of the task ahead. Gaining freedom means that “jobs will have to be sacri-

ficed, positions of prestige and status given up, favors forfeited.” Co-option into oppressive institutions is simply not an option. In fact, “it may well be – and we think it is – that leadership and security are basically incompatible.” After all, they incisively explain, “when one forcefully challenges the racist system, one cannot, at the same time, expect that system to reward him or even treat him comfortably.” There remain many who dismiss the struggle for genuine democratisation and freedom as utopian and unachievable, and it would be fitting to end with a final word from this important book: “If all this sounds impractical, what other real alternatives exist?”



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