Uncommon Tragedy
Radical Ecology and Class Struggle
Alaska is Melting
Bush and Global Warming
Driven out of Eden
Submissions

Submissions can include original material written especially for Common Voice or material that has already been published elsewhere and that would benefit from a wider audience of groups in our sector.

Some of the themes we would be interesting in exploring are listed below:

• the potential for revolutionary transformation in the present;
• the revolutionary potential of communes, intentional communities, LETS, autonomous spaces etc.;
• the relationship between feminism and socialism/communism/anarchism;
• debates over ‘historical materialism’;
• encouraging communication and co-operation between groups in our political sector;
• ‘free access’ and a non-monetary system of production and distribution;
• the anti-war movement;
• debates over ‘human nature’;
• what is ‘class struggle’?
• the psychological/spiritual dimensions of revolutionary change;
• reviews of popular music, art, TV shows, theatre etc.

As a guideline articles should be no more than 2000 words in length with reviews around 500 words.

We would prefer it if all submissions were made electronically where possible - via e-mail or as a document file (Microsoft Word etc.) on CD-ROM, floppy or zip disk, although we are also happy to accept material that is typed or hand-written.

We would also be grateful to receive a brief description of your organisation or group (if you belong to one) - along with a contact address - to be included in our contacts page.

Please submit all material to the address below. We look forward to your contributions.

For a world in common,
The Editorial Team,
Common Voice
Box 44
Greenleaf Bookshop
82 Colston Street
Bristol, UK
BS1 5BB
E-mail: editors@cvoice.org
Contents

Submissions.................................................................................................................... 2
Uncommon Tragedy......................................................................................................... 5
Robin Cox.......................................................................................................................... 5
Radical Ecology and Class Struggle: A Re-Consideration................................................... 9
Jeff Shantz.......................................................................................................................... 9
Green Syndicalism: One Alternative Social Ecology......................................................... 9
Conclusion......................................................................................................................... 10
Alaska is Melting............................................................................................................... 12
Seth Borenstein (Knight Ridder Newspapers)..................................................................... 12
Bush and Global Warming............................................................................................... 15
Editorial, THE PEOPLE..................................................................................................... 15
Driven Out of Eden .......................................................................................................... 17
George Monbiot.................................................................................................................. 17
Somewhere between Co-optation and Isolation:.............................................................. 20
Stevphen Shukaitis (of Rise Up Radio).............................................................................. 20
The Antarctic Ozone Hole............................................................................................... 23
Robert Malone................................................................................................................... 23
Ecosocialism....................................................................................................................... 25
The Socialist Party.............................................................................................................. 25
The Ecological Perspective............................................................................................... 25
Ecology and Socialism...................................................................................................... 26
Agriculture......................................................................................................................... 26
Non-Renewable Materials............................................................................................... 27
Non-Polluting Technology............................................................................................... 28
Conclusion......................................................................................................................... 28
Ecology in a Liberated World......................................................................................... 30
Ken Knabb (An extract from The Joy of Revolution by Ken Knabb, www.bopsecrets.org).................................................................................................................. 30
The End of the Peace Process: ................................................................. 32
reviewed by Torgun Bullen........................................................................ 32
Marxism as revolutionary environmentalism .............................................. 35
reviewed by Ben Courtice (http://home.connexus.net.au/~benj) .............. 35
The People as Enemy: ............................................................................... 37
reviewed by Dave Stratman ...................................................................... 37
Untitled Poem ............................................................................................ 39
Esther O'Donald Fruth, 2003 .................................................................. 39
Contacts ................................................................................................... 40
About World in Common: ......................................................................... 46
Uncommon Tragedy

Robin Cox

In 1986, the journal Science published an article by American biologist, Garrett Hardin, entitled 'The Tragedy of the Commons'. Its central argument, as Feeny et al put it, has since become 'part of the conventional wisdom in environmental studies, resource science and policy, economics, ecology and political science' (Human Ecology Vol. 18 No. 1 1990 p.2).

Hardin was concerned with the sustainable use of 'common-property resources' (CPRs). There are two important (and related) characteristics of CPRs. 'Excludability' is the degree to which one is able to control access to any resource. (The earth's atmosphere and oceans represent extreme examples of non-excludable resources.) 'Subtractability' is the degree to which one user, by exploiting a particular resource, adversely affects the ability of other users to do likewise and hence subtracts from their welfare. This underscores the finite nature of such resources and points to the need to regulate their use. Hence CPRs are a 'class of resources for which exclusion is difficult and joint use involves subtractability' (Feeny et al, p.4.) Hardin sets out to demonstrate the implications that different systems of property rights had for the sustainable use of CPRs. As the title of his article suggest, his main concern was with a system in which these resources were held in common.

Hardin gave the example of a rangeland on which a population of herdsmen were able to graze their cattle without restriction. While the benefits of adding a head of cattle to his herd would accrue to the individual herdsman alone, the environmental costs of this decision would be shared by every herdsman. Thus, from the individual's viewpoint, these costs would be largely 'externalised'. That would encourage him as a rational economic actor to increase his herd still further - and thereby become richer - since the benefits of doing so would outweigh the costs this entailed. The problem is that every other herdsman would be inclined to do the same and thus, ultimately, the combined effect of their actions would be to increase the number of cattle on the commons beyond its carrying capacity.

Common ownership of the rangeland will lead ineluctably to a 'tragedy', according to Hardin. 'Tragedy' in this context is rather like how one might describe a Greek play; the herdsmen are all too aware of the disaster unfolding before them yet are locked into a particular logic that prevents them from doing anything about it. For Hardin, this logic is grounded in the common ownership of the rangeland. The point that private ownership of the cattle, and the competitive struggle to increase herd size, might be implicated in this scenario seemingly escaped his notice. Without this would such a tragedy occur?
Economists assume that the solution to this problem has to be imposed from outside (for example, by a state) upon the individuals involved. One approach is to keep the communal ownership property rights but introduce measures such as cattle taxes or quotas to force herdsmen to reduce their stocking rates. Critics say this approach is inherently limited, since state authorities concerned mainly with retaining political power are likely to compromise on taking harsh measures to avert ecological collapse. An alternative approach, favoured by Hardin, is to enclose or privatise the commons. Private ownership, goes the argument, by applying the principle of exclusion, would compel the individual herdsman to bear the full costs of any decision to increase his herd thus inducing him to maintain a sustainable stocking rate on his plot. It would also provide an incentive to upgrade pasture because the benefits would be enjoyed exclusively by the herdsman. Both approaches assume that there is no possibility of an 'endogenous' or internal solution to the 'tragedy of the commons', and on this point the theory is coming under increasing fire.

A new approach emphasising the adaptive capacities of local communities in the face of environmental pressures has lately been gaining ground. A leading exponent of this is Carlisle Ford Runge who presents a cogent critique of Hardin's theory in the American Journal of Agricultural Economics (Nov 1981). Runge questions its basic assumptions on both theoretical and empirical grounds:

'First, it does not distinguish between situations of open access (in which the main difficulty is unrestricted entry) and those of common property. This view implies the inevitable over-exploitation of common property, a historically false position. Secondly, it treats the common property externality as if each individual's choices are independent of their expectations of others' choices. Thus, cost functions of each cattle owner are assumed separable in their arguments. Third, and most important, because individuals are assumed to act independently, the property rights paradigm abstracts from the crucial problem of each person's uncertainty about the actions of others' (p.596).

In fact, wherever a commons existed it was usually associated with a complex pattern of institutional rules governing a distinct community of users; unregulated open access regimes are more typical of sparsely populated frontier zones. As John Reader puts it: 'access to the commons was restricted by entitlement; use was regulated to ensure that no individual could pursue his own interest to the detriment of others. Far from bringing ruin to all, the true commons functioned to keep its exploitation within sustainable limits.' (New Scientist 8 September 1988 p.51). There are numerous examples that bear this out, from the traditional Japanese village to Turkish coastal fisheries. Many contemporary examples have been in existence for hundreds of years, and the very persistence of the commons as an institution testifies to its inherent stability.

Within existing pastoral societies mutual assurance is achieved through the institutionalisation of rules that allow herders to adapt their behaviour in the light of the expected behaviour of others. Once these are established, herdsmen have a vested interest in maintaining such rules through the exercise of moral sanctions because of the high opportunity costs involved in finding an alternative. Group size may be an important consideration here insofar as it affects the transmission of information within, and the cohesiveness of, the group concerned.

The gradual demise of the commons in Britain from the 15th century onwards was not the result of its decline into ecological ruin; it was the deliberate result of the state's policy of land
enclosure to meet the agricultural capitalists' demand for more land. In the colonial era, conservationist arguments were often used to justify the appropriation of other people's land. Communal tenure was dismissed as 'primitive' and 'unscientific' and conducive to poor economic performance as well as environmental deterioration. These attitudes continued to inform the policies of many post-colonial regimes. As Vink and Kassier point out, there are 'numerous examples of livestock development projects in sub-Saharan Africa which have, implicitly or explicitly, been justified on the basis of the tragedy of the commons hypothesis' (South African Journal of Economics no.2 1987 p.167). But projects which have sought to substitute private for communal tenure have been characterised by a 'pervading sense of failure'.

The undermining of communal institutions in the Sahel and Southern Africa has led to increased overgrazing (Runge op cit p.596). Land enclosures in drought-prone semi-arid areas pre-empt the application of traditional risk-avoidance grazing strategies involving the movement of cattle to less vulnerable areas (transhumance). Moreover the commercialisation of agriculture accompanying the spread of private tenure tends to make the rancher ever more vulnerable to the vagaries of the market. So while, in theory, private tenure may induce him to maintain sustainable stocking rates by internalising his environmental costs, economic pressures often force him to disregard these costs to ensure short term viability.

The introduction of private tenure does not necessarily result in greater productivity. Much depends on the production potential of the land itself. In a country like Mali where large tracts of communal land still remain, the production of livestock per unit area 'compares favourably with that in similar rainfall regimes in the USA or Australia' (Vink and Kassier op cit p.168). While the capital-intensive model of farming typical of the developed world may be highly productive, it is also extremely costly and often heavily subsidised. Attempts to imitate this model in Third World countries have often proved disastrous. But just occasionally, when political pressures have forced a reversal of this 'big farmer bias', the results have been quite startling. In Zimbabwe, following independence, the Communal Areas - amounting to only 42% of the total area and mainly situated in the more ecologically marginal zone - increased their share of the country's marketed grain and cotton from less than 10% before independence to about 50% in 1985/86. Whatever else this proves, it conclusively demonstrates that communal tenure and the absence of a land market is no obstacle to increased productivity.

The social consequences of land enclosures have almost always proved calamitous. While some may benefit - usually government officials and multinational corporations - the high transaction and enforcement costs (such as stock proof fencing) preclude most from participation in such schemes. The result is large-scale land evictions, increased inequality and rising discontent. The small yeoman farmers evicted by the Enclosure Acts in Britain had little option but to migrate to the towns where there was at least a reasonable prospect of employment. In much of the Third World today, however, the situation is markedly different. Urban employment opportunities are few and far between and are declining further under the impact of structural adjustment policies. Many of those displaced by land enclosures tend to end up in the more ecologically fragile areas which are subsequently degraded by this influx of poor and desperate people.

Despite his advocacy of private tenure, it would be wrong to characterised Hardin as an inflexible apologist for this cause. Indeed, he recognises its limitations particularly where it concerns other kinds of CPRs where - unlike his example of a rangeland - the problem of excludability precludes such an approach. Unlike those enthusiasts of the free market, who
naïvely seek to extend the principle of private property beyond even these limits, Hardin recognised very well the adverse consequences this would entail.

As he put it, 'the air and the waters surrounding us cannot be so readily fenced'. That being so, the tragedy of the commons reappears in another form - as pollution - when a 'rational man finds that his share of the costs of the wastes he discharges into the commons is less than the costs of purifying his wastes before releasing them'. Even where privatisation on a limited scale could be introduced the basic problem would remain: 'The owner of a factory on the bank of a stream - whose property extends to the middle of the stream - often has difficulty seeing why its is not his natural right to muddy the waters flowing past his door'.

For Hardin, the solution to this kind of problem necessarily entailed some infringement on the rights of property owners, and an important role for the state. However the state is far from being immune to the competitive pressures that face industry in general and upon whom it ultimately depends for its tax revenues. Indeed, it is notable that state enterprises have often been among the worst transgressors when it comes to pollution and that some of the most seriously polluted parts of the world have tended to be those governed by state capitalist regimes at one time or another (e.g. Soviet Union, Poland, China).

Hardin's theory of the commons must be regarded as a failed attempt to vindicate the principle of private property in respect of the earth's resources. It has been shown to be both empirically suspect and theoretically unsound. In the counter-arguments it has provoked, we can glimpse the potential of a sustainable alternative to the imposed monopoly on what should be our common heritage.
Radical Ecology and Class Struggle: A Re-Consideration.

Jeff Shantz

In recent years a variety of social movement and environmental writers have devoted a great deal of energy to efforts which argue the demise of class struggle as a viable force for social change (Eckersley, 1990; Bowles and Gintis, 1987; Bookchin, 1993; 1997). These writers argue that analyses of class struggle are unable to account for the plurality of expressions which hierarchy, domination and oppression take in advanced capitalist or what they prefer to call 'postindustrial' societies (Bookchin, 1980; 1986). They charge that class analyses render a one-dimensional portrayal of social relations. The result of this has been a broad practical and theoretical turn away from questions of class and especially class struggle.

Green Syndicalism: One Alternative Social Ecology

As a corrective to the retreat from class in much anarchist, new social movement and 'radical' thought some activists have tried recently to learn the lessons shown by the history of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or 'Wobblies'). The late Earth First! organizer Judi Bari used her knowledge of IWW organizing work to help build an alliance between timber workers and radical environmentalists in the redwood forests of Northern California. By showing that a radical working class perspective may also contain a radical ecological perspective, Bari contributed much to a deeper understanding of the root causes of ecological destruction and the destruction of logging communities. Moreover her efforts in Northern California provided a sharp and living critique of the common view among environmentalists (Foreman, 1991; Bookchin, 1980; 1986; 1987) that class analyses and class struggle approaches have little to offer in the effort to bring about an ecological society.

This approach has led to the development of syndicalist practice informed by radical ecology: a 'green syndicalism'. Green syndicalists have understood that labor struggles and ecological struggles are not separate (Bari, 2001; Purchase, 1994; 1997a; 1997b). Within green syndicalism this assumption of connectedness between historical radical movements, including labor and ecology, has much significance. These green syndicalist perspectives are important in reminding (or informing) ecology activists and workers alike that there are radical working class histories in addition to the histories of compromise which so preoccupy Bookchin's thinking. 'Historically, it was the IWW who broke the stranglehold of the timber barons on the loggers and millworkers in the nineteen teens' (Bari, 1994: 18). It is precisely this stranglehold which...
environmentalists are trying to break today. 'Now the companies are back in total control, only this time they're taking down not only the workers but the Earth as well. This, to me, is what the IWW-Earth First! link is really about' (Bari, 1994: 18). In her work, Bari forged real connections between the suffering of timber workers with ecological destruction today. The history of workers' struggles becomes part of the history of ecology.

Significantly, green syndicalists reject the productivist premises of 'old-style' Marxists who often viewed issues such as ecology as external to questions of production, distracting from the task of organizing workers at the point of production. Within green syndicalist perspectives, ecological concerns cannot properly be divorced from questions of production or economics. Rather than representing 'separate worlds', nature, producers or workplace become understood as endlessly contested features in an always shifting terrain. Furthermore these contests, both over materiality and over meanings, contradict notions of unitary or one-dimensional responses. Green syndicalists thus stress the mutuality and interaction of what had been conceptually separated: nature, culture, workers (Bari, 2001).

Through this expanded analysis of class struggles one may come to a more concrete understanding of the dynamic nature of conflict. No longer posited as one-sided or pre-given, it becomes clear that the struggles themselves lead to the emergence of entirely new issues and demands such as the quality of work and ecology.

Green syndicalists insist that overcoming ecological devastation depends on shared responsibilities towards developing convivial ways of living in which relations of affinity, both within our own species and with other species, are nurtured (Bari, 2001). They envision, for example, an association of workers committed to the dismantling of the factory system, its work discipline, hierarchies and regimentation - all of the things which Bookchin identifies (Kaufmann and Ditz, 1992; Purchase, 1994; 1997b). This involves both an actual destruction of some factories and their conversion towards 'soft' forms of small, local production. These shifting priorities express the novelty of green syndicalism, not the discourse of industrial management presented in the caricatures of its detractors.

Within green syndicalism one sees evidence of 'deep green' perspectives which express new visions of relations between industrial workers and radical ecology. Green syndicalist perspectives are suggestive of some tentative synthesis. The emphasis still remains on possibility.

**Conclusion**

In Remaking Society, Bookchin (1989, p.172) concludes that 'the bases for conflicting interests in society must themselves be confronted and resolved in a revolutionary manner. The earth can no longer be owned; it must be shared.' These statements represent truly crucial aspects of a radical vision for an ecological society. What is perplexing is that Bookchin does not draw the necessary implications out of his own radical conclusions. The questions of ownership and control of the earth are nothing if not questions of class.

As conflicts over nature deepen and the theft represented by property becomes delegitimized by the further destruction of varied eco-communities, there is the potential for greater mobilizations of people as workers in a diverse but united struggle for communitarian reconstruction. It is from a standpoint of unity-in-diversity (social and ecological) that a newer,
richer understanding of class and class struggle must begin. Through open communication and alliance, workers as environmentalists (and indeed environmentalists as workers) will add to this deeper understanding of class struggle.

Jeff Shantz is a member of the North-Eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (Toronto). This article first appeared in NorthEastern Anarchist Number 5
Alaska is Melting.

Seth Borenstein (Knight Ridder Newspapers)

Global warming has caused the Columbia Glacier to retreat seven miles in the last 20 years, leaving calves of ice in Prince William Sound. Glaciers are receding. Permafrost is thawing. Roads are collapsing. Forests are dying. Villages are being forced to move, and animals are being forced to seek new habitats. What's happening in Alaska is a preview of what people farther south can expect, says Robert Corell, a former top National Science Foundation scientist who heads research for the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment team. 'If you want to see what will be happening in the rest of the world 25 years from now, just look at what's happening in the Arctic.'

Alaska and the Arctic are warming up fast, top international scientists will tell senior officials from eight Arctic countries at a conference in Iceland. They will disclose early, disturbing findings from a massive study of polar climate change. In Alaska, year-round average temperatures have risen by 5 degrees Fahrenheit since the 1960s, and average winter temperatures soared 8 degrees in that period, according to the federal government. The entire world is expected to warm by 2.5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100, predict scientists at the International Panel on Climate Change. 2002 was the hottest year in Alaskan history, and this past winter was the second warmest on record, according to the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., which found that Alaskan temperatures began to rise dramatically in 1976. This July Anchorage recorded its second highest temperature ever, as tourists got suntans.

Deborah Williams, the executive director of the Alaska Conservation Foundation, used to take visitors from the Lower 48 to the famous Portage Glacier just outside Anchorage, where the $8 million Begich-Boggs visitor center opened in 1986. By 1993, the Portage glacier had receded so much that it no longer could be seen from the visitors' center. Williams still takes visitors to the site, seeing the glacier's retreat as a warning. 'Alaska is the melting tip of the iceberg, the panting canary,' says Williams, chief Interior Department official for Alaska during the Clinton administration.

Portage is 'a glacier that's almost out of water; it's thinned dramatically,' says U.S. Geological Survey geologist Bruce Molnia, the author of Glaciers of Alaska. About 98 percent of Alaska's glaciers are retreating or stagnant, he says. Alaskan glaciers add 13.2 trillion gallons of melted water to the seas each year - the equivalent of more than 13 million Olympic-sized swimming pools, University of Alaska in Fairbanks scientists concluded after a decade of studying glaciers.
with airborne lasers. The rate of glacier run-off has doubled over just a few decades, they found. Alaska's melting glaciers are the No. 1 reason the oceans are rising, Molnia says.

Another frozen staple of Alaska's northernmost lands, permafrost, is also thawing and 'is probably the biggest problem on land,' says Gunter Weller, director of the Center for Global Change and Arctic System Research at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. Permafrost is land that stays frozen year round. Villages rely on the hard permafrost to prevent beach erosion from violent ocean storms. Two Alitve villages, Shishmaref and Kivalina, must relocate because melting permafrost has caused beach erosion, leaving the towns vulnerable to severe storms. In 1986 the federal government built an $8 million visitors center here next to the Portage Glacier. The glacier is no longer visible from the visitors center.

About 600 people live in 150 homes in Shishmaref, a centuries-old village on a barrier island just south of the Arctic Circle. On the island's northern edge, erosion is so severe that the village voted to move two years ago, but villagers haven't been able to find a new site or money to finance the massive undertaking, says Percy Nayokpuk, president of the Shishmaref Native Corporation. 'It's a matter of safety,' Nayokpuk says. 'We're on this small low island. One bad storm could possibly wipe out the village. There is nowhere to run.'

Melting permafrost also means trouble for the oil industry. Oil companies build pipelines and roads on it to support drilling on the North Shore. To minimize damage to Arctic tundra, oil companies explore for oil on Alaska's North Slope only when roads are frozen with a foot of ice and six inches of snow. The ice-road season has dropped from 200 days a year in 1970 to 103 days in 2002, according to Alaska state documents. 'It is unlikely the oil industry can implement successful exploration and development plans with a winter work season consistently less than 120 days,' an Alaska Department of Natural Resources budget document said in March.

While global warming is hurting oil drilling, it's the increased burning of fossil fuels such as oil that causes global warming. In June, the Department of Energy announced that it would spend $270,000 to help Alaska rewrite its rules about how thick ice roads should be. Permafrost lies under 166 Alaskan towns and 1,700 miles of Alaskan highways. Melting is causing whole chunks of the Alaska Highway to come apart, state officials said at a January global-warming conference. Permafrost is melting 'under forests as well as under buildings and roads,' says atmospheric scientist Michael MacCracken, who headed federal climate-change studies in the 1990s.

So far, the greatest effect on forests has come from the spruce-bark beetle, according to Glenn Juday, a professor of forest ecology at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. The beetle, which kills spruce trees, has long lived in Alaska's forests, but normally takes two years to grow and reproduce; cold spells cut their numbers. With global warming, however, the beetles now are damaging as many trees each year as they used to ruin in two, Juday says. More than 4 million acres of spruce - Alaska's predominant tree - have been killed, especially on the Kenai Peninsula. 'It's the largest episode of insect-caused tree mortality ever recorded in North America.' The spruce-bark beetle isn't alone. Other tree-killing invaders made welcome by warmer weather include the larch soft fly, the aspen leaf miner and the birch leaf roller.

As Alaska's climate gets warmer and drier, Juday's studies indicate, black and white spruces, which make up 80 percent of the state's main forests, won't survive. By the turn of the next century, Alaska's forests will resemble the Aspen-treeed grasslands along the northern edge of the
Great Plains in North Dakota and Montana. Some scientific reports also blame global warming for plummeting herring and salmon populations, Williams says. In the Yukon River, a warm-water parasite has infected salmon and herring, a key food source for marine mammals such as the stellar sea lion. Warm waters have made Alaska's Bristol Bay salmon runs occur earlier than normal, making it harder for the salmon to survive, said Alaska Department of Fish and Game biologist Slim Morstad.

In addition, warm-weather wildlife, such as moose and beaver, are heading unusually far north, while species that require frigid weather 'don't have anywhere to move to,' says scientist MacCracken. Marine mammals such as walruses, ring seals and polar bears may soon see their numbers shrink along with the Arctic ice, according to Weller.

Published on Thursday, July 31, 2003 by the Knight Ridder Newspapers Copyright 2003.
Bush and Global Warming

Editorial, THE PEOPLE

It is said that Nero fiddled while Rome burned in 64 A.D. The Bush administration, defending the material interests of big coal, oil and auto capital and other segments of the capitalist class, is doing even worse while the crisis of global warming continues to gather intensity. Incredibly, though some scientists are reportedly wondering if our planet isn't approaching a global warming 'meltdown,' the Bush administration is still trying to deny that the crisis even exists. It recently proved exactly how far it would go to continue denying the crisis.

At press time, the release of an Environmental Protection Agency report on the state of the environment was imminent. Documents leaked to The New York Times showed that, as The Guardian put it on June 20, before okaying its publication 'White House officials...cut details about the sudden increase in global warming over the past decade compared with the past 1,000 years and inserted information from a report that questions this conclusion...which was partly financed by the American Petroleum Institute.'

One memo circulated among staff within the agency in April said the report 'no longer accurately represents scientific consensus on climate change.'

The People is no arbiter of scientific validity. Neither is the Socialist Labor Party. But when even the bureaucracy of the misnamed Environmental Protection Agency acknowledges publicly that 'scientific consensus on climate change' is that the crisis exists and that auto and industrial emissions are at least partly to blame, it is no doubt beyond time to act.

The EPA has since its establishment proven that it is primarily window dressing—an underfunded, toothless agency intended to promote the idea that something is being done about the massive rape of our environment and poisoning of our air, water and land by the profit mongers of 'free enterprise.' The service it provides in so doing is that of fending off demands that more must be done—or worse yet, demands that an economy that produces such poisoning should be scrapped altogether.

In 2002 the EPA finally suggested, much to the chagrin of Bush, that 'human activity' might be at least partly responsible for the phenomenon. This year the administration is apparently taking no chances, editing out any passages it thinks offensive to the interests of its capitalist benefactors before the report is published.
Denying the problem or its cause at this late date should mark this administration for exactly what it is—the unabashed and criminal toady of those who wish to continue raping and poisoning the environment for profit no matter what it means for the future of the planet.

According to The Guardian, 'Up to six degrees of warming is now predicted for the next 100 years by United Nations scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), if nothing is done about emissions of greenhouse gases, principally carbon dioxide, the chief cause of global warming.' Bristol University researchers in England recently reported that their studies of the Permian geological period 'show that six degrees of global warming was enough to wipe out 95 percent of the species which were alive on Earth...250 million years ago.' Species diversity did not reach what it was before the cataclysm for another 100 million years.

Some scientists now worry that rising temperatures may cause a 'runaway greenhouse effect' that cannot be stopped. In this worst-case scenario the polar ice caps and even Arctic tundra melt, oxidizing organic matter previously frozen in the ice, and releasing vast amounts of carbon dioxide and another greenhouse gas, methane.

Emissions of greenhouse gases are not being significantly cut because emission controls diminish profits. Take away the profit motive in capitalist production and replace it with socialist production for human needs and wants and such controls become not only possible, but desirable. While capitalism reigns on Earth, the chance exists that the profit mongers will simply keep on fiddling until it is too late. Join the Socialist Labor Party and the fight for a future under a democratic socialist economy capable of halting and eventually reversing the damage done to the planet and all its inhabitants by the voracious capitalist system.

Driven Out of Eden

George Monbiot

It is surely one of the most brazen evasions of reality ever painted. John Constable's The Cornfield, completed in 1826, and now hanging in the National Gallery's new exhibition Paradise, evokes, at the very height of the enclosure movement, a flawless rural harmony. Just as the commoners were being dragged from their land, their crops destroyed, their houses razed, the dissenters transported or hanged, Constable conjures the definitive English Arcadia. A dog walks a herd of sheep into the deep shade of an August day. A ruddy farm boy drinks from a glittering stream, his donkeys browsing quietly behind him. In the background, framed by great elms, men in hats and neckerchiefs work a field of wheat. Beyond them a river shimmers through watermeadows. A church emerges from the trees to bless the happy natives and their other Eden.

In the midst of the rural hell, Constable invents his heaven. It is a glittering lie, and we should not be surprised to read in the gallery's brochure that this is 'one of the nation's favourite paintings, reproduced countless times and in thousands of homes'. (1) For what Constable has done is what human beings have always done, and continue to do today. Confronted by atrocities, we invoke a prelapsarian wonder. We construct our Gardens of Eden, real or imagined, out of other people's hell.

The timing of the exhibition is good, as it is in this season that we leave our homes in search of paradise. In doing so, we immiserate other people. It is not just the noise with which we fill their lives while pursuing our own tranquility. In order to create an Eden in which we may disport ourselves in innocence and nakedness, we must first commission others to clear its inhabitants out of the way. Like Constable, we are adept at hiding this truth from ourselves.

The Yosemite Valley in California was set aside by Abraham Lincoln as the world's first public wilderness. As the historian Simon Schama records, 'the brilliant meadow floor which suggested to its first eulogists a pristine Eden was in fact the result of regular fire-clearances by its Ahwahneechee Indian occupants'. (2) The first whites to enter the valley were the soldiers sent to kill them. (3) Eden, in an inversion of the Biblical story, was thus created by Man's expulsion. The colonists redefined the Ahwahneechee's managed habitat as wilderness in order to assert both a temporal and spiritual dominion over it.

America's Garden of Eden, in other words, is in fact its Canaan, the land of milk and honey whose indigenous people had first to be eliminated before the invaders could claim it as their
birthright. The Mosaic doctrine of terra nullius (the inhabitants possess no legal rights to their land), which permitted the Lord's appointed to 'smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth' (4) has become the founding creed of the usurper all over the world. It continues to inform the land seizures in modern Israel, seeking now to turn itself into a walled garden; it continues to guide the expropriations upon which much of the global tourism industry is based.

In the second half of the 20th century, as the cost of international transport fell, governments discovered a powerful financial incentive to create, from the lands of the poor, a paradise for the rich. All over east and southern Africa, the most fertile lands of the nomads and hunter-gatherers were declared 'primordial wilderness'. (5) The inhabitants were shut out; only those who could afford to pay were permitted to enter heaven. You can read about the Maasai Mara reserve on the Kenya Tourist Board's website, under the heading 'Wilderness'. It informs you that the indigenous people, the Maasai, "regard themselves ... as much a part of the life of the land as the land is part of their lives. Traditionally, the Maasai rarely hunt and living alongside wildlife in harmony is an important part of their beliefs." (6) What it does not tell you is that the Maasai have been extirpated from the 'wilderness' in which they lived in harmony with wildlife, because the tourists did not expect to see them there.

The government of Botswana has just completed its expulsion of the Gana and Gwi Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, on the grounds that their hunting and gathering has become 'obsolete' and their presence is no longer compatible with 'preserving wildlife resources'. (7) To get rid of them, as Survival International has shown, it cut off their water supplies, taxed, fined, beat and tortured them. (8) Bushmen have lived there for some 20,000 years; the wildlife is not threatened by them, but the freedom of the diamond mining and the tourism industries might be. Having expelled the Bushmen from their ancestral lands, the government now invites tourists to visit what its website calls 'the Last Eden'. (9)

The precursors of these game reserves were the deer parks and other earthly paradises the aristocracy built for itself in Britain. In Stowe gardens in Buckinghamshire, landscaped by Capability Brown in the 1740s on behalf of the Whig politician Lord Cobham, is a valley called the 'Elysian Fields', the paradise of the ancient Greeks. Hidden in the trees in the heart of paradise is a church: the only remaining evidence of one of the villages cleared to make way for the estate. You can scour the National Trust's literature for any reference to the people who lived there or in the other places which were turned into the grand estates it preserves, but you will be wasting your time. (10) Britain's biggest NGO recounts the history of heaven, but shields its eyes from hell.

We deceive ourselves by precisely the same means in building our virtual Edens. Paul Gauguin sought his garden of innocence in the South Pacific, but found instead a society ravaged by French colonisation and venereal disease. Like Constable he painted paradise anyway: the tableau displayed in the National Gallery was largely copied from a frieze in a Javanese temple, into whose implausible Eden Gauguin inserted his ethereal Tahitians. (11) Perhaps the most disturbing painting in the exhibition is Francois Boucher's Landscape with a Watermill. In the French countryside in 1755, the peasants were living on husks, grass and acorns, but Boucher has plump maids in white linen sauntering through their tasks, while boys lounge in bucolic splendour on the riverbank. The painting appears to have been produced to grace the walls of a landowner's home. Today, we find such lies repeated on our television screens, in the travel and wildlife programmes which seek to persuade us that all is well in the white man's playground. The BBC's only recent series on the Congo, filmed in the midst of the massacres there, informed
us that 'the Congo may once have been known as the 'heart of darkness' - today it seems more like a bright, beautiful wilderness.' (12) It ignored the killings altogether.

Paradise is the founding myth of the colonist. Unable to contemplate the truth of what we do, we extract from our fathomless collective guilt a story of primordial innocence.

www.monbiot.com

References:


10. See for example http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ places/stowegardens/index.html

11. Sheena Stoddard, ibid.


All web addresses current on August 8th 2003.

First Published in The Guardian Unlimited Tuesday August 5th, 2003
Somewhere between Co-optation and Isolation:

Maintaining autonomy while making strategic demands from electoral politics?

Stevphen Shukaitis (of Rise Up Radio)

It is perhaps ironically accurate that you can judge the success of your organizing efforts by the amount of effort the power structure devotes to either trying to co-opt or to destroy them. This is especially true with the many tendrils of the loosely connected strands grouped under the heading of environmentalism. The fact that McDonalds or some similar establishment offers veggie burgers, or that multinational summits now phrase their plans for ecology-destroying profit mongering in terms of sustainability is a perverse sign of victory.

I'm sure I'm not the only person who can't help but make a nasty face every time I see a shiny new gas guzzling SUV emblazoned with a giant 'meat is murder' sticker. I never fail to be mystified by such. How do people simply not get the connection between how it would be wrong to kill a cow, but somehow slaughtering several hundred thousand Iraqis or polluting Nigerian lands and killing indigenous tribes is somehow a separate issue - or not an issue at all?

Having spent some time looking at the relation between different forms of oppression it baffles me that such inherently interconnected issues can be addressed as separate concerns. It seems that confronting any given issue in isolation leads to the branding of dissent. One can express a disagreement in an almost consumer like display, but stay content that such is easily reintegrated back into the system, the spectacle, or whatever else you would like to call it.

These concerns over co-opting the risks (and occasional benefits) of single issue campaigns will become all the more apparent and pertinent in the United States as 2004 presidential election nears. There will be many attempts to turn the energy and organizing that has gone into the efforts against the war, neo-liberalism, racism, sexism, corporate power, ecological destruction, and every other possibly related issue, and to unite them into a huge voting block to get rid of Bush. This almost certainly will involve great amounts of admonition to 'be pragmatic' and to get behind the candidacy of some random Democrat, perhaps Nader, perhaps someone else - the individual is really inconsequential. There will probably be some efforts made to show how such an individual voted against one particular war resolution or particularly egregious piece of business backed legislation, and this will be used as a pretext for declaring how anti-war or pro-environment such person is. Again, the details are generally rather inconsequential.
This leaves those of us on the more radical end of the political spectrum in somewhat of a quandary. Yeah, Bush is by all means an evil presence who has wrought great damage over the past four years, and it would be great to see him booted. However, replacing him with another neo-liberal happy fuzzy faced Democrat (or Green) really doesn't seem to accomplish much at all. In perspective it's really amazing how much horrendous conservative garbage Clinton managed to pass (1994 crime bill, 1996 welfare reform act, NAFTA, gutting the FDA, etc.) while managing to somehow maintain the image of being a liberal. Just looking at recent political events in South America would seem to be warning enough about the pitfalls of electoral political action. I was somewhat amused and encouraged when Chavez started to refer to himself, Lula, and Castro as the 'axis of good.' While Lula and the Worker's Party briefly seemed like they might accomplish some actual good, it wasn't long before he started licking the capitalist boot and implementing some neo-liberal reforms like slowly taking apart the pension system.

It would be fairly simple to leave it as that: electoral action is the essence of co-option itself, and there is no hope for achieving any sort of actual social, political, environmental change through the ballot. Does that mean that our only option is the bullet? For that reason among others I simply just can't leave it that. For me when people talk about using a diversity of tactics, that would imply using the widest possible of all tactics to achieve one's ends. Conversely, when Malcolm X would speak of securing human rights by any means necessary, that would suggest that any tactic or method that could advance such goals would be worthy of consideration.

I'd like to invert the question of electoral politics as it is usually asked in reference to political activists and community organizers. Instead of the question being how the Democrats or the Greens, or whoever, can mobilize a base of support drawing from certain people with promises often broken and plans left unimplemented, I think the question we should be asking is what do we want from them? In other words, to think actively and tactically about the electoral process, to think of what demands can be made of such a process that serves our needs of mobilizing outside of the electoral process rather than letting our concerns and demands become token chips in the encompassing and enveloping blob of electoral politics.

To borrow a phrase from Dead Prez, to think about how we can pimp the system, rather than being pimped by it. To do such would be to steer the course between flat out rejection of electoralism and the co-optive tendency of embracing it. It would be what Saul Alinsky might describe as jujitsu electoralism.

Recently Nell Geiser and I interviewed Jason West, the newly elected Green party mayor of New Paltz, New York, for the radio show we both work for (Rise Up Radio on WBAI 99.5 in New York City). Going into the interview I expected to be barraged by the usual array of typical 'Green' responses to most questions, the importance and primacy of electoral action, and the usual rhetoric one would expect. I was very curious as to how one could expect or plan strategically so that victories as such could be made sustainable and prolonged, to not have any noticeable gains just be recapitulated in the next electoral season or two. This is especially important as West's victory occurred in part due to an anomalous split in the town's usual voting blocs.

Although Mayor West answered questions in many ways that I suspected that he would - preferring to focus on issues like converting the municipal vehicles to biodiesel fuels and to improvements in the ecological impact of the local sewer system - he said a number of things that I did not expect from him. He was very open about his not seeing electoral political action
as the be-all-and-end-all of organizing, but as a means whereby short-term concrete gains could be achieved and then used as a catalyst to further efforts for deeper and more systemic changes. At several points he made reference to 'Pacifism is Pathology' by Ward Churchill in discussing how strategic long term political planning makes excluding any form of action a questionable idea, and indicated support for both the Animal and Earth Liberation Front.

A number of the things that he said were really quite thought provoking for me, to a large degree because, rather than taking what I have found to be the usual response of Greens and those engaged in electoralism to autonomous organizing (generally summed up as 'one must focus on pragmatic and realizable goals, which you're not doing'), he saw obvious connections between how local electoral campaigns could be benefited by more radical forms of organizing, and how such could also be to the benefit of those trying to create autonomous spaces, new forms of community, and who are engaging in more radical forms of resistance. Some tentative ideas for this might involve support for the development of autonomous social centers, squats, the creation of community run programs and support for public spaces, from where forms of resistance and contestation often emerge.

So, rather than putting forward any sort of definitive position, I would like to put forth the question: how can those of us who have a vision of a more just, sustainable, and free world based upon increasingly autonomous communities, the destruction of the state and capitalism, make strategic demands of electoral campaigns that we can use to forward the kind of work we want to engage in? How can we use the electoral process to benefit our aims and desires rather than being caught up in the quandary of either being isolated from the marginal form of democracy this represents, or co-opted by it? How can we use the continued failures and absurdities of representative democracy to begin discussions and organizing to create genuine democracy, economic democracy, direct democracy?

I'm far from knowing exactly what such steps might look like, or whether they even exist, for this would most likely have to be decided upon based on the conditions where it is occurring, but I think there is a good deal that can gained from looking at such questions. And the time to ask those questions is now, before we're stuck with four years of the lesser evil or worse, and without anything to show for it that can get us any closer to building the world we want to live in.

Rise Up Radio is a youth produced social justice radio show airing Fridays 11:00-11:55 am on WBAI 99.5 in New York City.
The Antarctic Ozone Hole

Richard Malone

According to the National Institute for Weather and Atmospheric research in New Zealand, the risk of people being affected by skin cancer in the southern hemisphere will be greater, because of the increasing size of the hole in the ozone layer of the earth's atmosphere. NIWA says it is too soon to tell whether the hole in the ozone layer over the Antarctic will reach a record size this year. Australian scientists say it is growing at a rate that suggests it will.

There are very few people living in this part of the world around Antarctica, the area that is most affected by the increased effects of sunlight through the depleted ozone layer. Most of the damage to the ozone layer has been attributed to the gases (chloro-fluoro carbons or CFCs) that were commonly used in refrigerators and as propellant for aerosol cans. Substitutes for these gases have been available for some time but CFCs are still having an effect on ozone depletion.

In waste disposal sites throughout New Zealand, local city and town councils remove the gases from abandoned refrigerators in order to minimise the effects on the ozone layer, and yet the problem still increases year by year.

The New Zealand Parliament is governed by the Labour Party which is dependent for its majority of the 120 seats through a coalition with the Green Party (nine seats) and the liberal United Party (nine seats). Conservation is a major political consideration in this current parliament, and implementation of the Kyoto agreement on pollution has led to a major controversy recently. The government has suggested farmers should pay a fee for the methane gases produced by sheep and cattle, in order to encourage them to develop pastures containing grasses and clovers that are less likely to produce these types of gases. There is also a suggestion that bacteria can be introduced into the stomachs of the animals that will affect the types of gases eliminated by them. Farmers are calling these payments a Fart Tax and there has been a huge protest about what they say is the unfairness of the proposal.

New Zealand is keen to protect its clean and green image and is one of the few countries that have an anti-nuclear law that refuses to allow nuclear propelled ships into its ports. It also has banned the importation of Genetically Modified seeds and has very strict quarantine controls to prevent the entry of insects and other pests.
New Zealand has a small population, only four million people, and the area of 66 million acres, ten million acres greater than the United Kingdom (Britain). Pollution is a major concern in NZ and many lakes rivers and streams are affected by the effluent from dairy farms, (NZ is one of the largest exporters of cheese in the world).

There are many isolated areas of NZ where people try to practice living in place (aiming for local self-reliance) but their personal beliefs and practices are affected by things that are outside their control and influence. The hole in the ozone layer is one of these problems, another is the most recent infestation of North Island beehives by the varroah mite. This little creature has had a huge effect on the numbers of bees, and subsequently the pollination of Kiwi fruit, a major export crop for many people who practice living in place, and depend on organic farming and biodiversity in order to create a sustainable environment.

Regardless of their best efforts, a willingness to live in place, and to create a sustainable environment, these people are constantly assailed by the affects of consumerism in the global market.

In spite of its isolation, and government legislation banning the importation of genetically modified seeds, corn produced in NZ from seeds imported from the US were found to be contaminated by GM corn. These seeds were screened and tested on arrival in NZ before being grown, however the GM contamination was discovered by food scientists in Japan who tested the corn topping on Pizza imported from NZ.

Personally I think it is admirable that there are so many people in NZ and elsewhere who are doing their best to live in a positive and sustainable way that enhances their quality of life and the people around them. Unfortunately their interests are affected by the decisions made in London, Tokyo and New York, by people who have an entirely different agenda, an agenda that is dependent on growth and consumerism and is not interested in the ethos of sustainability. These people will no doubt rejoice in the increasing size of the hole in the ozone layer as an opportunity to increase the sales of their new sunscreen lotion, complete with the new upgraded UV screen factor and incorporating the latest anti wrinkle cream.

For the vast majority of people living in the major cities of the world, they need not worry at this stage about the hole in the ozone layer, they will be screened from the sun's ultra violet rays by the atmospheric pollution that surrounds them, they will of course be affected by the pollution in other ways. For most of the world's workers, sustainability is about how to survive the gap between spending your last dollar, and the arrival of the next pay packet.

Yours for changing the culture of consumerism to a culture of cooperation, a revolution in the way that we think about the affects each of us can have on a new consciousness in a world society.

r.malone@clear.net.nz
Ecosocialism

*The Socialist Party*

The Ecological Perspective

Current methods of production may be damaging the world's eco-systems in many ways, but the question remains whether human productive activity, transforming materials originating from nature into goods suitable for human use, is inevitably damaging in an ecological sense. The massive scale of human productive activity has immense implications for ecology, and some radical greens argue that human activity on such a scale is incompatible with a harmonious relationship with the rest of nature.

In considering what we mean by 'ecological damage', it is important to remember that these ecosystems are evolving. The biosphere as a whole, which consists of millions of mutually interdependent life forms, might be thought of as one single ecosystem. Yet it is possible to distinguish various sub-systems, or 'biomes' within it, on the basis of the different climatic and physical conditions in different parts of the world. These range from the tundra of the Arctic, through the coniferous and deciduous forests and steppes, to the savannah and tropical rainforests of the regions near the equator. To each combination of physical and climatic conditions there corresponds a stable ecosystem which evolves to its 'climax' through a series of successive stages. This stable climax will be the situation where the amount of food produced by the plant life is sufficient, after taking account of the plants' own respiration needs, to sustainably meet the food energy requirements of all the animal life-forms within the system. It will be, in fact, the situation which makes optimum use, in terms of sustaining all the life-forms within the system, of the sun's light rays falling on the area.

An ecological climax is defined in terms of the existing physical and climatic conditions. It is clear that if these change, as they have done relatively frequently in the course of the thousands of millions of years life has existed - through such things as the sea level rising or falling, and the coming and going of the ice ages - then the previously existing balance will be upset. A new one will then tend to develop in accordance with the new physical and climatic conditions.

The break-up of an old ecosystem plunges the different species and varieties of life-forms into a state of competition. In the case of plants, the competition would be to capture the sun's light rays. In the case of animals, it would be to consume the food energy produced by plants. The species and the individuals proving to be best adapted to the new conditions would survive
and flourish. Eventually a new stable ecosystem, with a different 'climax', appropriate to the new geophysical conditions, would evolve. At such times biological evolution would have tended to speed up as whole. Species could disappear leaving the ecological niche they occupied to be filled by newcomers.

The world's eco-systems are continually evolving and hence there is no one 'original,' 'natural' state of the planet. After all, humans are both a product and part of nature and not something outside of it. There is no reason to regard an ecosystem in which humans, like other animals, live in limited numbers as 'hunter gatherers' in the forest as any more 'natural' than one in which there is a greater number of trees and forest plants. There is no basis in ecology for saying that trees should be the main life-form, nor even that the natural human condition is hunting and gathering.

Ecology and Socialism

The materials humans take from nature can be divided into two categories according to whether they are renewable or non-renewable. Nearly everything of organic nature is renewable (since more of it can be grown in a relatively short period of time), as are certain natural forces which humans use as instruments of labour (rivers, waterfalls, wind, the sun's rays etc). Non-renewable resources on the other hand - such as mineral ores, coal, oil, clay, sand - are so called because they do not form part of some natural cycle that reproduces them, at least not with a timescale relevant for humans.

Agriculture

The most obvious way in which humans extract renewable materials from the biosphere is through agriculture. Agriculture involves, by definition, a fundamental change in the existing eco-system. The introduction of agriculture to Europe involved cutting most of the deciduous forest. This deciduous forest had represented a stable ecological climax for most of Europe. The land was used to grow plants which humans found useful, to the detriment of both the trees and other plants that had flourished in the forest. Agriculture involves deliberately preventing an ecosystem from developing towards a climax.

For an ecosystem involving agriculture to be a stable one requires deliberate action on the part of humans. This involves not only planting fields and keeping them clear of other plants which might grow there ('weeds'), but also to maintain the fertility of the soil which, without agriculture, would spontaneously renew itself.

Things go wrong when humans ignore the ecological consequences of their actions, for instance, by permitting overgrazing by their domesticated animals or by taking out of the soil without restoring the minerals and organic materials that are essential to normal plant growth. However, if humans observe these rules, then, as a number of historical examples testify, an ecosystem in which humans practise agriculture can be as stable as one from which humans are absent, or one in which they practise hunting and gathering.

This was understood and practised in the relatively self-sufficient agricultural communities which existed up until the coming of capitalism, where what was produced was largely consumed on the spot. The human waste resulting from consumption, together with animal waste and
those parts of plants and animals that were not used for food and other purposes, were restored to the soil where they were decomposed by insects, fungi and bacteria into the elements that sustain the soil’s fertility.

When, however, the place of production and the place of consumption are separated, this cycle tends to break down. The result is that the fertility of the soil diminishes. If an area specializes in the production of a crop for export, i.e. for consumption elsewhere, this means that some of the mineral and organic matter incorporated into the crop will leave that area for ever and not be restored to the soil. The same applies to animal rearing. Animals require large amounts of calcium for their bones, as well as other minerals such as phosphorus, iron and magnesium, which also come from the soil, via the plants on which they feed. If these animals are exported, whether dead or alive, and consumed elsewhere, then the minerals they contain are lost to the soil of the area where they were raised.

A complementary problem arises at the other end, at the point of consumption: what to do with the human waste which, when the points of production and consumption were the same, was automatically restored to the soil and recycled by nature? Releasing it into the sea or into rivers or sewers means that it is lost to agriculture, even if not, unfortunately, to the biosphere (this contributes to water pollution by encouraging the proliferation of some life-forms - for example, algae and bacteria - to the detriment of others which the water normally supports.)

The 'solution' that has been found under capitalism, because it is the cheapest in terms of the labour content of the products, has been to use artificial fertilizers - nitrates and phosphates that have been manufactured in chemical plants. This works in the sense of allowing the land to go on producing the same amount, or more, of the same crop or animal, but at a price in terms of polluting the water in the region concerned. Artificial fertilizers, not being held by the soil in the same way that organic waste is, tend to be leached off by rain into waterways where they cause pollution.

The ecological solution to the problem is to find some way of restoring to the soil the organic waste resulting from human consumption in urban areas. Barry Commoner suggested that this might be done by means of pipelines linking the town and the countryside. A longer term solution would be that envisaged by those early socialists who looked forward to agriculture and manufacturing industry being combined, the gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country. (Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto, 1848)

**Non-Renewable Materials**

Concern has been expressed that non-renewable resources will eventually run out. Still, despite some wild predictions that were made in the recent past, depletion of non-renewable resources is not an immediate problem. One advantage non-renewable materials have over most renewable ones is that they can normally be used more than once. With the important exceptions of coal, oil and natural gas when burned, they can be recycled. A proportion of some metals is lost through corrosion but all metals can in principle be recovered and re-used.

It has been suggested, for instance, that most of the gold mined since Ancient times is still in use. Much of the iron, copper, tin and other metals mined since the same time is still around
somewhere even if not still used as gold is. Resources can be conserved by making instruments of production easier to repair and by manufacturing goods of all kinds to last rather than to break down or become unusable after a carefully calculated period of time, as is common practice under capitalism. Non-renewable resources can be replaced in many cases by renewable ones. Electricity generation is a case in point.

**Non-Polluting Technology**

The techniques employed to transform materials must, if they are to avoid upsetting natural cycles which are fundamental to nature, avoid releasing into the biosphere or leaving as waste products, toxic substances or substances that cannot be assimilated by nature. In other words, a non-polluting technology should be applied. This is quite feasible from a technical point of view since non-polluting transformation techniques are known in all fields of production. However, they are not employed on any wide scale today because they would add to production costs and so are ruled out by the economic laws of capitalism.

**Conclusion**

The underlying principle behind the changes in the materials and productive methods used, which is demanded by the need to take proper account of the ecological dimension, is that the productive system as a whole should be sustainable for the rest of nature. In other words, what humans take from nature, the amount and the rhythm at which they do so, as well as the way they use these materials and dispose of them after use, should all be done in such a way as to leave nature in a position to go on supplying and reabsorbing the required materials for use.

In the long run this implies stable or only slowly rising consumption and production levels, though it does not rule out carefully planned rapid growth over a period to reach a level at which consumption and production could then platform off. A society in which production, consumption and population levels are stable has been called a 'steady-state economy' where production would be geared simply to meeting needs and to replacing and repairing the stock of means of production (raw materials and instruments of production) required for this.

It is obvious that today human needs are far from being met on a world scale, and that fairly rapid growth in the production of food, housing and other basic amenities would still be needed for some years even if production ceased to be governed by the economic laws of capitalism. However it should not be forgotten that a 'steady-state economy' would be a much more normal situation than an economy geared to blindly accumulating more and more means of production. After all, the only rational reason for accumulating means of production is to eventually be in a position to satisfy all reasonable consumption needs.

Once the stock of means of production has reached this level, in a society with this goal, accumulation, or the further expansion of the stock of means of production, can stop and production levels be stabilized. Logically, this point would eventually be reached, since the consumption needs of a given population are finite.

So if human society is to be able to organize its production in an ecologically acceptable way, then it must abolish the capitalist economic mechanism of capital accumulation and gear production instead to the direct satisfaction of needs.
A self-managed society will naturally implement most present-day ecological demands. Some are essential for the very survival of humanity; but for both aesthetic and ethical reasons, liberated people will undoubtedly choose to go well beyond this minimum and foster a rich biodiversity.

The point is that we can debate such issues open-mindedly only when we have eliminated the profit incentives and economic insecurity that now undermine even the most minimal efforts to defend the environment (loggers afraid of losing their jobs, chronic poverty tempting Third World countries to cash in on their rain forests, etc.). (1)

When humanity as a species is blamed for environmental destruction, the specific social causes are forgotten. The few who make the decisions are lumped with the powerless majority. Famines are seen as nature's revenge against overpopulation, natural checks that must be allowed to run their course -- as if there was anything natural about the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which force Third World countries to cultivate products for export rather than food for local consumption. People are made to feel guilty for using cars, ignoring the fact that auto companies (by buying up and sabotaging electric transit systems, lobbying for highway construction and against railroad subsidies, etc.) have created a situation in which most people have to have cars. Spectacular publicity gravely urges everyone to reduce energy consumption (while constantly inciting everyone to consume more of everything), though we could by now have developed more than enough clean and renewable energy sources if the fossil-fuel companies had not successfully lobbied against devoting any significant research funding to that end.

The point is not to blame even the heads of those companies - they too are caught in a grow-or-die system that impels them to make such decisions - but to abolish the setup that continually produces such irresistible pressures.

A liberated world should have room both for human communities and for large enough regions of undisturbed wilderness to satisfy most of the deep ecologists. Between those two extremes I like to think that there will be all sorts of imaginative, yet careful and respectful,
human interactions with nature. Cooperating with it, working with it, playing with it; creating variegated interminglings of forests, farms, parks, gardens, orchards, creeks, villages, towns.

Large cities will be broken up, spaced out, 'greened' and rearranged in a variety of ways incorporating and surpassing the visions of the most imaginative architects and city planners of the past (who were usually limited by their assumption of the permanence of capitalism). Exceptionally, certain major cities, especially those of some aesthetic or historical interest, will retain or even amplify their cosmopolitan features, providing grand centers where diverse cultures and lifestyles can come together. (2)

Some people, drawing on the situationists' early 'psychogeographical' explorations and 'unitary urbanism' ideas, will construct elaborate changeable decors designed to facilitate labyrinthine wanderings among diverse ambiences - Ivan Chttchegov envisioned 'assemblages of castles, grottos, lakes', 'rooms more conducive to dreams than any drug' and people living in their own personal 'cathedrals' (3) . Others may incline more to the Far Eastern poet's definition of happiness as living in a hut beside a mountain stream.

If there aren't enough cathedrals or mountain streams to go around, maybe some compromises will have to be worked out. But if places like Chartres or Yosemite are presently overrun, this is only because the rest of the planet has been so uglified. As other natural areas are revitalized and as human habitats are made more beautiful and interesting, it will no longer be necessary for a few exceptional sites to accommodate millions of people desperate to get away from it all. On the contrary, many people may actually gravitate toward the most miserable regions because these will be the 'new frontiers' where the most exciting transformations will be taking place (ugly buildings being demolished to make way for experimental reconstruction from scratch).

(1) Isaac Asimov and Frederick Pohl's Our Angry Earth: A Ticking Ecological Bomb (Tor, 1991) is among the more cogent summaries of this desperate situation. After demonstrating how inadequate current policies are for dealing with it, the authors propose some drastic reforms that might postpone the worst catastrophes; but such reforms are unlikely to be implemented as long as the world is dominated by the conflicting interests of nation-states and multinational corporations.

(2) For a wealth of suggestive insights on the advantages and drawbacks of different types of urban communities, past, present and potential, I recommend two books: Paul and Percival Goodman's Communitas and Lewis Mumford's The City in History . The latter is one of the most penetrating and comprehensive surveys of human society ever written.

(3) SI Anthology, pp. 3-4 [Formulary for a New Urbanism]

End of fourth and last chapter of 'The Joy of Revolution,' from Public Secrets: Collected Skirmishes of Ken Knabb (Bureau of Public Secrets, 1997). (No copyright)
The End of the Peace Process:

Oslo and After Edward W. Said (Vintage, 2001)

reviewed by Torgun Bullen

Edward W. Said (born November 1 1935; died September 25 2003) was Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He was a Palestinian New Yorker who wrote passionately about the plight of the Palestinians, emphasising all the while the need for a peaceful, secular solution to the Israeli/Palestinian problem as well as equal citizenship and peaceful co-existence between Arabs and Jews.

The so-called Middle East 'peace process' began secretly in Oslo and was signed on the White House lawn in September 1993. The interim agreements were concluded in October 1998, in the Wye Plantation a few miles from Washington.

The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After is a collection of essays outlining what was achieved by both sides, Israeli and Palestinian - pitifully little for the Palestinians, according to Said.

Said addresses the general ignorance in the West about the origin of the situation in Israel, due to the silence of most Western intellectuals on what happened in Palestine in 1948 and the effects of an extremely efficient American and Israeli propaganda machine. The view is widespread in the West that the Zionists settled in a largely uninhabited land in 1948 and that they 'made the desert bloom'. Nothing could be further from the truth, Said says. About 750,000 Palestinians, 70 % of the population, were forcefully made to flee their homes and became refugees in surrounding countries. Before 1948, only about 7% of the land in Palestine was owned by Jews. This increased to about 50% after 1948. In 1967, the Israelis annexed East Jerusalem and occupied the rest of historic Palestine.

Palestinian Arabs had been settled on their land for thousands of years when the Zionists made them flee. The ones still living in the occupied territories are in fact living in disjointed Bantustans with Israelis firmly in control of land, water, roads, entries and exits to townships and security. One of the founding fathers of Zionism is supposed to have remarked that their plan was to acquire all the land in Palestine 'acre by acre, goat by goat', and this is more or less what has happened and is happening, through house occupations, bulldozing of homes, expropriation of land, deceptive property purchases and the like.
Said makes the comparison again and again with the way the American Indians were treated and with the apartheid system and Bantustans in South Africa. As far as the occupied territories go, in Gaza land confiscated by Jewish settlers now amounts to 40% and in Jerusalem and in the West Bank 75%.

All Jews worldwide are covered by the so-called 'Law of Return' which means that a Jew from, say, Belgrade with no recent ties to Palestine or Israel, has an automatic right to settle in Israel, while Palestinian Arabs within Israel or the occupied territories, whose families have been there for generations, have no right to land.

Said doesn’t spare Arafat and his hangers-on in the Palestinian Authority, listing their undemocratic, corrupt and brutal practices, including the widespread use of torture. Arafat surrounds himself by several security apparatuses (nobody knows how many). Gaza is a virtual concentration camp surrounded by a security fence on three sides and the sea on the fourth. A human rights lawyer working there estimates that in Gaza there are 20,000 security men for 1 million residents - the highest police per capita ratio in the world. Said launches stinging attacks on the general patriarchal and autocratic style of leadership in the Arab world.

Said makes the case that the Israelis are not 'ordinary oppressors', in that many Jews living in Israel are the survivors of the Holocaust. This does not give them right to oppress others, he says, at the same time he distances himself from other Arabs who think the Holocaust is not their problem. Said expresses sympathy for all human suffering and is a strong spokesman for dialogue with sympathetic Israelis, which is frowned upon in much of the Arab world as 'normalization' with Israel.

Although the Palestinians seem to be steadily losing out to the settlers and Israel, in one respect they have the advantage: by 2010 it is estimated that Palestinians will achieve demographic parity with Jews - what then? asks the author.

Said sees the folly of believing that a Palestinian 'state' is going to be a solution for the Palestinians - after all, Arafat regularly declares such a 'state', and all the while the land occupations and the bulldozing of homes continues. Beyond that, Said does not question 'statehood' per se. What he would like to see for the Palestinians is equal rights with Jews and others within Israel on a secular basis - a modern Western style liberal 'democracy' for all Israeli citizens.

Summing up the achievements of the 'peace process', he says (p. 19): 'The newly redrawn areas of the West Bank and Gaza gave Palestinians limited autonomy (but no sovereignty) in 3% of the former and about 60% of the latter, which the Israelis were glad to get rid of anyway'.

The positive thing about Said is his insistence on Israelis and Palestinians solving their problems together, as equals. History cannot be undone, what happened, happened, and there is only one platform to work from: the one where Jews and Arabs live side by side. He is an advocate for dialogue with sympathetic and 'enlightened' Israelis, and does not discount such attempts as 'fraternising with the enemy', or 'collaborating'. He is also unequivocal in his insistence on the equal role that should be played by women in any democracy and highlights their subordinate role in the region.
The disappointing side to his argument is that, in spite of pointing out the brutality and corruption of Arafat and the Palestinian leadership again and again, he still makes appeals for them to change. Said's hope for the Palestinians and the Middle East is a Western style 'democracy'. He is more or less saying that the style of leadership in the Middle East is still somewhat medieval and pre-capitalist - all power is in the hands of powerful, often despotic, patriarchal leaders from ruling families. Seen from that standpoint the more powerful role of government and the state in Western Europe, for example, must seem more attractive - with schools, universities and health care funded from the state purse, and with some limited freedom of expression.

What Said, along with the majority of 'enlightened' intellectuals, does not see is that within the confines of states, capitalism and private property, these problems are going to perpetuate themselves indefinitely. Tensions and rivalry are built into the capitalist system; one group of leaders replacing another turn out to be, like in Orwell's 1984, just another lot of pigs at the trough. It cannot be any other way. The state is there to serve the interests of the capitalist class, to give to the capitalists as much as they can without risking social unrest and to take from the workers as much as they will allow.

Only when workers realise they have no country to owe allegiance to, and that the reliance on leaders leads them nowhere but down a blind ally, will we start to make progress.
Marxism as revolutionary environmentalism


reviewed by Ben Courtice (http://home.connexus.net.au/~benj)

Following the ecological devastation perpetrated by Soviet industry, and the view held by many (including many Marxists) that Marxism advocates the technological 'domination' of nature, Marxism has had a defensive attitude to the modern environmental movement. Although Marxists have always taken part in environmental movements since their rise in the 1970s, there has always been suspicion that they are only there for their own interests (such as recruitment to their own group) and really don’t care about the environment itself.

Some critics say Marxism is just out of date on environmental questions. Others suggest it is fundamentally anti-environmental. But both these ideas are on shaky footing when any serious examination of the thought of Karl Marx is made, and John Bellamy Foster does just this in his book.

Marx developed his political and economic critique of capitalism during the middle of the nineteenth century. The industrial revolution was shaking the political and economic structure of society. This was the central focus of Marx's study and political activity, but many forget that natural sciences were also undergoing a revolution. The common view of economics and politics usually denies the relevance of natural science, but modern environmental notions that they are intimately connected were obvious to Marx, who avidly followed the latest scientific discoveries in many fields.

'Within contemporary Green thought a strong tendency has developed to attribute the entire course of ecological degradation to the emergence of the scientific revolution', Foster writes. But a concern for the environment (centred on problems of soil fertility and population pressure) permeated the scientific world of the nineteenth century. In fact, some scientific advances were made partly in response to the damage and problems that capitalist industry (not science) had brought about.

Of course, there are many trends of thought within the environmental movement, and Foster does not attempt to reconcile Marx with all of them. For some, nature (or 'wilderness') is seen first as something to be treasured for its spiritual (or cultural) value. Some supporters of this romantic view even present it as a non-anthropocentric, objective view of nature (when in fact
is highly anthropocentric and laden with subjective values). Marx, however, saw threats to nature as a product of humans' separation from nature. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels call for abolishing the distinction between city and country. Often interpreted as an attack on the cultural backwardness of rural society, this is as much an expression of Marx's understanding of problems such as soil fertility.

The rise of modern cities meant that food, grown in the country, had to be transported to the city. The mineral components of the food then were flushed into rivers as sewage waste, depleting the soil's fertility; the agricultural cycle of natural fertiliser was broken. In the modern era not all problems (such as deforestation) are so easily reducible to a division between city and country. However, Marx's view of this 'metabolic rift' is a crucial part of any modern environmental strategy, and points to his broader method which views society as necessarily a part of the environment.

Finding the roots of the environmental crisis is more complicated than equating exploitation of nature with exploitation of workers. Saying that capitalism exploits the environment because it can make money is so simplistic as to be trivial, and in terms of solutions, points no further than to reformist regulation. It is necessary to consider in more depth: how does the problem arise? what aspects of capitalist social organisation really cause the destruction of our environment? A socialist society that wishes to avoid the ecological disasters of Soviet agriculture and industry has to grapple with these questions, the answers to which point inexorably to fundamental changes to society, well beyond the political level.

Foster sets out to demonstrate that ecological thought is central to Marxism. This he achieves admirably. Having demonstrated this, the question is, what to do next? A history of ideas does not a Marxist ecological movement make. As Louis Proyect of www.marxmail.org has written, 'Foster is correct to state that the analysis of the ecological crisis must be rooted in Marxist materialism, but - after having stated this - it is still a task that remains unfulfilled.'

But anyone - scientist or activist - who wishes to rise to this (long overdue) challenge could do worse than start with a reading of Foster's book. Just because Marx did not have to deal with radioactive waste or the greenhouse effect doesn't mean his ideas and approach have no relevance to modern environmentalists.
Common Voice Issue 1 / February-April 2004

The People as Enemy:

The Leaders' Real Agenda in World War II, by John Spritzler, (Black Rose Books, 2003)

reviewed by Dave Stratman

John Spritzler's The People As Enemy: The Leaders' Hidden Agenda in World War II is a powerful, necessary, and inspiring book. Read it and you will never see World War II in the same way. More to the point, you will never see contemporary capitalist society in the same way. Spritzler explodes the myth of 'the good war' by taking apart, piece by careful piece, much of the structure of lies and myths designed to buttress capitalist rule, and exposes the system in its ugliness and ultimate weakness.

Spritzler shows too that there is a powerful counter-force to capitalism at work in society: working men and women fighting everywhere for a better world, a force so threatening that the most powerful elites on earth waged a world war to extinguish it. This counter-force was not defeated on the field of battle in World War II so much as misled and betrayed by Communist leaders in a little-known history from which we have not yet recovered. The People as Enemy is a giant step toward understanding and breaking free of that history.

There are three key myths about World War II which this book lays bare: that the war was caused by conflicts between nations; that the top priority of the Allied leaders in the war was to defeat the Fascists; and that Allied bombing of civilians was part of the effort to defeat the Fascists.

World War II was a desperate means of social control undertaken by the elites of the warring nations as the only alternative to working class revolution. In each of the belligerent nations which Spritzler examines: Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the U.S., government leaders were driven to war not chiefly by fear of other countries but by fear of their own people. The ruling elites of these countries went to war because they saw no other way to stay in power.

War between nations was the form in which the ruling elites prosecuted the class war against their own people. Depression began in 1929 and gripped the world. Countries were swept by mass strikes and factory occupations, mass marches, worker demands for a just world, threats to the established power. German Nazis and Japanese militarists, Stalin and 'democratic' British and American leaders, seized upon war as the way to whip up nationalist fears of the
The People as Enemy: Foreign Enemy, replace calls for revolution with national unity behind establishment leaders, put down strikes and labor upheaval, and crush dissent. Of the U.S., Spritzler writes, “FDR led the U.S. into war because he knew there was no other way to control the American working class that was growing increasingly revolutionary. Just as for the Fascist leaders, the function of war for American leaders was not to defend against a threat from foreign nations, but to serve the needs of domestic social control.”

The People As Enemy shows war as the ultimate and critical means of counterrevolution by rulers, their favored means to stay in power when all else fails; there is no horror they will not inflict, no atrocity they will not commit to enforce their rule. The weapons of the ruling elites to maintain their power in the 1930s and '40s were Fascism - and, as Spritzler also shows, Communism - fake democracy, war, genocide, nationalism, and other devices designed to deflect workers from their real enemies and set them upon each other.

The People As Enemy provides a wealth of hidden history. Spritzler's description of the amazing breadth of working class struggle in the United States in the years preceding the war is especially eye-opening, as is the evidence that the British establishment was not 'appeasing' Hitler at Munich out of fear, but rather intentionally nurturing Nazi power as a force against the German working class and against the Soviets.

The book has profound implications beyond World War II. Echoes of the past in the present and specifically a consciousness of the Iraq war are never distant in this book. It suggests that the real force driving the history of the twentieth century was working class struggle for a new world and ruling class efforts to contain it. The rhythm of the century was revolution and counterrevolution - a rhythm in which we, of course, are still caught. Seldom has a work of history been more acutely relevant to understanding our present and our possible futures.

John Spritzler is an editor of New Democracy and a biostatistician at the Harvard School of Public Health working on AIDS research.

Dave Stratman, Editor of New Democracy, 5 Burr Street Boston, MA 02130 617-524-4073, newdemocracyworld.org, Newdem@aol.com
Untitled Poem

Hope is the problem, purely, simply said,
that clouds the eyes and weaves a gauzy strand
'cross wrists and ankles, tethers biceps, tongue.
It drugs th' essential brain and will of man
until content with hope and hope alone,
addicted to the lie, he'll sit and wait.
While dreaming, hoping for that better life,
he twiddles thumbs and eats what's on his plate.
Unlike its human counterpart, the bee
knows just what must be done and goes to task
and whether it be worker, drone, or queen,
lives for the hive and not what people ask.
So, too, may men in common, truly free,
abolish hunger, war, and poverty.

Esther O'Donald Fruth, 2003
Contacts

One of the aims of Common Voice and the World in Common network is to try and facilitate communication, co-operation and collaboration between the individuals and groups that comprise the global anti-state, anti-capitalist, antireformist political sector. To help achieve this aim we will publish a contacts list in every issue of Common Voice. If you, your group or publication would like to be included please submit the following information either via e-mail to editors@cvoice.org, or via post to World in Common, Box 44, Greenleaf Bookshop, 82 Colston Street, Bristol, BS1 5BB, UK.

Name of organisation: ______________________________
Contact Name: ___________________________________
E-mail address: ___________________________________
Website address: ___________________________________
Postal address: ____________________________________
Telephone/Fax number: _____________________________
Year of formation (for groups/organisations): ___________
Publications (with subscription details): _______________
A short description of your aims/objectives: _______________

Current Contact List (in no particular order):
Name of organisation: The Land is Ours
Contact Name: Mark. S. Brown
E-mail address: everythingincommon@tlio.demon.co.uk
Website address: www.thelandisours.org
Postal address: 16b Cherwell Street, Oxford OX4 1BG
Year of formation: 1995
Publications: The Land is Ours newsletter (Subscription: £1/donation per issue).
TLIO campaigns peacefully for access to the land, its resources, and the decision-making processes affecting them, for everyone, irrespective of race, gender or age.83

Name of organisation: International Communes Desk
Contact Name: Anton Marks
E-mail address: anton@kvutsatyovel.com
Website address: www.communia.org.il
Postal address: Yad Tabenkin, Ramat Efal, Israel, 52960
Tel: 972 - 3 - 5344458, extension 4
Fax: 972 - 3 - 5346376
Year of formation: 1976
Publications: C.A.L.L. (Communes At Large Letter) - The bi-annual journal of the International Communes Desk features articles, stories, jokes and updates from communities all over the world.

Aims/Objectives:
- To spread the communal idea, in its many forms, out of the belief that the communal way of life is not only possible, but essential for the benefit of mankind.
- To maintain contact with as many as possible communes and intentional communities, in order to learn about their life styles and exchange information, opinions and ideas for mutual benefit.
- To provide an address for people from all over the world, who are seeking advice and information about the kibbutz in its different aspects and about communities the world over (including help in making contact for those wishing to visit a community or join one).

Name of organisation: CLASS WAR, Auckland
E-mail address: classwar@rome.com
Website address: http://go.to/ClassWar
Postal address: P.O. Box 78-104, Grey Lynn, New Zealand 1032.
An anarchist group in Auckland city, New Zealand. For details on our present campaigns, please visit the website or contact us.

Name of organisation: Industrial Workers of the World (US)
E-mail address: ghq@iww.org
Website address: www.iww.org
Postal address: P.O.Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101, USA
Tel: (215)222-1905
Year of formation: 1905
Publications: Industrial Worker (10 issues per annum - US$15)
Aims/Objectives:
The IWW is a member-run union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities. IWW members are organizing to win better conditions today and build a world with economic democracy tomorrow. We want our workplaces run for the benefit of workers and communities rather than for a handful of bosses.

Name of organisation: Industrial Workers of the World (UK)
E-mail address: info@iww.org.uk
Website address: www.iww.org.uk
Postal address: IWW, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK
The Industrial Workers of the World is a union run directly by its members, promoting global solidarity and direct action for the abolition of capitalist wage slavery.

Name of organisation: Redline Publications
Contact Name: Jim Plant
E-mail address: socliterature@btopenworld.com
Postal address: PO Box 6700, Sawbridgeworth, CM 21 0BS, UK
Fax: 01279 726970
Year of formation: 2001
Publications: The People , paper of the Socialist Labor Party of America, 6 issues surface mail £3.00, airmail £9.00, 12 issues surface £5.00, airmail &17.00. Free sample copy upon request.
Aims/Objectives:
Publication & distribution of socialist literature, particularly publications of the Socialist Party of America, but also a wide selection of other titles in the non-reformist, non-stateist, non-Leninist, non-Trotskyist tradition. Free illustrated catalogue available upon request.
Name of organisation: New Union Party
E-mail address: nup@minn.net
Website address: www.newunionparty.org
Postal address: 1821 University Avenue, W. #S-116, Saint Paul, MN 55104, USA
Tel: 651-646-5546
Year of formation: 1980
Publications: New Unionist (monthly)[?] US$7 for 12 issues
Aims/Objectives:
The New Union Party is an organization of men and women who are committed to building a rank-and-file working-class movement for fundamental social change. Our goal is to replace the present competitive, class-divided system of capitalism with the cooperative industrial community we call economic democracy, a society where the people will be in direct democratic control of their work, their workplaces and the product of their work.

Name of organisation: Socialist Labor Party
E-mail address: socialists@slp.org
Website address: www.slp.org
Postal address: P.O.Box 218, Mountain View, CA 94042-0218, USA
Tel: (408)280-7266 Fax: (408)280-6964
Year of formation: 1890
Publications: The People (bimonthly - $5 per year)
Aims/Objectives:
The SLP's goal is a classless society based on collective ownership and control of the industries and social services, these to be administered in the interests of all society through a Socialist Industrial Union government composed of democratically elected representatives from all the industries and services of the land. Production would be carried on for use instead of profit. The SLP program for achieving revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism is based on the Marxist tenet that socialism can be achieved only through the class-conscious action “of the working class itself”.

Name of organisation: Workers Solidarity Alliance
E-mail address: WSANY@hotmail.com
Website address: www.workersolidarity.org
Postal address: 339 Lafayette St., Room 202, New York, NY 10012, USA
Tel: 212-979-8353
Fax: 973-773-9337
Year of formation: 1984
Publications: Ideas and Action (suspended)
Aims/Objectives:
WSA is an anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian organization of activists who believe that working people can build a new society and a better world based on the principles of solidarity and self-management. Our view is that such a society will be brought about only by working people building their own self-managed mass organizations from the ground up. Independent working class organization exists to some extent today in the form of rank-and-file committees, tenants unions, workers centers and other formations that might represent the forerunner of such a movement.

Name of organisation: World Socialist Movement (WSM)
E-mail address: enquiries@worldsocialism.org
Website address: www.worldsocialism.org/
Postal address: c/o Socialist Party of Great Britain, 52 Clapham High St., London SW4 7UN, England
Tel: 020 7622 3811 Fax: 020 7720 3665
Year of formation: 1904
Publications: Socialist Standard (Monthly journal of the Socialist Party - 1 year sub £12)
Aims/Objectives:
The World Socialist Movement is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organizing democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society we advocate. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.
Name of organisation: The Socialist Party of Great Britain (Ashbourne Court Group)
E-mail address: enquiries@spgb.org.uk
Website address: www.spgb.org.uk/
Postal address: 71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB, UK
Year of formation: 1991
Publications: Socialist Studies (50p per issue)
Aims/Objectives:
Object: the establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.
Name of organisation: Bureau of Public Secrets
E-mail address: knabb@slip.net
Website address: www.bopsecrets.org
Postal address: P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley CA 94701, USA
Year of formation: 1973
Publications: Situationist International Anthology (texts by the group that triggered the May 1968 revolt in France); Public Secrets (collected skirmishes of Ken Knabb); occasional leaflets, pamphlets, etc.
Aims/Objectives:
“Making petrified conditions dance by singing them their own tune.”
Name of organisation: Aufheben
Website address: www.geocities.com/aufheben2
Postal address: Aufheben, Brighton & Hove Unemployed Workers Centre, PO Box 2536 Rottingdean, BRIGHTON BN2 6LX, UK
Publications: Aufheben
Aims/Objectives:
The magazine is an attempt to develop revolutionary theory/practice, based on but we hope superseding the traditions of the left communists, autonomia and situationists.
Name of organisation: Processed World Magazine
Contact Name: Chris Carlsson
E-mail address: processedworld@yahoo.com
Website address: www.processedworld.com
Telephone/Fax number: 415-626-2060 (tel) 415-626-2685 (fax, call first)
Postal address: 1095 Market Street, Suite 210, San Francisco, CA 94103
Year of formation: 1980
Publications: Processed World published 3x/yr. between 1981 and 1994, then once in 2001 and we plan a new issue this year (2004), currently planned on the theme of “USSA: Living in a Dying Empire” but subject to later revision.87
Aims/Objectives:
We currently plan to publish occasionally as we see fit, depending on energy, ideas and money. The circle of friends around Processed World, which goes back nearly a quarter of a
century, has been known to engage in various activities, including art attacks, street theater, flyering, attending Big Summits of the Powers that Be to engage in opposition, public discussions, poster projects, billboard alteration, subversive advertising campaigns, digital lost history projects... and so on and so forth...

Name of organisation: Freedom Press
E-mail address: info(at)freedompress.org.uk
Website address: www.freedompress.org.uk
Telephone/Fax number: 020 7247 9249
Postal address: 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX
Year of formation: 1886
Publications: Freedom newspaper, out every 2 weeks, subs £10 claimants, £14 standard, write to us for a free copy
Aims/Objectives:
Freedom is an independent anarchist publisher. We produce a newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, and we publish books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice. We run Britain's largest anarchist bookshop in East London, house the Autonomy Club meeting host an open-access computer suite. As anarchists we work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that human freedom can only thrive when the institutions of state and capital have been abolished.

Name of organisation: enrager.net
E-mail address: admin(at)enrager.net
Website address: www.enrager.net
Postal address: enrager, 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX
Year of formation: 2003
Aims/Objectives:
enrager.net is an online resource about all aspects of anti-capitalism and antiauthoritarianism. It contains clear information about basic ideas and history, as well as pretty comprehensive listings of groups in Britain, a newswire with both up-to-the-minute syndicated news and more detailed analysis, organising tips about how to start a local group, produce a newsletter or resist in the workplace, lively discussion forums to link up with people in your area, help plan events, and chat about anything from politics to music to monkeys, and much more besides. Check it out!

Name of organisation: Autonomedia
Contact Name: Jim Fleming
E-mail address: info@autonomedia.org
Website address: www.autonomedia.org
Telephone/Fax number: 718-963-2603
Postal address: POB 568, Brooklyn, NY 11211-0568
Year of formation: 1984
Publications: 300 books
Aims/Objectives:
Not-for-profit small press specialized in radical media, politics and culture

Name of organisation: International Communist Current
E-mail address: internationali@internationalism.org
Website address: http://www.internationalism.org
Postal address: BM Box 869, London WC1N 3XX
Year of formation : 1975
Publications: World Revolution (10 issues/year), International Review (Quarterly)
Aims/objectives:
The ICC is an international organisation of the communist left, with sections in 13
countries. Our political positions include the rejection of support for ‘national liberation’
struggles, participation in elections and support for the trade unions. In the face of
imperialist war we call for internationalism: the rejection of support for any fraction of
the bourgeoisie - whether ‘aggressor’ or ‘defender’; for the rejection of pacifism; and for
the solidarity of the international proletariat and its class war against capitalism and for
communism.
Our activity
1) Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian
struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.
2) Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to
contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.
3) The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world
communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of
capitalism and the creation of a communist society.
Our origins
The ICC traces its origins to the successive contributions of the Communist League of
Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the International Workingmen’s
Association, 1864-72, the Socialist International, 1884-1914, the Communist
International, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the
degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the German, Dutch
and Italian Lefts.
About World in Common

WE IN WORLD IN COMMON . . . Realize that only through mutual respect and solidarity among the groups that make up our political sector can we realize our common goals.

TOGETHER WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE . . . A global network of individuals and groups united by our opposition to capitalism and the state and by our search for practical alternatives.

WE HOLD THAT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES . . . represent the common criteria for eligibility to participate in the World in Common project:

• Opposition to all forms of Capitalism (past, present, local, global, state or ‘free market’)
• Its replacement by a classless, moneyless world community without borders or states and based upon:
  - common ownership and direct democratic control of the means of production;
  - a free access ‘use’ economy with production geared towards the satisfaction of human needs;
  - voluntary association, cooperation and the maximization of human creativity, dignity and freedom.
• A recognition that such an alternative society can only be established democratically from the ‘bottom up’ by the vast majority of people, without the intervention of leaders, politicians or ‘vanguards.’
• A commitment to continue the process of contact and cooperation with other groups in our political sector. This does not mean ignoring that which makes us unique, rather that we should devote time and energy to building on what we have in common.

Contact Us:
World in Common
Greenleaf Bookshop
Box 44
82 Colston Street
BRISTOL, UK
BS1 5BB
E-mail: contact@worldincommon.org
LET S abolish money?

Challenging the Right beyond the Left
Global labour in the age of Empire
Guesde and DeLeon on Co-operatives
In memory of Frank Girard
Only one other world is possible
What is ‘Anarchist Communism’?
Submissions

Submissions can include original material written especially for Common Voice or material that has already been published elsewhere and that would benefit from a wider audience of groups in our sector. Some of the themes we would be interested in exploring are listed below:

- the potential for revolutionary transformation in the present;
- the revolutionary potential of communes, intentional communities, LETS, autonomous spaces etc.;
- the relationship between feminism and socialism/communism/anarchism;
- debates over ‘historical materialism’;
- encouraging communication and co-operation between groups in our political sector;
- ‘free access’ and a non-monetary system of production and distribution;
- the anti-war movement;
- debates over ‘human nature’;
- what is ‘class struggle’?
- the psychological/spiritual dimensions of revolutionary change;
- reviews of popular music, art, TV shows, theatre etc.

As a guideline articles should be no more than 2000 words in length with reviews around 500 words.

We would prefer it if all submissions were made electronically where possible - via e-mail or as a document file (Microsoft Word etc.) on CD-ROM, floppy or zip disk, although we are also happy to accept material that is typed or hand-written.

We would also be grateful to receive a brief description of your organisation or group (if you belong to one) - along with a contact address - to be included in our contacts page.

Please submit all material to the address below. We look forward to your contributions.

For a world in common,

The Editorial Team,
Common Voice
Box 44
Greenleaf Bookshop
82 Colston Street
Bristol, UK
BS1 5BB

E-mail: editors@cvoice.org
Contents

LETS abolish money?        Adam Buick            4
Socialism: Challenging the Right beyond the Left  Len Wallace      8
What Is Anarchist Communism? Toby, Thrall          14
In Memory of a Revolutionary    Various Authors     23
Global Labor in the Age of Empire  Eugene W. Plawiuk  27
Co-operatives and Socialism    Jules Guesde           38
Co-Operative Communities      Daniel De Leon         46
Co-operatives and Trade Unions Karl Marx              48
Only one other world is possible: communism!    Jens         52
Identity Theft on a Mass Basis  Michael James       69
Book Review: Beneath the Paving Stones: Situationists and the Beach, May 1968    Nate Holdren  73
Book Review: The Creation of Patriarchy      Torgun Bullen  75
Contacts                                     82
About World in Common                90
LETS abolish money?

*Adam Buick*

If you listen to the enthusiasts they can recreate communities, cure unemployment, undermine the multinationals and even provide an alternative to the global capitalist economy. What can? LETS or *Local Exchange and Trading Schemes*.

This is what the enthusiasts say. First, Harry Wears from Haverfordwest:

“*I’m really enthusiastic about LETS. I think it’s the most exciting mechanism for social change I have ever come across. In LETS, debts don’t accrue interest and there is no pressure to pay. A LETS cheque can’t bounce, nor a LETS business go bust. LETS sees money as a symbol but, unlike sterling, it can’t be manoeuvred to the detriment of people using it*” ([Woman & Home](#), October 1993).

Then Donnachadh McCarthy from Southwark:

“*It is a system to recreate a community economy which we were losing because of multinational companies and big supermarkets. Money which comes into Southwark is used once and then leaves via the banks which use it to finance projects elsewhere*” ([Independent](#), 13 December 1993).

And Ed May of the New Economics Foundation:

“*With mass unemployment in Britain many people have the time but not the cash. LETS gives them access to things they would not otherwise have*” ([Guardian](#), 12 March 1994).
Finally, from the same *Guardian* article by John Vidal:

“The implications, say the theorists, are enormous. In a cash-starved economy (one in five British households is severely in debt), despite the existence of wealth in the form of skills and resources, traditional exchange is hijacked by a lack of cash. With local currencies, as long as people make their goods and skills available, their exchange can go round and round. ‘The community therefore becomes richer,’ says Paul Ekins, a green economist”.

It is, of course, absurd that people who need things should go without even though the skills and resources to provide for them exist. We can go along with the LETS enthusiasts in denouncing this scandal of unmet needs alongside unused resources. The difference between Socialists and LETS enthusiasts is that, while both of us criticise money, they answer “yes” to the question “So, you want to go back to barter?” while we answer “no”. They want to retain exchange and trading with some new kind of money; we want a society based on common ownership geared to producing things directly for people to take and use in which exchange and trading, and money as the means of exchange, would be redundant.

**Return to Barter**

LETS schemes are essentially local barter clubs. A group of people with varying skills get together and agree to exchange the services they can provide with any other member without using money. Records, however, have to be kept. Each member has an account and when one member’s services are used their account is credited with the exchange value of that service while that of the user is debited by the same amount. What normally happens is that each member is given a sort of cheque book which they can use to pay for other members’ services either at a published price or as agreed between the two. Clearly for all this a unit of account is needed. Some schemes define this unit in terms of labour time. Others tie it to the pound. The accounts could in fact be done in pounds but generally the unit is given a special name. In Bath it is an “oliver”; in Brixton it is a “brick”; in Reading a “ready”, and so on.

Do LETS schemes really allow people, as is claimed, to by-pass money and so have “access to things they would not otherwise have”? Two unemployed people with different skills can always barter their services. Thus an unemployed plumber can repair an unemployed electrician’s central heating in exchange for some rewiring by the electrician. Neither needs money for this. A LETS scheme is merely an extension of this: the plumber or electrician joins a barter club and so gains access to a wider
range of potential clients as well as access to a wider range of reciprocal services (too often, though, things not normally needed by the unemployed like aromatherapy, holistic massage, acupuncture, tarot reading and other such New Age fads). So, it’s an alternative to placing cards in newsagent’s windows or relying on the grapevine to learn about work opportunities. As such, like the black economy, it’s one way of surviving in the capitalist jungle but that’s all. But don’t LETS schemes help create a “local community spirit”? Maybe, but no more than any other local club.

Small is Small

The trouble is that the idea has been hijacked by all sorts of currency cranks and funny money theorists who see it as the basis for an “alternative money” and an “alternative economy”. But they overlook two important facts.

First, the nature of the activities covered by LETS schemes. They are all activities that can be carried out by a single individual such as repairs and personal services, and which in the normal money economy could be done by self-employed people working on their own. In fact, from an economic point of view, LETS club members are acting as self-employed; a LETS scheme is a club in which self-employed individuals barter their services. It could never extend beyond this to productive activities that require expensive equipment and plant and a large workforce—such as, precisely, the manufacture of the things that LETS members and the self-employed repair.

Secondly, there are definite limits to the size a LETS scheme can attain. The biggest in Britain only has 300 members. If they got much bigger than this the administrative work of recording all the transactions would grow and could no longer be done by voluntary or part-time labour; people would have to be employed to do it, which would add to the running costs of the scheme and have to be shouldered by the members. The membership fees and transaction charges already levied by the scheme would rise. At a certain point this would cancel the advantages of being in the scheme and members would find it more convenient to re-enter the money economy and resort to newsagent’s windows and contacts.

Funny Money

What most of the currency cranks who have latched on to the LETS idea envisage is converting the units of account – the schemes use olivers, bricks, readies, etc. – into a real money that would circulate. In fact most commentators, like John Vidal in the Guardian article, refer to the LETS units of account as “currencies”, but
this is misleading. They are not money; they do not circulate. They only exist on paper or computer disk as a record of transactions. LETS schemes are in fact more cumbersome than money. After all, with a real money that circulates an individual account of a person’s exchange transactions doesn’t have to be kept.

Some of the advantages claimed for LETS units also apply to cash. So when Harry Wears says “a LETS cheque can't bounce”, this is true but neither can cash. Similarly, when it is argued that people have an incentive to use LETS credits – and that when they do accumulate them this doesn’t give them any power to manipulate other people – as they don’t pay interest, the same applies to cash as such. A hoard of cash is no more useful than a large LETS credit balance. What is being advocated as the ideal is a money that can’t be accumulated and can’t be lent at interest, with LETS units being seen as the formula to achieve this.

But such an “alternative money” is never going to come into being, because it would be worse than existing money. If you have an exchange economy (which the LETS enthusiasts accept, as is seen by the full name Local Exchange and Trading System) then conventional money is the best means of exchange. Not only does it allow many more exchanges to take place than barter or a modified form of barter like LETS schemes, but the payment and receipt of interest also facilitates more exchange. Banks are not, as some LETS theorists (along with the traditional currency cranks) suggest, the villains of the peace who interrupt the normal circulation of money and goods by not making money available to match needs and resources unless they are paid a tribute in the form of interest. Banks are financial intermediaries which borrow money from people who have some but don’t want to spend it immediately, and then lend it those who have something to spend money on but no money of their own. Naturally the banks take precautions to ensure that they are going to get back any money they lend, but the overall result that they help keep money circulating and exchange going. To want to keep exchange but do away with banks and the taking of interest is unrealistic in the extreme. It is typical currency crankism.

The way to end the scandal of unmet needs alongside unused skills and resources is not to retain the exchange economy while trying to get rid of some of its effects by reforming the money system. It is to get rid of the exchange economy altogether by establishing a society based on the common ownership of productive resources where goods and services would be produced directly for people to take and use and not to be exchanged, or bought and sold, at all.

First published in the Socialist Standard, journal of the SPGB in Dec 1994
The following paper was presented to a meeting of Windsor, Ontario members of ‘Socialist Project’, a Canadian anti-capitalist group founded in 2000 with the aim of re-building the ‘Canadian left.’ Their website can be found at www.socialistproject.ca

The poet, painter, textile manufacturer, writer, leader of the Arts and Crafts movement and English socialist William Morris once stated that “the business of Socialists is to make Socialists”. Morris made a relevant point. I think that the Socialist Project can (and must) fulfil that function. In some ways we are “starting over”. Hopefully we will not repeat things as either tragedy or farce. The statement below is to that end.

Socialism: Challenging the Right beyond the Left

Len Wallace

It’s time to reset the parameters of political debate in Canada. For far too long discussion has been monopolised by the politics of the mundane - how and who will deliver either more or less of the same. It’s time for an explicitly Socialist politics in Canada that reveals the limits of capitalism (the system of capital) and the political, social and economic boundaries that system imposes, and challenges its apologists of the Right as it goes beyond the politics of the Left.

A few years back I recall performing onstage at Windsor’s Labour Day parade and rally, singing labour songs as the marchers entered the park, banners flying high. I sang that old anthem of working class liberation, *The Internationale*. After I had finished and began putting away my instrument I was approached by an audience
member - “Your dream is dead! Socialism is dead!”, he taunted me. I asked him, “What Socialism are you talking about?”

Socialism has meant many things to many people. How one defines Socialism determines the politics of the matter. Ask someone what Socialism means and you get various responses - it means government control, state ownership, regulations, deficit spending, economic intervention by government, redistribution of income, progressive taxation. It’s the welfare state, the mixed economy, or totalitarianism. It’s title has been used to describe the so-called “real existing socialism” of stalinism\footnote{1} or the “We all believe in the free market now” semi-demi-socialism of Ed Broadbent and “The Labour Party is the party of modern business” dishrag social democracy of Tony Blair.\footnote{2}

Some have concluded that the very meaning of Socialism has been lost and amongst certain Left circles it is quite unfashionable to even utter the dreaded ‘S’ word at all. Oftimes, when someone does proclaim that he or she is “a Socialist”, they have difficulty defining what that actually means other than they are for good jobs, full employment, national health care, etc. To say that Socialists are simply for “all the good things in life” is to say nothing. Socialism, in the end, is relegated to electing the right Members of Parliament and perhaps getting a good public auto insurance policy. The problem with such “Socialisms” is that they all leave capitalism in place.

In the past number of years there has been a great public and worldwide outcry against the direction of capitalism as a worldwide system (globalization) and has taken the form of active protest by millions. The nature of much of this protest has been termed “anti-capitalist”, but being anti-capitalist or anti-capital does not make an individual or movement consciously Socialist.

The present movement against the World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, etc., while critical of capitalism’s bad effects, does not yet attack the very premises upon which capitalism is based. While the problems of capitalism are attacked, the root cause of the problem (capitalism itself) is left untouched.

**Understanding the System of Capital**

Perhaps the best way to begin defining Socialism anew is to define what Capitalism is. Despite the opinion promoted by economists and political apologists (who Karl Marx called the “hired prize fighters of capitalism”), capitalism is not an eternal
principle of humankind’s relations most in tune with human nature. It is an historical stage of human society, a specific mode of production.

Marx described capitalism as a society with the immense production of ‘commodities’ that are put on the market for exchange through selling and buying with a view to the realization of profit. Commodities are not ‘goods’ simply produced to meet human needs and social wants. They are only produced when the outcome is the creation of profit. Capitalism is a system of capital creation and accumulation. Capital must not only be created, it must be necessarily accumulated and expanded (and unless accumulated to a great extent the system breaks down resulting in recession and economic crises).

The existence of capital presupposes two things - first, a working class which is divorced from, does not own the means of production. The only thing that workers really possess is their labour power, their ability to labour which they must sell for a wage or salary. Secondly, the existence of a class which owns or controls capital, which buys the labour power of the workers and uses it for the creation of surplus value, profit. Thus, capitalism is a class divided society. On the one hand those who own only their labour power, on the other hand those who own capital. On the one hand those who survive by selling their labour power, on the other hand those who gain their existence by living off the profit (surplus value) created by the other class.

The working class was essentially created. Peasants, serfs, farmers were driven off their lands, dispossessed of everything they owned, forced into the cities, forced to sell the only thing they had left - themselves, their ability to work. It was either that or starve. In essence, it was enforced wage slavery in which capitalists made use of the powers of the State (laws in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries were made to that end; the enclosures throughout England and Europe; the destruction of Scotland’s Highland clan system and the forced clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries; the forced dispossession and removal of the Irish peasantry; the imposition of an oppressive colonialist rule in what became known as the ‘Third World’; apartheid; the brutal industrialisation and collectivisation in the Soviet Union and China. The process continues to this day with the destruction of lands of indigenous peoples around the world). Marx was correct. Capitalism came into existence dripping with blood. It was a process of subordinating labour to the domination of capital at every level of life.3

The distinguishing feature of capitalism is not that capital/property is privately owned or that production is anarchic, that there is no planning. It is that labour
is alienated, exploited. If the State, government intervenes into the system, it does not affect the fact that workers remain exploited. If the State nationalizes property and eliminates private capitalists the State itself becomes the single capitalist, its bureaucracy the de facto owners of capital. Capitalism as the ‘system of capital’ remains unchanged.

The producers (workers) do not produce ‘goods’ for themselves. They do not use their mental and physical abilities as the essential, creative part of their own nature as human beings. They simply produce to the dictates of capital and the need for capital accumulation. They are told what to produce, how to produce it, how fast and under what conditions. While various management methods sometimes allow workers decision-making input into production, that, in the end, can only be within the limits imposed by the need to accumulate. Labour, under capitalism, is a way in which workers garner ‘earnings’ to live another day to produce again. Life is what happens when they don’t work.

Long ago the essentially conservative Thomas Carlyle noted, “We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that cash payment is not the sole relation of human beings”. So pervasive and intrusive is the role of capital in everyday life that all things are now measured and judged in terms of price, money, profit. Culture, education, sex, music, art, the environment, health, even human life itself is measured by the standard of money and whether or not it is profitable (“Those who die with the most toys wins”).

The actual existence of capitalism as a ‘system of capital’ imposes limits to what that system can do. In the end, the system cannot work in a way that is detrimental to capital and all action within this system of capital (reforms, taxation, public works, health care, issues of the environment and ecology, etc.) are determined and restricted by the inevitable fact that capital must accumulate.

To the consternation of many the inevitable fact remains that capitalism and capital cannot act uncapitalistically and has defined the politics of the Right and the Left - the Right which holds to a belief in the complete benevolence of a non-existent, mystical “invisible hand” and the totalitarianism of the so-called “free” market, the Left which believes in the benevolence of state interventions to greater or lesser degrees hoping for respite only to find that the logic of capital again reasserts itself.

The politics within capitalism is then a series of trade-offs for those who define themselves as part of the political Left. Environmentalists are limited to what industry must maintain as a healthy profit margin. Jobs versus environment becomes an
issue. Health care workers see public funds frozen, diverted or cut back because the State “just doesn’t have the money”. The same said for education, child care, scientific research, artistic development, unemployment assistance, etc. Trade unionists end up as supporters of multinationals to maintain jobs against workers in other countries. Unemployed workers fight for jobs against hired workers. Activism reproduces itself as a non-ending activism (i.e., the endless fight for higher wages, better work conditions, societal reforms) in a system that simply cannot deliver.

Capital not only limits what one can do it also divides people against each other in an acknowledged ‘Rat Race’ that lays the foundation for the politics of despair, racism, sexism, ethnic division as people compete for the crumbs offered (from the television game shows of ‘Survivor’ to the latest war).

Defining Socialism

By understanding capitalism and how it works, we come to a clearer understanding of what Socialism should mean. If Socialist politics means radical break from capitalism, then all the premises of capitalism (production for profit, buying and selling of commodities, etc.,) must be fundamentally challenged.

Production to the dictates and needs of capital must be replaced by a system of production controlled by society and based on the satisfaction of real human need. As the French Situationists of the sixties noted, capitalism is a society not geared to the satisfaction of needs but “directly geared to the fabrication of habits, and manipulates people by forcing them to repress their desires.” What is produced, how it is produced must be determined by society, not by capital.

Since the very existence of capital implies economic exploitation of a working class then capital itself has to be abolished. Property (the means of producing and distributing) is not to be statified or nationalized. It is to be taken over by the community, the collective, by democratic control of society as a whole. The very real and observable antagonistic relationship between capital and labour can only be overcome by the abolition of capital (and thus the abolition of waged labour).

Socialism as Practical Politics

One of the criticisms hurled at Socialists is that we are starry-eyed, utopian dreamers, not involved in the fine art of ‘practical politics’. The answer to this is that those who defend and work through the system of capitalism and expect a society fit for human beings are the ones who are the utopians. Their ‘practicality’ cannot
go beyond the limits of capital. Their proposed solutions to very real problems from joblessness to AIDS, from hunger to environmental destruction, are bound up with this inevitable limit. In the end, a society in which people’s needs are met and the possibility of a full, creative life is simply impractical under capitalism. The politics of its ‘shamocracy’ becomes a game of the absurd where corporate millionaires become Prime Ministers and Presidents.

The goal of a society where the individual as part of the collective is able to determine production and meet his or her needs - what we call Socialism - is desirable, necessary and achievable. It is in every way ‘practical’, not a utopia conjured from out of the sky and imposed upon society. The knowledge of what capitalism is, how it works and its movement already suggests the solution Socialism offers.

Notes

1 The term “real existing socialism” became the defensive catchword of Soviet ideologists in response to Marxist criticisms in the 1960s which saw in that system a real existing state capitalism.

2 A much forgotten part of Ed Broadbent’s speech made in Windsor at a dinner celebration given in honour of his retirement from federal NDP leadership and comments made by England’s Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair to the Labour women’s conference, April 1, 1995. I would add to this list the example of former Ontario NDP Premier Bob Rae whose nonsensical ‘supply side socialism’ which was supposedly based on ‘love’ found its practice in the imposed wage controls of the so-called ‘social contract’ legislation.

3 Istvan Meszaros’ brilliantly analyzes this in his major work, Beyond Capital, (Merlin Press, 1995).
What Is Anarchist Communism?

Toby, Thrall (Aotearoa)

What? Anarchist Communism? Surely that’s a contradiction in terms. Doesn’t communism mean a draconian police state, and anarchism the destruction of the state? Surely then the two are incompatible? Well, this article argues the opposite. A stateless and voluntary form of communism is an essential complement to anarchism. I believe anarchism is impossible without it.

From my experience in anarchist circles in Aotearoa all too often many anarchists seem to be stuck in a simplistic notion that anarchism is just something to do with forming small collectives of friends (affinity groups) who have occasional meetings where everybody sits in circles and tries to be non-authoritarian. If pressed, most of these anarchists will say anarchism is something to do with getting rid of authority and respecting individual liberty. I think we need to transcend this crude anarchist theory and practice - and here anarchist communism is very useful. Anarchist communism gets beyond the liberal notions outlined above that anarchism is a nice idea of individual liberty, an idea which is almost inevitably detached from the struggle of the oppressed. So the purpose of this article is to outline the basics, in very broad brush strokes, of anarchist communism and in particular non-market anarchist communism to an audience unfamiliar with this type of anarchism. Then it offers some brief observations on the potential for an updated anarchist communism today.
(1) Origins

Anarchist communism did not appear until the mid 1870s in Europe. It arose against the backdrop of the rise of industrial capitalism, with all the exploitation, alienation, poverty and misery that it created among workers and peasants; and the rise of an increasingly powerful and centralised state, which overall served the interests of the boss or capitalist class. Anarchist communism grew out of the anarchist collectivist wing of the First International Workingmen’s Association, a wing which was expelled from the International by Karl Marx and his supporters.

Peter Kropotkin, perhaps the most influential anarchist communist theoretician, claimed that the real origin of anarchism was in the “creative, constructive activity of the masses”. He contended “Anarchism originated among the people, and it will preserve is vitality and creative force so long only as it remains a movement of the people.” The Dielo T rouda (Workers’ Cause) group of exiled Russian anarchist communists, a group which included Nestor Makhno - a peasant leader who fought the Bolsheviks and the Whites after the Russian revolution - wrote in a similar vein in their Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists (1926) that “The class struggle created by the enslavement of workers and their aspirations to liberty gave birth, in the oppression, to the idea of anarchism: the idea of the total negation of a social system based on the principles of classes and the State, and its replacement by a free non-statist society of workers under self-management. So anarchism does not derive from the abstract reflections of an intellectual or a philosopher, but from the direct struggle of workers against capitalism, from the needs and necessities of the workers, from their aspirations to liberty and equality. The outstanding anarchist thinkers, Bakunin, Kropotkin and others, did not invent the idea of anarchism, but, having discovered it in the masses, simply helped by the strength of their thought and knowledge to specify and spread it.”

Thus we see that anarchist communism cannot be viewed as a nice idea detached from the struggles of the oppressed. The fortunes of anarchist communism are intimately related with developments in the class struggle. Anarchist communists learnt from the content and form of the struggles of the oppressed. Thus we tend to find that following the 1871 Paris Commune, anarchist communists adopted the ‘commune’ as their model of a future classless and stateless society; and after the Russian revolution of 1917 workers’ councils.
(2) Politics: Free Association or Anarchism?

Anarchist communism is composed of two aspects: anarchism and communism. To look at anarchism first, anarchism is the continual forming and reforming of non-hierarchical voluntary groups, of varying sizes, to meet people’s needs. In Kropotkin’s words, anarchism “seeks the most complete development of individuality combined with the highest development of voluntary association in all its aspects, in all possible degrees, for all imaginable aims; [they would] constantly assume new forms which answer best to the multiple aspirations of all.”

So anarchism is the continual prevention of the re-establishment of any authority, any power, any State; and full and complete freedom for the individual who, freely and driven by his or her needs alone, freely bands together with other individuals into a group; then the freedom of development for the group which federates with others within the neighbourhood; then freedom of development for communities which federate within the region and so on; until a world without borders is established.

So in place of authoritarian organisations, non-authoritarian organisations would be formed by people themselves for the purposes of self-help and mutual aid. The tendency to this free association even exists in modern capitalist society - in the form of people supporting strikes and other forms of working class solidarity, international railway and postal networks, even the Red Cross and lifeboat associations. These voluntary associations are limited and distorted by capitalism; however, they give us a glimpse of what free agreement has in store for us if we establish a stateless society in the future.

(3) Economics: Free Communism

The second part of anarchist communism is communism. Unfortunately, communism is now a dirty word. In the sense it is used by anarchist communists, it does not mean a police state, or a barracks style socialism, or state capitalism; it means a free and voluntary communism.

People think economics has something to do with bosses, accountants, economists, money, the market, profits, production, the division of labour, work or wage-labour. Yet anarchist communists like Kropotkin have a refreshing approach to economics. Capitalists claim that all the things listed above like money and the market are natural, and it is impossible to have anything else. Yet they are just stuff made up by capitalists, like a veil to cover reality. Lift the veil, and what we have in reality
is human beings, with their multiplicity of needs and wants that ought to be satisfied.

Anarchist communism is human-centred and not otherworldly. Anarchist communists do not look to God (if it exists) or politicians or bureaucrats to change society, but instead to people themselves. Thus anarchist communism’s approach to economics is to refuse to engage it on its own terms. We don’t need to talk of money and the market and so on, we instead need to talk of the economic means for the satisfaction of the needs of all human beings with the least possible waste of energy to achieve them. Instead of the vague and ambiguous aim of some socialists to “the right to work”, anarchist communists aim for “the right to well-being” (that is, the satisfaction of physical, creative and other needs).

But to satisfy these needs, we need to re-organise society. We need to have a revolution to abolish all classes & wage-labour. Anarchist communists reject the market, money, and profit as both exploitative and unnecessary. Instead, we need a society of common, voluntary agreement to meet these shared needs and wants. Thus if we solve the social problems of hierarchy and inequality, then ‘economics’ dissolves into a series of practical questions (how to produce a luxurious standard of living for all with a minimum of labour time; how to make production as safe, clean, and fun as possible; how best to integrate industry and agriculture, how best to integrate manual labour with intellectual labour etc.).

There are two aspects to communism. The first is the taking into possession of all of the wealth of the world, on behalf of the whole of humanity, because that wealth is the collective work of humanity. ‘All belongs to all’. This requires the abolition of all property, and the holding of all resources in common for the well-being of all. The second is organising society around the principle “From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” This means everything should be produced, distributed and exchanged for free according to need. Everyone would be the judge of their own needs and take for free from the common storehouse whatever they needed. If there was scarcity, things would be rationed according to need. One of the reasons the abolition of money is a necessity is because there can be no exact measure of the productive contribution of every individual, as production today is so interwoven. These two aspects of communism are intimately related: common possession of the necessaries of production requires the common enjoyment of the fruits of production. The abolition of property requires the abolition of the wage system. Retaining some form of private property or monetary exchange would lead to the re-establishment of classes and the state. As Kropotkin noted, “the Revolu-
tion, we maintain, must be communist; if not, it will be drowned in blood, and have to begun over again.”

Communism is not some impractical dream. Even in today’s capitalist society, we have public bridges, beaches, roads, parks, museums, libraries and piped water (at least in some cities) which are free for anybody to use according to their needs. For example, the librarian does not ask you what your previous services to society have been before they get you a book from the shelves or stacks. Again, these are token examples which give us a glimpse of what is possible under a classless and moneyless society.

One of the most common misperceptions about communism is that it means a draconian police state where a small party elite exploit the majority of population, as what happened in the USSR, its Eastern European colonies, and what is happening in China, North Korea and Cuba. There are many theories on just what type of societies the above countries were or are, ranging from libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis’ ‘bureaucratic capitalism’, to those of anarchists who claim it was ‘state capitalist’, but all are agreed that those societies are or were capitalist not communist.

John Crump lists five criteria for (libertarian forms of) communism: (1) The means of production will be owned and controlled communally, and production will be geared towards satisfying everyone’s needs. Production will be for use, and not for sale on the market; (2) Distribution will be according to need, and not by means of buying and selling; (3) Labour will be voluntary, and not imposed on workers by means of a coercive wages system; (4) A human community will exist, and social divisions based on class, nationality, sex or race will have disappeared (5) opposition to all states, even the ones who falsely proclaim themselves to be ‘workers’ states’. (Crump, *Non-Market Socialism*, MacMillan, 1987, pp. 42-46). On the basis of this criteria, we can now see that (say) the old USSR run by the Bolshevik elite from 1917 was a class society where the state, market and wage system were retained, enabling a small bureaucratic elite to be able to force the majority of the population to work for them. As a group of council communists said in the 1930s: “The socialisation concept of the Bolsheviks is therefore nothing but a capitalist economy taken over by the State and directed from the outside and above by its bureaucracy. The Bolshevik socialism is state-organised capitalism.”
(4) Synthesis: Anarchist Communism

Anarchism and communism are a necessary complement to one another. A synthesis of both are required for a free and equal society. To Kropotkin it is “communism without government, free Communism. It is a synthesis of the two chief aims prosecuted by humanity since the dawn of history - economical freedom and political freedom.”

On the one hand, communism needs to be anarchist or else it will become authoritarian communism. Communist economic arrangements without free, voluntary agreement could easily lead to dictatorship by a minority. Communism needs to be free, non-statist and voluntary from its outset. As Kropotkin noted, “communist organisations cannot be left to be constructed by legislative bodies called parliaments, municipal or communal councils. It must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could live even for a few months if the constant and daily cooperation of all did not uphold it. It must be free.” Communism could not exist without anarchism, without thousands and thousands of voluntary associations formed and reformed to meet people’s needs.

On the other hand, anarchism by itself, without communist economic arrangements, would perpetuate class divisions. If private property or money was retained in some form, it would be used by some groups to exploit others. It is futile to speak of political liberty when economic slavery still exists. The abolition of the state requires the abolition of capitalism. Anarchism needs communism because, by satisfying basic human needs such as food and shelter for all, communism provides the material basis for anarchism or political liberty.

Once both capitalism, the wage-system and the state are abolished, individuals will be truly free to develop their own potential as they wish. Anarchist communism aims to produce the greatest amount of individuality combined with the greatest amount of community, and in the process eudaemony and well-being for all.

Now we are in a position to see that many modern anarchists lack any notion of communism, or socialism for that matter. Anarchism to them is reduced to the formation of liberal non-authoritarian groupings, based upon people’s subjective tastes. It is seen as a purely anti-authoritarian & anti-governmental idea, rather than an expression of anti-capitalist/anti-statist or communist tendencies in society. On the other had we see that some modern anarchists, particularly those from Marxist or
Leninist backgrounds, tend to see anarchism only in its economic aspects, thus they focus on the class struggle without any notion of non-authoritarian organisation.

(5) Modern Anarchist Communism

There is a tendency for many anarchists today to see anarchist communism as out of date. It was a product of a society torn by vicious class divisions, but since then, they claim, these divisions are not so clear. This view is absurd. First of all, society today is still based on class exploitation much like 100 years ago, and this exploitation under neo-liberalism or the New Right has intensified! Second of all, there is a genuine need to bring class struggle anarchist communism up to date. The working class has changed: the image of a male, white, blue collar, industrial workforce is completely out of date. The working class is now largely dominated by (casualised) service workers, not industrial factory workers; the majority of the working class is female; and a high proportion of the working class in Aotearoa are Maori and Pacific Islanders. Hence we need to see the struggles of working class Maori, Pacific Islanders (see article on pages 6-7), the unwaged, and working class women as part of the class struggle. The struggle against class exploitation needs to include not only struggles against the boss class but struggles against the things that divide the working class, like sexism and racism. The class struggle is a struggle to liberate all of humanity, not just one particular class or group (that is, it requires the self-abolition of the working class).

One particularly valuable attempt to update anarchist communism comes through the work of American eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin. The ecological crisis means that we must not only seek genuinely democratic methods of production, but also produce things in an ecologically sensible way. Bookchin has formulated an eco-anarchist communism which claims that all forms of hierarchy are interlinked. For example, he claims ecological destruction is rooted in our hierarchical relationships to each other. Eliminate these relationships, and our relationship to nature will be transformed as well. Hence under Bookchin’s formulation the struggle is thus to abolish all forms of authority (class, race, gender etc.). The problem with Bookchin is that he rejects the class struggle as the means to abolish authority, and instead places great hope on ‘new social movements’ capturing local body governments through participating in representative elections! This has failed in the past, or ended up with parties that inevitably move to accommodation with the establishment. A non-class approach almost inevitably fails because it does not seek to abolish the exploitative social relations that underlie capitalism. Revolutionary class struggle, as shown to some extent in Argentina today (see back page), is the only
means by which anarchist communism can be brought about. Experience shows us that only when the working class becomes conscious of its oppression and acts in a revolutionary manner that abolishing (or to be realistic, minimising to the highest degree possible) all exploitation becomes possible.

Today, many anarchist communist groups around the world are ‘platformist’ in orientation. Platformists rightly contend that anarchist communists need to be organised into coherent, unified groups capable of putting forward well-defined views. However, the problem with platformist groups is that in general they sacrifice the content of anarchist communism for a fetishisation of their own organisational form, and hence tend to become obsessed with their own internal and external practice, often regardless of the actual level of class struggle in society. They seem to be forever searching for the perfect anarchist communist organisation. While it is excellent that they see anarchist communism as part of the class struggle, often they overlook the necessarily communist (non-market) aspect of anarchist communism, and thus seem to be little more than anarchist collectivists rather than communists.

I believe anarchist communism is not an outdated theory but still has much relevance to today’s authoritarian capitalist society. With the rise of a vague anti-capitalist or at least anti-corporate feeling in society, and a general skepticism towards political parties and unions, and increasing questioning of the militaristic state, the prospects for anarchist communism seem good. Anarchist communism is a viable, well thought out alternative to capitalism that goes beyond the vagueness of just being “anti-capitalist”. The neo-liberal hegemony over society is somewhat skin-deep: it has forced us to work harder for less pay, reducing our living standards and producing a real disgruntlement with work among many people. Who wants to sacrifice 40 years or more of your life doing something you hate (work) for the profit of someone else?

Yet we need to keep our feet on the ground. Disgruntlement against neo-liberalism has not been translated into positive action against the system much. Across the “first world”, the level of working class resistance to capitalism is at historic lows, if strike activity is anything to go by. Many people are today apathetic, alienated, and individualistic; even if many see through the spectacle of modern capitalism and its hollow promise of happiness through enforced consumption, most do not act against it. Once the level of working class self-activity increases, as it seems to be doing very recently, these attitudes will no doubt change, and radical movements like anarchist communism may suddenly become popular once again.
As well, its main rivals on the left have all but faded away: social democratic parties have collapsed (eg. the Alliance) or transformed themselves into right wing neo-liberal parties (eg. the Labour Party); Stalinists have lost the lure of the USSR; and other Marxist-Lemmingists (Leninists) have been reduced to tiny, irrelevant sects. This collapse of the traditional left offers us an unprecedented opportunity to encourage coherent anarchist communist tendencies among people without power.

Further Reading

This article is based upon the non-market anarchist communist theories of Kropotkin. His most important book is The Conquest of Bread, which is absolutely essential reading if you are interested in anarchist communism. Other important pamphlets by Kropotkin are his Anarchist Communism and his Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal. The best overviews of Kropotkin’s anarchist communism are in Alain Pengam’s ‘Anarcho-Communism’ in (Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, eds. John Crump and Maximilien Rubel), and John Crump’s chapter on anarchist communism in his Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan.

See also:
http://www.freespeech.org/thrall/
Frank Girard - a Tribute

Frank Girard, the driving force behind the Discussion Bulletin – a publication which has had a seminal influence on the World in Common group - sadly passed away on the 19th February 2004.

Frank was born in 1927 in Michigan, USA. He was a long-standing libertarian socialist and popular local activist. He was a candidate for the Socialist Labor Party in many elections. He founded the Society for Economic Equality, co-authored a book on SLP and produced and distributed numerous leaflets and pamphlets.

In 1983 Frank started DB which ceased publication in 2003. For many of us who subscribed to DB, it was a great pleasure to receive the journal through the post every few months or so. In his own words, the Discussion Bulletin:

...places the great divide in the “left”, not between anarchists and Marxists, but between capitalism's statist left wing of vanguardists and social democrats, and the real revolutionaries of our era: the non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists. It is organized in small groups of syndicalists, communist anarchists, libertarian municipalists, world socialists, socialist industrial unionists, council communists, and left communists. The perspective of these groups with their rejection of capitalism's wage, market, and money system, along with capitalist
politics and unionism, constitutes the only real alternative to capitalism in both its market and statist phases.”

The purpose of DB was to bring together the “often fiercely antagonistic groups that make up this sector” and provide a forum in which they can “debate and discuss the issues that divide them, gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities, and begin a process, we hope, of at least limited cooperation.” There can be no more fitting tribute to Frank than to carry on the good work that he pioneered. This is what we in the World in Common group have resolved to do.

Robin Cox (World in Common)

Frank Girard: In Memorial

I was deeply saddened to hear last month of the passing of Frank Girard, the long time editor of the publication. Frank stopped publishing the Discussion Bulletin in July 2003 citing his age and the increasing importance of the internet, which he felt made publications like the Discussion Bulletin less and less relevant. He planned continued involvement in the socialist movement. His death at 77 is a felt loss to his many friends and comrades. Frank worked as a machine operator and later a high school English teacher, but more important was his membership from the 1940s on in the Socialist Labor Party, the organization of followers of American socialist leader Daniel De Leon. Frank ran for political office several times in Michigan, but argued he was “running against capitalism.” Unsurprisingly, he was never elected. In the early 1980s, as part of a seemingly endless series of schisms in the SLP, Frank was expelled from the party along with much of the Grand Rapids section (in 1991 he published a short history of the party along with another former Socialist Labor Party member Ben Perry). In 1983, Frank began to publish the Discussion Bulletin. The Discussion Bulletin was unlike many other socialist publications in that it was simply a forum for discussion. Its contents were, aside from Frank’s editorial remarks and occasional contributions, entirely from its readership. It was also a model of regularity for socialist publications, appearing every two months like clockwork for twenty years. Frank’s other strength was that he was genuinely committed to discussion and debate in what he called the non-market socialist sector, in which he included De Leonists, World Socialists, council and left communists, and class struggle anarchists among others. Throughout its existence the Discussion Bulletin featured, unedited, contributions from all of the above sectors. And although he never completely broke with De Leonist politics and all its incumbent weaknesses,
but which had played such an important role in his life, Frank was also prepared to
learn from discussion, and admit when he was wrong. Frank was a non-sectarian in
the best sense of the word. The cessation of publication by the Discussion Bulletin
left a hole. Frank’s passing leaves a much larger one.

Neil F. (Red & Black)

Obituary for Frank Girard

We have just received a report that Frank Girard, who edited and published - vir-
tually single-handedly - the Discussion Bulletin for twenty years from 1983 to 2003
died last month at the age of 77. Frank had been a member of the Socialist Labor
Party (the De Leonist organization in the U.S.) from the 1940s until his expulsion
in the early 1980s, even running for political office on the SLP ticket. He began
the Discussion Bulletin as an open forum for the exchange of political views by De
Leonists, anarchists, libertarians, left communists, etc. - what he called “non-market
socialists.” Not only were the pages of Discussion Bulletin open to a wide range of
political views, but the publication appeared like clockwork on a bimonthly basis,
something of a rarity in this political milieu.

The ICC had many polemical exchanges with Frank, particularly on the political
legacy of De Leonism, especially its blind spot when it came to the mystifications of
bourgeois democracy. Despite its opposition to reformism, and despite the lessons
of history, De Leonism, and Frank, persisted in a naive belief that capitalism could
be overthrown at the ballot box. We also frequently criticized Frank for not pub-
lishing more exchanges on contemporary issues facing the working class, especially
imperialist war. He once told us in a letter that he didn’t republish any of the leaflets
or articles against the various American imperialist ventures in the 1990s because all
the groups had the same position, even though there were many different analyses
for the causes of the war, and proposals for how the working class could oppose war.
He finally seemed to take this criticism to heart at the time of the most recent US
invasion of Iraq by publishing a collection of leaflets by various groups.

Whatever criticisms we made of Frank, and he of us, it was always clear that they
were made as part of a fraternal debate between comrades who were committed to
the destruction of capitalism and the liberation of the working class. When Frank
Girard made the decision to cease publication we urged him not to. We argued that
the Discussion Bulletin played an invaluable role of mutually introducing to each
other the elements of a very disparate, far flung political milieu. After the publica-
tion of the last issue of Discussion Bulletin last July, we sent Frank a letter saluting his efforts on behalf of the proletariat, wishing him well in his retirement, and giving him a subscription for life to the press of the ICC. We had no idea at the time that his life would sadly end so soon. We extend our condolences and solidarity to the family and friends of Frank Girard.

*Internationalism,*
*Section in the US of the ICC.*
Global Labor in the Age of Empire

Eugene. W. Plawiuk


Proletarian struggles constitute – in real, ontological terms – the motor of capitalist development. They constrain capital to adopt ever-higher levels of technology and thus transform the labor process. The struggles force capital continually to reform the relations of production and transform the relations of domination. (Pg. 208)

Empire, Michael Hardt and Tony Negri, Harvard University Press, 2000

We are here today not to bury Globalization but to praise it. The very nature of the World Social Forum reflects the dialectic of Globalization; it is both the creation of a global corporate state and a worldwide movement in opposition to the global agenda of that corporate state. Had this movement not been world wide, then we perhaps we could identify Globalization as the enemy. This is the contradiction of globalization; it has created a worldwide movement of opposition, it has brought together peoples from around the globe through communications and computer technology, through mass transportation, it has created a mass movement of internationalism. It is our globalized solidarity that is confronting our real problem: the privatization of everything.
Globalization is the term in vogue to describe an evolution of trade agreements from a protectionist national model to one of a corporate state model of free trade. There is nothing “new” in globalization its impact is more apparent to us thanks to the technological transformation of communications in the last century. Many pundits have made much of the new technology as creating a form of permanent crisis free capitalism. In fact Wired Magazine in the 1990’s predicted that the Internet combined with computer technological advances in business would lead to a 25-year boom for capitalism. And then the dot.com bubble burst so much for that theory.

What I am going to talk about is the transformation that Capitalism, and its competing national capitals, have made in the past thirty years. A transformation that has created a global proletariat, a condition that has never before existed. The very transformation of developing nations into industrial beltways for global capitalism has taken fifty years to evolve. This evolution began after WWII and the boom in economic expansion in the advanced industrial countries, while developing countries in the Third World, in Russia and the East and in the Pacific Region, saw the formation of modern states arising where once were colonial outposts of the old 19th Century Empires.

The reality is that the technological revolution touted as key to globalization has been the engine of capitalism for the past three hundred years. Beginning with printing and moving to steam, shipping, railways and telegraph, newspapers, and telephones, TV and fax machines and now computers and the internet, communications and technology have been the products of and machinery for advanced capitalism. The trade agreements of the past fifty years were based on a social contract and a protectionist model that recognized national sovereignty. GATTs, the Bretton Woods Agreement creating the IMF and World Bank, the creation of the UN itself, was the result of the tumultuous booms and busts of the early years of the last century, ending in the great depression and WWII.

It is in the Seventies that the neo liberal agenda gets cooked up in the think tanks of the right wing; the Cato and Fraser Institutes. The ideological class war began way back then, in the pages of right wing libertarian journals like Reason. Theorists of right wing free market anarchism like Murray Rothbard, proclaim the privatization of everything, including police, firemen, a return to child labor, and animal abuse, all is allowed in the market freed of the “nanny state”. All relations between men are to be contractual, and that is the only reason for the law to maintain my right to private property. Rothbard wrote of this in 1973 and further expanded his ideas of
privatizing everything in the 1980’s.

Far from being a fringe element as he was taken to be originally, his ideas and those of Von Mises and Frederick Hayek would be embraced, by today’s advocates of neo-conservative politics and economics. The political action taken by the right wing began in California with the Proposition 13, which ended state funding for schools and hospitals. The slide down the slippery slope of privatization had begun. Embraced by Reagan and Thatcher, the kooky free market ideas of the Austrian school returned once again reeking havoc in the economy. Privatization is the result of tax cuts. Proposition 13 called for a tax cut which resulted in a decline in funding to essential services, in turn this meant the right wing could say if the state cannot provide the services then the private sector can.

And this is the real meaning of privatization and tax cuts, the ideology is that private business is more efficient than state capitalism. However private business needs the state to fund it, to educate its workers, to insure them from catastrophic legal costs (hence the WCB). What right wing ideology was really saying was that all aspects of our public lives must be dominated by the market. Which is effectively what has happened. All the so-called social reform issues of the seventies and eighties were driven by the right wing agenda. The Crisis in Public Education wasn’t about students not being able to learn, which they couldn’t because of lack of funding, but about smashing teachers unions.

All of this was to promote making all aspects of the public sector open to being competitive, market orientated, driven by the bottom line, all the while more and more tax breaks left these services starved of funds, driving them into the waiting arms of the lowest bidder. In Alberta the Tories created the boom in the civil service. Yep the same guys in power today, crying about the cost of health care. They built all those hospitals in Lougheeds day to win rural votes, they built schools to win urban votes and they build seniors homes to win their votes. To dismantle this state the government wants to privatize everything. What this really means as New Zealand and Australia show is that once workers and their unions are smashed then you give them individual contracts, everyone becomes a contract worker.

The insidious ideology of the sixties which laid the base for this attack was that of Daniel Bell whom declared the end of ideology, the age of the middle class, the end of class war, we were all equal as consumers now. This matched the right wing economics of Frederick Hayek and the Austrian school, which denies labor, produces all value and focuses instead on prices, costs, and profits.
All of this now is our future. Working multiple jobs, teleworking and working from home, we all become contract workers, responsible for our own health care insurance, our own retirement plans, all of the benefits usually paid for by the employer and state now paid for by us. This is the privatization agenda, to free business and the state from their social responsibility in order to amass large amounts of capital.

We have been in a crisis of capitalism for thirty years, and that crisis is why we have the privatization agenda worldwide. Imperialism, Globalization, call it what you will but it is the idea once again the return of the bad old days.

The State was a creation of capitalism, its function was to protect business. Its return to its roots is not something to be cheered. It simply means that we will have wars to enforce the privatization of competing states. The attack on Serbia and Iraq were attacks on the last vestiges of social states, state capitalism. The current hysteria against Cuba is the same. Russia is a shining example today of the success of the Austrian School of Economics. It’s a basket case. While under state capitalism people had to line up for rations, today the markets are overflowing with goods, there are no line ups, because no one has any money to buy anything.

The changes in global trade agreements in the past decade has been the creation of a corporate state model of agreement, not between sovereign nations but the creation of corporate trading blocks, with corporations meeting on the level of governments. Agreements are not binding, except in extra parliamentary bodies of an international tribunal. National laws are subject to corporate contract governance. Free Trade is not about trade it’s about the World Bank and the IMF funding states to privatize their essential services.

What does this mean for the mass movements of workers and unemployed. Well out of the bad old days of the robber barons came the unions, defeat after defeat in the 19th century still did not stop workers from organizing to overthrow capitalism. And with the mass mobilizations against the war we have seen, can give us hope that resistance is not futile.

The modernization of the world was an economic and political movement that included a mass workers opposition, a movement towards socialism that countered imperialism and rapacious capitalism. Keynesianism, the creation of the World Bank, the IMF, and even the social contract of labor peace in Europe, were the result of capitalism responding to and adapting to the revolutionary movements of workers after these earlier attempts at world revolution.
Capitalism is more than just industrialization, it recreates the entire world in its image, it is a form of social relation, whereby all production, all values, all social services, are made into objects of consumption, they are commodified. Art loses its patrons, its last link to feudalism and becomes the object of mass consumption. Workers lose their relationship to their work and to the products of their work only to become consumers. Social safety nets are created by the state to eliminate the harshest realities of capitalism’s dog eat dog world, poverty and homelessness are ameliorated by the welfare state. Universities lose their medieval other worldliness and become research arms for the military and corporations. Public Education is embraced as a way of reducing unemployment and reinforcing a unitary vision that the world is the way it is and will always be this way.

Capitalism is in the process of becoming more than competing capitals, national institutions or even individual corporations, it is and has become the world in which we live. From Johannesburg, to Edmonton, from Moscow to Seoul, from Wellington to Porto Valegro, the world is now a unified capitalist system. The reality is that capitalism is what we are fighting, not some misshapen creature called globalization. The reality is that globalization is what is happening in opposition to the capitalist transformation of the world.

Globalization is the linkages being made between the peoples of diverse nations, of workers and intellectuals through the use of the Internet, fax machines, international travel, books and publications, telephones, radio, and TV. The transformation we are experiencing is the privatization, the commodification of all that surrounds us. The fact is that we did not create the state, capitalism did, it destroyed and transformed the feudal institutions into a modern state that could meet its needs. In the process it used this state to transform agriculture, the economy of the Old World, into an industrial economy. Through the enclosure acts it used the state to force the peasants and village artisans to become industrial workers to feed its “dark satanic mills” of steam driven production.

These workers, the new proletariat of modern capitalism, fought to resist this change, first by trying to destroy the machines, then by creating unions which were outlawed, then by demanding control of their workplaces as they once had in their home based industry, and finally by demanding a say in the political affairs of the capitalist state. This in short is a thumbnail sketch of the development of modern capitalism. As capital evolved it evolved its own negation, a revolutionary workers movement, a movement for socialism, an ideal that looked not backwards to some golden age of the past, but forward to a bright future of a classless society of abun-
dance.

The workers revolutionary movement began fighting change and then embraced it, they saw that the past offered nothing but a brutal existence of subsistence while the future was a world where all could have both plenty and freedom. This was not inherent in capitalism, it was the result of class struggle. The world was transformed not just by capitalism but by the opposition to capitalism. Democracy is not inherent in capitalism, it is the result of the transformation of the capitalist state by workers revolution. Likewise socialism is not inherent in capitalism, it is the result of the negation of capitalism by those subjected to it.

That is why the globalization has created its own negation, a world wide revolutionary movement of the proletariat. A new socialist vision is being created in opposition to capitalism. It has many names and variants, mass democracy, direct democracy, etc. but like the workers movement of old, it is still a movement against capital. Why it does not call itself socialist is a result of the failed revolutions of the 20th Century that turned socialism from a mass worldwide movement for the future, into a backwater ideology of nationalism.

That moment of nationalism was needed to develop the productive forces in the developing world. Nationalism acted as a form of enclosure, ending colonialism but forcing the peasants to become workers in the newly established industrial state. Production remained for export while the state became the creator of industries and social services in the developing world.

That transformation was needed but limited, and now capital is reinventing the world in its own image. The WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, the Fraser and Cato Institutes, all expound the virtues of contracting out, privatization, elimination of State owned industries. The rallying cry of the right wing is “the private sector can do it better”.

This applies in Alberta today as much as it does in the Sudan, or Iraq, or Seoul, or Detroit. We hear it all the time. It is the ideology of libertarian free market, free capitalism to provide all services and we will see wealth produced beyond our wildest dreams. It is the ideology that says the world is a market, not a social community, that we are no longer hewers of wood and gatherers of water, nor even producers of goods, we are consumers and shareholders.

The international trade agreements that we have been opposing, are global encroachment acts. Take for instance the Uruguay round of the GATTS talks, which
opened the world up for trade in agriculture. This allows global corporations like Cargill, Archer Daniels Midlands, etc. to move into developing countries and transform their peasant/farmer village based agriculture into industrialized factory based production. In the process the land is destroyed and the environment is threatened. An example is the case when Cargill moved into Indonesia and created Palm Oil fields and refineries. The resulting use of slash and burn led to the worst mass forest fire to threaten the region, creating a cloud of smoke that traveled across Indonesia into Malaysia and north towards Japan.

Meanwhile in Alberta Cargill and other southern Alberta meat packing plants are importing workers from the developing world to work in their factories here. Cargill is unionized, yet when the workers went on strike they were dealt with as brutally here as they would be in Indonesia. Brooks in Southern Alberta is a perfect example where a non union meat packing plant, operating without concern for basic health and safety for the workers, models its operations on those it uses in the Third World, and in fact imports workers from the Third World to work there.

This immigration of labor, fills capitals need and the workers need. It has made it difficult for UFCW to unionize these workers, because they speak diverse languages, and UFCW has not mobilized them according to their needs, but using an old outmoded business union model tried to get them to join as if their needs were those of Calgary Safeway’s workers. This disconnect is the problem that business unions face when dealing with immigrant workers.

The fact is that Alberta has some of the worst labor legislation in the world. And while our standard of living is certainly above the living conditions in Indonesia, or Nigeria, we like them have a minimum wage rather than a living wage. In these newly industrialized countries a minimum wage is based on the food required to feed oneself and ones family, here it is based on the same, the minimum required to feed oneself. A living wage would be based upon a wage needed to support ones family, as well as the required benefits, health care, education, housing, the worker needs.

In the Philippines the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) is a partner in the privatization of universities in Manilla, In Edmonton NAIT contracts out not only the ownership of its new IT facilities to Hewlett Packard, but contracts out the faculty as well, and promotes the contracting out of its computer students work. Meanwhile Filipino women make up the majority of nannies in the world. In Hong Kong or Alberta Filipino nannies are brought in as indentured serv-
ants with no employment rights, no union rights, and kept as chattel slaves in their owners house, must not leave to seek employment elsewhere or be deported.

Most immigrant labor finds jobs in the janitorial industry, this largely non-union industry has seen a massive boom across North America. Bee Clean, which employs 5000 workers in Alberta alone, was awarded KPMG Entrepreneur of the year award a week ago. Yet it remains unorganized. It has gained its success by contracting out and privatization of public sector custodial jobs. This building we are in, was one of the first contracted out on campus to Bee Clean. Bee Clean also contracts with the City of Edmonton for cleaning your public library, and with ETS to clean bus shelters, all jobs formerly done by unionized public sector workers.

The largest growing sector of part-time workers in the industrialized world are call center workers. There are 10,000 in Edmonton, thousands more across Canada, in the United States, Germany, France, Italy. They are largely unorganized, because they are part time workers. They also face competition from another growing industrial sector in North American capitalism, the prison industrial complex. Across North America prisoners are being used for call centre work. Because call centre workers have a high turn over, are not career-based jobs, and certainly lack any “industrial” base, unions have been reluctant to organize them, despite the poor pay and terrible working conditions these ‘workers’ face.

Contracting out has become a crisis in the United States. The failure of the Bush economic agenda, the corporate collapse of the Dot.Com industries, the crony capitalism of Enron and other privateers who played fast and lose in the stock market, has created an economy that has seen massive job losses. Now the Wall Street Journal and the Cable Business Channels, Lou Dobbs of CNN in particular, are crying about American industries outsourcing and contracting out jobs from America. The Congress is calling for a special committee to investigate the contracting out of American jobs. This after almost twenty years of a relentless push to privatize and contract out everything.

In this case the concern is focused on the high tech computer jobs being lost to India. Germany has just opened up two new faculties, in cooperation with Indian Universities, to develop a German speaking program for computer programmers, so they can outsource their computer programming needs. When Hewlett Packard is not outsourcing work to India, it is bringing in Indian University computer graduates into the US on temporary green cards to work. Again these indentured workers have no rights, are temporary workers housed in company housing, and can only remain working in America as long as they have a contract with HP. They are need-
less to say paid significantly less than their American counterparts.

The recent march on Washington by thousands of undocumented workers, falsely called illegal immigrants, exposes the fact that America needs these workers. The California election was as much about giving these workers drivers’ licenses as it was about Movie Star politicians or the budget crisis. The reaction against these workers will grow as the employment crisis grows in the US. Once again racist reactionary politics will pit worker against worker. Because undocumented workers are workers, let us ask who employs them? Governors, Presidents, corporate bosses, anyone who needs a gardener, a nanny, or a cheap source of labor to build Las Vegas hotels.

Let us look at the impact of capitalism on the union movement. Unions are a business, they look at gaining large numbers of members in order to bargain with the bosses. To effectively bargain they need a steady work force, in many cases their disconnect from their members is this servicing model, the membership see a bureaucracy of union reps and leaders, who bargain for them, who service them, who do not challenge capitalism, but maintain business as usual.

I will not go into examples of specific unions, but overall, their purpose is to maintain themselves in power, not to mobilize for workers power. As a result union membership in North America is on a serious decline. Where unions have spent their energy in the past decade has not been organizing the unorganized, or the poorest workers, or even the growing part time or contracted out workers, but in raiding each other. That’s right, gangsterism has replaced revolutionary struggle. Competing unions want each other’s membership, or as the old industries collapse the unions move into non traditional areas, such as the public sector to compete with existing public sector unions for a decreasing membership base.

In a real tribute to Wall Street, a number of unions have adopted the methods of big business; merger and acquisitions. The Brotherhood of Railway workers is talking about merging with the Teamsters. Talks are under way for Steel and other Metal workers unions to merge with Coal and Transportation unions, nationally and internationally. Unlike the One Big Union of the last century, that believed all working people, regardless of their jobs, should be in a union to overthrow capitalism, these mergers will create new capitalist enterprises that guarantee the union bosses their jobs, in a declining growth market.

We need a new union strategy to deal with the changes in capitalism, we need a new union movement to combat capitalism and promote workers power, not pro-
mote our powerlessness. We need a movement that sees all of us a the proletariat, whether we work in the home, go to school and work, work part time or full time, whether we are computer programmers, teachers, or janitors.

We need a social movement to challenge capitalism, we need a living wage campaign in Alberta, and we need to end indentured servitude of nannies and farm-workers. We need to fight for union rights for university professors, graduate students and cab drivers. We need to fight for wages for housework rather than tax credits for single income families.

Capital needs its state. Alberta is the perfect example of this. In the past year the government has passed work for welfare, and legislated an end to all strikes by any unionized health care workers, and eliminated the right of faculty and graduate students in post secondary institutions to have unions. And we still have the lowest minimum wage in Canada, as well as the lowest taxes. But most importantly the state must regulate workers, and their right to organize. This government is the most anti-union in Canada. Capital detests unions and workers organizing whether it is here in Alberta, or in newly industrializing China.

Despite the dismissal of those who say unions are a thing of the past. The business unions of today live in the past, we need a union for all of us, a union of the proletariat of the hand and brain in resistance to global capitalism. The future never looked brighter.

Globalization must be met with counter-globalization, Empire with a counter-Empire....From this perspective the IWW is the great Augustinian project of modern times. The perpetual movement of the Wobblies was indeed an immanent pilgrimage, creating a new society in the shell of the old without establishing fixed and stable structures of rule. The Wobblies had extraordinary success among the vast and mobile immigrant populations because they spoke all the languages of the hybrid labor force.....The primary focus of the IWW was the universality of its project, workers of all languages and races across the world and workers of all trades should come together in “One Big Union”. (Pg. 201-202)

_Empire_, Michael Hardt and Tony Negri, Harvard University Press, 2000

_Footnotes_

1 U.S. union merger combines hotel, restaurant workers and retail, textile

http://www.canada.com/search/story.html?id=14f37e9a-cc9a-46aa-8376-9944f01fd878

Industrial, Wood and Allied Workers of Cda seek merger with Steelworkers
Eugene Plawiuk is a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees. He is a researcher, writer, labour historian and cutting edge web activist. He has written social criticism of science fiction, labour histories of the Edmonton District Labour Council, the 1919 General Strikes in Edmonton and Calgary, the 1932 Edmonton Hunger March.

With his partner Donalda Cassel, they transcribed to the Web the last public speech of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn founding member of the IWW and President of the Communist Party of the U.S.A.

Memories of the IWW by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5202/rebelgirl.html

He is a founding member of the Edmonton Mayweek Labour Arts Festival society, the Alberta Labour History Institute, the Alberta Spanish Civil War Memorial Foundation, and the Alberta Leonard Peltier Defense Committee.

He was a founding member of Erewhon Books, Edmonton’s anarchist Bookstore

He describes his political influences as an esoteric blend of anarchism, syndicalism, surrealism, Marx, and Left Communists.

His works can be found at http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5202/
Co-operatives and Socialism

*Jules Guesde*

*Speech given in July 1910 to a congress in Paris on cooperatives of the French SFIO party.*

Comrades,

I will detain you for a few moments because I am very tired and also because the party to which I belong has at its disposal only two hours, and I would not like to block those of my friends who desire to develop before you their ideas upon the question in order.

What I wish to do, and I believe it is necessary to do it, in order that we may speak with a knowledge of the case, is to examine what co-operation is in itself.

Co-operation is simply one of the forms of association, a means of grouping in modern society; it even belongs sometimes to the class of ordinary stock societies, with this only difference that the share offered by the co-operative barely reaches 100 francs, while the shares of capitalist societies go above 500, or even 1,000 francs. And it is because co-operation is nothing but a form of association or grouping that
you see it advocated by all social opinions and categories. Co-operation has even been advocated as - what shall I say? - as nascent socialism; co-operators, some of them even workingmen, have set themselves from the start against the class-conscious organization of the proletariat. I recall, when I returned banishment in 1876 - not to go very far in the past - the state of mind of the first Syndicalist Congress in Arras Hall. The syndiqués of that time were exclusively co-operators and carried co-operation, which they called the brotherhood of capital and labor, so far that in their public meetings, when a portion of the proletariat was driven to fight under the form of a strike and they came as far as Paris to ask us for contributions, that is ammunition for our struggling brothers, Chabert, to name only one of them, rose against the collection for the benefit of the striking workingmen of Monceau-lès-Mines, claiming that it would be impossible for our hard-working working class, which since years was treading the road of co-operation to uphold a strike without contradicting itself, even though said strike be born outside itself and forced on its victims by capitalist greediness.

REVILLON - It is an easy thing to make the dead speak!

GUESDE - I ask the testimonial of all our Parisian comrades, not one of whom will rise to belie me. What I wished to establish with this page from yesterday's history is that this form of association, of grouping, which co-operation is, can be put to all sorts of use, and is of value to us Socialists, only according to the use it is turned to. Leaving history aside, I will now turn your attention simply to what is happening in a neighboring country. Take Belgium, there you see admirable socialistic co-operatives; but you see others, powerful ones, too, organized by the clerical party, by the liberal party. And I ask you whether this co-operation thus cooked with all the different sorts of sauces, conservative, clerical, bourgeois here, socialistic and revolutionary there, is not enough to prove that the co-operative in itself has absolutely nothing socialistic. Co-operation and co-operatives become socialistic when they are made to help towards reaching the aim pursued by socialism, viz., the gathering into the same social hands of all the means of production and exchange. Any joining on a small scale of capital and labor in the same individual hands, such as is done by even the best co-operatives, is necessarily powerless, as long as in other co-operatives capital is still furnished by one and labor by others.

Co-operatives therefore are and can be of value only through the use they are put to. In the measure in which this form of grouping or association serves and helps the Socialist Party, it certainly becomes a sort of arsenal bringing arms to the fighting proletariat. But there lies the exclusive sense of socialist co-operation. If the co-op-
eration remains autonomous, if workingmen gather and say: “We are going to ease our life by purveying our families with more articles for consumption, which we will buy in common, at wholesale prices so as to benefit by the difference with retail prices”, no doubt this is a respectable aim. I understand very well that in our present state of society the workers try to ease as much of their misery as they can, and to give their families as much satisfaction as they can. I am not at all condemning those co-operatives; they are according to workingmen’s rights, that is understood. But I must note, on the other hand, that if these means of diminishing their misery and rendering their life more bearable were generalized, instead of being as to-day an exception to the present state of affairs, the fatal consequence would be that the cost of living having become cheaper, wages would not increase and would even decrease. (Interruption and applause.)

I know very well that when I express myself thus, I go against the opinion of some of my comrades; but they will explain their opinion in a little while and I assure them I will listen to them with all the patience I beg from them. (Applause.)

I repeat therefore that without any doubt, if consumers’ co-operatives were generalized in the country, if they became the rule instead of an isolated fact, there would be two reasons why the morrow of these co-operatives would be either a stagnation or a lowering of wages. The first reason, the one brought forth by Lafargue, is that the bosses were the first ones to use this means: railroad companies, big industrialists, turned towards co-operatives born out of their own initiative when they refuse to increase the wages of their employees, saying to them: now you can live very well, with the cost of living thus reduced. There lies the first proof; but there is another one: everywhere, in all the localities, one may see that wages are higher where life is dearer, lower where life is cheaper. Why are wages higher in Paris than in the Normand country or in the center of France? It is because in Paris, due to the octroi, life is more expensive, and nobody will deny that the high or low cost of living has an influence over the rate of wages. There is no question here of the iron law of Lassalle, I leave that aside. I speak purely and simply of a general fact which is within the reach of anybody who has eyes to see.

I am coming now to a third proof of my contention. In the resolution drawn up by the majority from the Seine, do they not tell you expressly: “we must do away with commercial parasitism, through co-operation”? Well now, what you call commercial parasitism is represented in France by a million or twelve hundred thousand small tradesmen. They manage to live somehow or other from the product of their shops, and at the expense of the workingman consumer, certainly; but after you
close their shops they will have to keep on living. And then it will be a million or twelve hundred thousand new proletarians whom hunger will throw upon the labor market, and what will be the consequences of these twelve hundred thousand new unemployed coming on top of the unemployed already in existence? Will not this new reserve army forcibly be the cause of reduced salaries? Will not the bosses, seeing more workers at their doors than they need, shave the wages of those at work? Come now, comrades! (Applause.) If the co-operatives were being extended all over the country, wages would fatally be reduced at all points.

Do you want another example, taken from to-day and not to-morrow? Which is the occidental country - and I am sure none of those who belong to that country and happen to be here will belie me, nor reproach me for giving it as an example in this circumstance - which is the neighboring country the workers of which pass the frontier in great numbers and come to work in our Northern France, either permanently or intermittently? Is it not Belgium, are they not our Belgian comrades. And why do they migrate so? Because in Belgium the wages are lowest, and they are lowest because Belgium is flooded with co-operatives of all colors. (Interruptions and applause.)

There is still another reason why co-operatives can have no socialist value. I know that I myself, when once I tried to throw light into bourgeois brains, in the Chamber of Deputies, when they refused to understand that a new society, our socialist society could be substituted for the capitalist society which ours is at once the natural and legitimate child, I was obliged, in order to open their eyes, to make comparisons - which are not always reasons. I took co-operation as an example which could give them an idea of what the society of to-morrow would be, and I took co-operatives, not such as they are working now, but such as they should work by definition, and I said to them: “See how in the co-operatives for production the union of capital and labor in the same hands does away with all exploitation; see how in the co-operatives for consumption all antagonism between seller and buyer who henceforth are one and the same man is done away with just as with profit of one at the expense of the other.”

The question was to make them foresee, through an ideal co-operative, what would be and shall be a society in which neither the production nor the distribution of products will give rise to profits or exploitation. But, as well try to open the eyes of the blind, or make the deaf hear me. (Laughter.)

At the present time anyhow, our co-operatives do not at all belong to this order
of things. Nearly all of them are obliged by the capitalist milieu, to go in for capitalism themselves, for instead of selling only to their members at the price of cost, they are more and more obliged to sell to outsiders for the sake of profits. The antagonism between seller and buyer, which it is the role of co-operation to abolish, is still in existence. I admit there are exceptions. But as a rule you are more and more compelled by a milieu based upon competition to look for means of existence and development outside the distribution of products; you are compelled to sell to the public; to realize profits, to go in for commerce; in a word, you thus become only a new sort of department store, constituted by small workingmen share-holders instead of department stores constituted by large bourgeois share-holders. (Applause.)

Such is reality. It is no use going off on illusions; such is and will be more and more that co-operation, which they would have us look upon as nascent socialism. To imagine that it could be otherwise in our present society, would be to fall back upon the Utopias of former days, represented by Fourier and his “phalanstery”, or Cabet and his “Icaria”. To pretend that you can go in for anything but capitalism in a capitalist society is really an unheard-of folly. General laws, born out of the form of property, impose themselves, and those people who want to build oases in the desert cannot escape those laws; the oasis will be swept by the simoom just as the desert is. And the oasis in this case is the co-operative, forced to bow before commercial or mercantile necessities. I know that you can remedy this evil partly by confederating your societies, and I congratulate you for entering upon and persevering in this road; but, once more, whatever you do upon co-operative ground, you cannot help being governed by all the laws which determine and regulate production and exchange in the society of profit of to-day.

I repeat therefore that it is impossible to attach any socialist value to co-operation in itself. It does not even prepare the elements of the new society, prepared as they have been for a long time, both as material and as organization, by capitalist concentration which preceded co-operation by far and in proportions which it will never equal. It is precisely because, thanks to this capitalist concentration, all the work to-day is one of administration, direction, execution, the most scientific sort of work as well as the most manual, executed by hired men, that we can exchange any day, without any shock, the present order of things for a new one. Everything is ready for this transformation or revolution, because the nominal property of the capitalists to-day, does not represent any sort of work, even of directing, and it may disappear to-morrow without anything being touched or destroyed in the operating of the different sorts of industries; factories, fields, railroads, stores, etc.
There you have the conditions which not only do more than allow collectivist order but render it necessary. Co-operation does not enter there for an atom, and when I heard this morning our friend Poisson saying: “But, if to-morrow you become the masters of the government before co-operatives had covered the country, how would you establish the new society?” I thought that Comrade Poisson was imaging useless nightmares. We can, once we conquer power, realize the whole of socialism, what in America they call the *co-operative commonwealth*, because co-operation is not a means, but the aim of the proletariat. It will then triumph and gather into the hands of the whole of society all capital and labor, so that there shall be no more exploitation, sale, nor profits. Co-operation I say, is not a means - or it can only be one of the means, if co-operatives bring their help to militant socialism. Yes, the co-operatives’ only value is to coin money, to furnish the workingmen’s party with arms and ammunition. It is not the duty of the party to help the co-operatives, but it is the strict duty of the co-operatives to help materially the party with all of their strength.

The co-operative as an auxiliary to the party - that is how we have always viewed the problem, and how we have always worked towards its solution. This morning they spoke of our former campaigns with some contempt, comparing us to sky-lark hunters with mirrors. My answer is that we have never made to shine before the eyes of the workers any but good living realities. We, the Socialists, were the first ones to take the initiative of the co-operative movement in the North; I with a comrade from the Bouches-du-Rhône, went in 1885 to Roubaix there to organize the first socialist co-operative: “L’Avenir du Parti Ouvrier”. I don’t mean to say that there were no co-operatives already in existence, but all were of a bossist or clerical type. Those co-operatives destroyed any class-conscious spirit in the workingmen who belonged to them. All they found there was a material advantage for themselves and their families. We told them: come to the socialist co-operative, you will find in it not only a low price store, but also powder and bullets for your everyday struggles, strikes and elections, and therefore a new means of emancipation. And remembering the old saying of Aesop, “The tongue is at once the best and the worst“, I added: co-operatives are the worst things if they tend only to lower the cost of living, for the benefit of the bosses; they are the best, if they tend to constitute as many citadels for the party and bring to it new resources for the battle of final freedom. (*Applause.*)

There, comrades, is what distinguishes us from other comrades who think differently. However, I will add that if they should show us that we are wrong, that co-operation in itself is socialism aborning, how many things have already been represented as socialism aborning, just to make the workers forget it, when they
have nothing to hope for outside it! Yes, if they would show me that there really is an embryo which only needs to be developed, to-morrow’s society in the germ, I would surely renounce my fears and welcome the new light brought to the proletariat. But until now, not one argument has been offered me. And I am bound to say once more that co-operatives, as they are operated to-day, have nothing in common with socialism; if they do not contribute with their dollars and cents to the struggles the working class has to undergo, they may and oftenest to do become a diversion if not an obstacle to the recruiting and developing of the socialist movement; a diversion, because - and you cannot deny it - when an elite of workingmen put their intelligence into a co-operative, when they carry inside their heads nothing but commercial schemes, how to create a custom for it, how to secure its prosperity and development, there is no room left in brains thus occupied, for the socialist idea, no more time for the socialist education of the masses, to whom we cannot repeat enough that there is only one means of emancipation, viz., the capturing of the political power, and by the help of it, of the capitalist property, industrial and commercial. As I wrote once, the co-operative mustard catches easiest those who could render incalculable services to propaganda, but who, hemmed in, confiscated, paralyzed by a necessarily commercial work, become on the contrary dead losses to the struggling proletariat from whom they were torn away. (Applause.)

Comrades, in the industrial realm of the factory, co-operation brings nothing to the socialist movement but the fruits it can contribute when it is a socialist co-operative. But there is another realm where co-operation can play a great and useful role: the realm of the country. Ah! the socialist idea, the idea of a society owning its means of production, utilizing them socially, and distributing between all its members the products of a common labor; in the industrial towns it is the factory which does the work of teaching this freedom-giving notion to the workingmen, it is the factory, with its work in common, which puts up in front of the workers the necessity of collectivist or communist society. Hence no need there for the co-operatives’ school: the communism of the shop is enough. But in the country, it is different; there we have small scattered land-owners, cultivating individually their bits of land; they, too, are exploited by capitalism in several ways, but no common action or association presents itself as the very thing to create this bond, this common interest. A co-operative which brings together 500 vineyard farmers, takes them out of their individualism, initiates them to the work in common, teaches them solidarity; it does not prepare, as some people claim, the co-operation or socialization of the ground; that will be the work of the new society - no, but it prepares the formerly individualistic brain of the peasant for that society in which the individualistic character of property has here a really socialistic meaning, because it has an educational
meaning. But do not claim that it would have a similar meaning in the towns, for I will tell you once more that it is the factory, the exploitation in common which, by creating laboring collectivities, is the best school of collectivism - by showing them that the collectivist society is not only possible but necessary to human liberation.

I spoke at such length, because it seemed to me necessary to say certain things, however ill I be. But I am going to stop, and here is my conclusion:

The co-operatives in existence to-day have either been founded by Socialists, or penetrated by them. In those where they have penetrated they must promote the idea, the party they represent. In those which they founded, they must increase to its maximum the material collaboration given the idea and the party. Anyway, I hope there will not be a single comrade in this Congress to reproach the co-operatives of the North for having served, as they did, the cause of Socialism! It would be too frightful that Socialists should make themselves the echoes against our co-operatives, of our worst enemies among the bosses. What Motte and the other great bosses of the North cannot forgive them, what they throw in their faces as an insult, is that they are *milch cows of the revolutionists!* And you would take up this language here (*Applause.*) No, you will not want to unarm our brothers over there in accordance and with the arms of the pillars of the capitalist class. You will let the co-operators of the North do their duty as Socialists. If you knew how beautiful a scene it is in the general meetings, when man, woman and child are present! They do not come there only to receive a “dividend”, they come to know the use to which has been put this dividend which they have abandoned to the party, to the collectivist future, to the general emancipation of mankind! You would have to be present at a general session of the Union de Lille, for instance; then I am sure that you would not hear one single speaker pronounce words such as I had the sorrow to hear this morning, meaning precisely these co-operatives of the North, which are at the head of the whole French co-operative movement, don’t forget it. Have you got in Paris co-operatives like ours, helping all the battles with their strike funds, unemployment funds, etc.? I am very glad to greet the co-operatives of the Seine, but don’t forget that your elders over there gave you the example, which you ought to follow to the end. (*Prolonged applause.*)

*Source: Daily People, 25 December 1910 (translated Jaime de Angulo) [http://www.slp.org][1]*
Editorial: Co-Operative Communities

Daniel De Leon

It cannot have failed to attract the attention of newspaper readers how frequently of late mention is made of the starting of some new co-operative community. They are cropping up North, South, East and West. To some this is an encouraging sign; to us it is not; at least it does not appear to be an unalloyed good.

In so far as the starting of such colonies may be taken as a barometer of the Socialistic sentiment that is now leavening the land it certainly is cause for joy; nevertheless, in so far as such sentiment is manifesting itself in the starting of such colonies it is an evil; at least it is a dangerous thing-more likely to lead to harm than to good; and, furthermore, indicative of a very unripe understanding of Socialism.

Socialism, i.e., the movement that demands the collective ownership of the people’s machinery of production, springs from that development of industry that renders peoples dependent one upon the other. Time was when the family could be the unity of society. That was the time when small production was in vogue. At that time the family was substantially self-supporting; the town or township was absolutely so. Under such conditions Socialism could not suggest itself. But with the introduction of machinery and its perfection the social basis was revolutionized. Not only did the machine force co-operation upon hundreds of families within one industry, but it subdivided labor to the extent of forcing cooperation upon whole countries, whole States and, finally, upon the whole nation. Today the New Bedford or Fall River spinner is not an independent entity resting on his own bottom; he is
a link in a long chain that spreads through the whole country that makes him de-
pendent upon the shoemakers of Auburn, Me., the miners of Ohio, the farm hand
of Kansas, the shippers of California, the cottonfield workers of Texas, the hatters of
Danbury, the sugar workers of Louisiana, etc., and each and all of these dependent
upon him and interdependent upon one another. When production has reached
that point Socialism is demonstrated and becomes a necessity.

The co-operative community is based on a denial, at least on a disregard, of that
fundamental principle of Socialism that establishes the idea of integral co-operation,
i.e., of the necessity of modern society to co-operate in all the fullness of produc-
tion. The co-operative community ignores the extensive interdependence man has
reached; it accordingly ignores the Socialist conclusion that today the Co-operative
Commonwealth must be co-extensive with the nation’s boundaries.

Societies of this sort are, accordingly, wrongly poised and cannot last. The work
of Noyes on American Socialisms⁴, giving an account of all the communistic set-
tlements in America and the cause of their failures, is valuable reading at this time.
These communities are either in the nature of cloisters to which men flee for asy-
num-and then they draw forces from the struggle that is going on where all the avail-
able forces are needed; or they are meant to be miniature demonstrations of Socialist
theory-and then they are fraught with danger because their wrong construction
insures their failure, thereby rather injuring than promoting the cause they have at
heart.

Socialism is a national evolution; like the eagle that needs the wide expanse of
the dome of heaven to spread its wings, and could neither develop nor be “exhib-
ited” in a rat hole, so does the Co-operative Commonwealth need for its field the
full extent of a commonwealth of the broad dimensions that modern civilization
requires, and never could thrive or be “demonstrated” within the narrow compass
of a “community.”
Co-operatives and Trade Unions

*Karl Marx*

**Co-operative Labour**

It is the business of the International Working Men’s Association to combine and generalise the spontaneous movements of the working classes, but not to dictate or impose any doctrinary system whatever. The Congress should, therefore, proclaim no special system of co-operation, but limit itself to the enunciation of a few general principles.

(a) We acknowledge the co-operative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show, that the present pauperising, and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers.

(b) Restricted, however, to the dwarfish forms into which individual wages slaves
can elaborate it by their private efforts, the co-operative system will never transform capitalist society. to convert social production into one large and harmonious system of free and co-operative labour, general social changes are wanted, changes of the general conditions of society, never to be realised save by the transfer of the organised forces of society, viz., the state power, from capitalists and landlords to the producers themselves.

(c) We recommend to the working men to embark in co-operative production rather than in co-operative stores. The latter touch but the surface of the present economical system, the former attacks its groundwork.

(d) We recommend to all co-operative societies to convert one part of their joint income into a fund for propagating their principles by example as well as by precept, in other words, by promoting the establishment by teaching and preaching.

(e) In order to prevent co-operative societies from degenerating into ordinary middle-class joint stock companies (societes par actions), all workmen employed, whether shareholders or not, ought to share alike. As a mere temporary expedient, we are willing to allow shareholders a low rate of interest.

**Trades’ unions. Their past, present and future**

(a) Their past.

Capital is concentrated social force, while the workman has only to dispose of his working force. The contract between capital and labour can therefore never be struck on equitable terms, equitable even in the sense of a society which places the ownership of the material means of life and labour on one side and the vital productive energies on the opposite side. The only social power of the workmen is their number. The force of numbers, however is broken by disunion. The disunion of the workmen is created and perpetuated by their unavoidable competition among themselves.

Trades’ Unions originally sprang up from the spontaneous attempts of workmen at removing or at least checking that competition, in order to conquer such terms of contract as might raise them at least above the condition of mere slaves. The immediate object of Trades’ Unions was therefore confined to everyday necessities, to
expediences for the obstruction of the incessant encroachments of capital, in one word, to questions of wages and time of labour. This activity of the Trades’ Unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary. It cannot be dispensed with so long as the present system of production lasts. On the contrary, it must be generalised by the formation and the combination of Trades’ Unions throughout all countries. On the other hand, unconsciously to themselves, the Trades’ Unions were forming centres of organisation of the working class, as the mediaeval municipalities and communes did for the middle class. If the Trades’ Unions are required for the guerilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as organised agencies for superseding the very system of wages labour and capital rule.

(b) Their present.

Too exclusively bent upon the local and immediate struggles with capital, the Trades’ Unions have not yet fully understood their power of acting against the system of wages slavery itself. They therefore kept too much aloof from general social and political movements. Of late, however, they seem to awaken to some sense of their great historical mission, as appears, for instance, from their participation, in England, in the recent political movement, from the enlarged views taken of their function in the United States, and from the following resolution passed at the recent great conference of Trades’ delegates at Sheffield:

“That this Conference, fully appreciating the efforts made by the International Association to unite in one common bond of brotherhood the working men of all countries, most earnestly recommend to the various societies here represented, the advisability of becoming affiliated to that body, believing that it is essential to the progress and prosperity of the entire working community.”

(c) Their future.

Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless [French text has: “incapable of organised resistance”] by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large [French and German texts read: “convince the broad masses of workers”] that their
efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions.

*From The Different Questions – Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council (International Workingmen’s Association, 1866)*

http://www.marxists.org/
Only one other world is possible: communism!

Against the mystifications of the ‘Social Forums’

Jens

Between 12th and 15th November, the “European Social Forum” was held in Paris, a kind of European subsidiary of the World Social Forum which has taken place several years running in Porto Alegre, Brazil (in 2002 the ESF was held in Florence, Italy, while the 2004 event is planned for London). The ESF has attained considerable proportions: according to the organisers, there were some 40,000 participants from countries ranging from Portugal to Eastern Europe, a programme of 600 seminars and workshops in the most varied venues (theatres, town halls, prestigious state buildings) distributed across four sites around Paris, and to conclude a big demonstration of between 60 and 100,000 people in the streets of Paris, with the unrepentant Italian Stalinists of Rifondazione Comunista at the front, and the anarchists of the CNT at the rear. Though they received less media attention, two other “European forums” took place at the same time as the ESF, one for members of the European parliament, the other for trade unionists. And as if three “forums” were not enough, the anarchists organised a “Libertarian Social Forum” in the Paris suburbs, at the same time as the ESF and deliberately presented as an “alternative” to it.

“Another world is possible!”. This was one of the great slogans of the ESF. And there is no doubt that for many of the demonstrators on 15th November, perhaps above all for the young people just entering political activity, there is a real and press-
ing need to struggle against capitalism and for “another world” to the one where we live today, with its endless poverty and its interminable and hideous warfare. Doubtless some of them drew an inspiration from this great united gathering. The problem though, is not just to know that “another world is possible” - and necessary - but also and above all to know what kind of world it could be and how to build it.

It is hard to see how the ESF could offer an answer to this question. Given the number and variety of participating organisations (ranging from organisations of “young managers” and “young entrepreneurs”, to Christian unions, Trotskyists like the LCR or the SWP, the Stalinists of the PCF and Rifondazione, and even anarchists like Alternative Libertaire), it is hard to see how a coherent answer, or even any kind of answer at all, could emerge from the ESF. Everybody had their own ideas to put forward, whence an enormous variety of themes expressed in leaflets, debates, and slogans. By contrast, when we look more closely at the ideas that came out of the ESF, we find first, that there is nothing new in them, and second, that there is absolutely nothing “anti-capitalist” about them either.

The extensive mobilisation around the ESF, plus the publicity given to a multitude of themes from the “anti-globalisation” tendency by so many groups of the left or far left, prompted the ICC to intervene in the event with all the determination that our strength allowed. Since we suspected that the ESF’s “debates” were sown up in advance (a suspicion which several participants in these debates confirmed to us), our militants from all over Europe concentrated on selling our press (in several European languages) and on taking part in informal discussions around the ESF and during the final demonstration. Similarly, we were present at the LSF in order to intervene in the debates and to put forward the perspective of communism against anarchism.

“The world is not for sale” is a fashionable slogan, with various different versions when a “realistic” slogan is called for: “culture is not for sale” for the artists and theatre workers,1 “health is not for sale” for nurses and health workers, or again “education is not for sale” for the teachers. Who would not be touched by such slogans? Who would want to sell his health, or his children’s education?

However, when we look at the reality behind these slogans, we begin to smell a swindle. In fact, what is proposed is not to put an end to “selling the world”, but just to limit it: “Free social services from the logic of the market”. What does this mean, concretely? We all know that, as long as capitalism exists, everything has to be paid for, even services like health and education. All those aspects of social life that
the “anti-globalists” claim to want to “free from the logic of the market” are in fact a part of the workers’ overall wages, a part which is usually managed by the state. Far from being “freed from the logic of the market”, the level of workers’ wages, the proportion of production which returns to the working class, lies at the very heart of the problem of the market and capitalist exploitation. Capital always pays its labour power as little as possible: in other words, the minimum necessary to reproduce the next generation of workers. Today, as the world plunges into an ever deeper crisis, each national capital needs fewer hands, and must pay those hands it needs less if it is not to be eliminated by its competitors on the world market. In this situation, the working class can only resist reductions in its wages - however “social” these may be - through its own struggle, and not by calling on the capitalist state to “free” its wages from the laws of the market, something the state would be perfectly incapable of doing even if it wanted to.

In capitalist society, the proletariat can, at best, impose a more favourable division of the social product through the power of its own struggle: it can reduce the level of surplus-value extorted by the capitalist class in favour of variable capital - ie its wages. But to do this in today’s context firstly demands a high level of struggle (as we saw after the defeat of the struggles in France in May 2003, which was followed by a storm of attacks on the social wage), and secondly can only be temporary (as we saw after the movement of 1968 in France).

No, this idea that “the world” is not for sale is nothing but a wretched fraud. The very nature of capitalism is precisely that everything is for sale, and the workers’ movement has known this since 1848: “It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade (...) The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers”. This is how Marx and Engels put it in the Communist Manifesto: it just goes to show how valid their principles remain today!

“Fair trade, not free trade!” was another major theme at the ESF, given a great boost by the presence of French smallholders with their “biological” cheese and other products. Who indeed could not be touched by the hope of seeing the peasants and small craftsmen of the Third World live decently from the fruit of their labour? Who would not want to stop the steamroller of agribusiness from throwing the peasants off their land and heaping them up by millions in the slums of Mexico and Calcutta?
But here again, as with the question of the market, fine sentiments are a poor guide. First of all, there is absolutely nothing new about the “free trade” movement. The charity business (with companies like Oxfam, present of course at the ESF) has been practising “free trade” for handicrafts sold in its shops for more than forty years, without this in the least preventing millions of human beings from being plunged into poverty in Africa, Asia, or Latin America...

Moreover, in the mouths of the “anti-capitalists”, this slogan is doubly hypocritical. Someone like José Bové, president of the French Confédération Paysanne, can play the anti-capitalist super-star all he likes with his denunciation of the food industry and the evil McDonalds: this does not prevent the militants of the same Confédération Paysanne from demonstrating to demand the maintenance of subsidies they get from the European CAP. By artificially lowering the price of French products, the CAP is precisely one of the main instruments for maintaining unfair trade to the advantage of some and, inevitably, to the disadvantage of others. Similarly, “fair trade” for the American steel industry unionists who demonstrated at Seattle and who have been lionised for it ever since, means imposing tariffs on the import of “foreign” steel produced more cheaply by workers in other countries. In the end, “fair trade” is just another name for trade wars.

In capitalism, the notion of “fairness” is anyway an illusion. As Engels put it already in 1881, in an article where he criticised the notion of the “fair wage”: “The fairness of political economy, such as it truly lays down the laws which rule actual society, that fairness is always on one side – that of capital”.

The most outrageous swindle in all this business of “fair trade” is the idea that the presence of “anti-globalist” demonstrators at Seattle or Cancun “encouraged” the negotiators from the Third World countries to stand up to the demands of the “rich countries”. We will not go into detail here about the fact that the Cancun summit ended as a bitter defeat for the weaker countries, since the Europeans will not dismantle the CAP and the Americans will continue with their massive farm subsidies against the penetration of their market by cheaper commodities from the poor countries. No, what is really disgusting is to credit the idea that the members of government and the besuited bureaucrats of the Third World countries were present at these negotiations to defend the peasants and the poor. Quite the contrary! To take just one example, when Brazil’s Lula denounces the tariffs imposed on imported orange juice to protect the American orange industry, he is thinking not of the poor peasants but of Brazil’s enormous capitalist orange plantations, where the workers slave just as they do in the orange plantations of Florida.
The common thread that runs through all these themes is the following: against the “neo-liberals” and the “transnational” companies (those same evil “multi-nationals” that the anti-globalists’ predecessors denounced back in the 1970s), we are supposed to place our confidence in the state, or better still to strengthen the state. The “anti-globalists” claim that business has “confiscated” power from the “democratic” state in order to impose its own “commercial” laws, and that therefore a “citizen’s resistance” is necessary in order to recover the power of the state and revive “public services”.

What a scam! For one thing, the state has never been more present in the economy than it is today, including in the United States. It is the state that regulates world trade by fixing interest rates, customs tariffs, etc. The state is itself the major actor in the national economy, with public spending running at between 30% and 50% of GDP depending on the country, and with ever-increasing budget deficits. More important than this, whenever the workers get it into their heads to defend their living conditions against the attacks of the capitalists, who do they find in their path right from the outset if not the police forces of the state? Demanding - as the “anti-globalists” do - that the state be strengthened to defend us from the capitalists, is really a gigantic fraud: the bourgeois state is there to protect the bourgeoisie from the workers, not the other way around.

It is not for nothing that the ESF produced this call to support the state, and especially to support its left fractions presented as the best defenders of “civil society”, against “neo-liberalism”. As the saying goes: “He who pays the piper calls the tune”, and it is wholly instructive to look at who financed the ESF’s 3.7 million euro costs:

- First of all, the local authorities of Seine-St-Denis, Val de Marne, and Essonne contributed more than 600,000 euros, while the town of St Denis alone forked out 570,000 euros. In fact, this is the French “Communist” Party - that bunch of old Stalinist scoundrels - which is trying to buy its political virginity after years of complicity in the crimes committed by the Stalinist state in Russia, and decades of sabotaging the workers’ struggles.
- The French Socialist Party has been much discredited by the attacks it made against the workers during its time in government, and it is true that the audience at the ESF did not miss the chance to make fun of Laurent Fabius (a well-known Socialist leader) when he dared to turn up in the debates. One might have thought that the PS might not be too keen on the ESF, but in fact, quite the reverse! The city of Paris (controlled by the PS) contributed 1 million
euros to the costs of the ESF.

- And what about the French government? A right-wing, thoroughly neo-liberal French government, denounced in articles, leaflets, and posters by the whole left from the anarchists to the Stalinists - surely it would be uneasy, at the very least, to see the Forum attracting so many people? But no, not at all! It was by personal order of the president, Jacques Chirac, that the Foreign Ministry contributed 500,000 euros to the ESF.

He who pays certainly intends to profit! The ESF was liberally financed and housed by the whole French bourgeoisie, from right to left. And the whole French bourgeoisie, from left to right, intends to benefit from the undoubted success of the ESF, on two levels in particular:

- First of all, the ESF is a means for the left wing of the state apparatus to renew itself (after being discredited by years spent in government dealing blow after blow to the workers' living conditions and assuming the responsibility for the imperialist policy of French capitalism). Since political parties are no longer in fashion, they are disguised as "associations" in order to give themselves a more "citizen", "democratic", "network" look: the PCF appeared in the form of its "Espace Karl Marx", the PS with its "Fondation Léo Lagrange" and "Jean Jaurès". We should emphasise that it is not just the left which has an interest in making us forget its past misdeeds - something which is clear enough to anybody. The whole ruling class has an interest in covering the social front, in making sure that the workers' struggles - and even more generally the disgust and questioning provoked by capitalist society - are diverted towards the old reformist recipes, and prevented from finding the consciousness necessary to overthrow the capitalist order and put an end to all its ills.

- Secondly, the whole French bourgeoisie has an interest in the extension and strengthening of the ESF's clearly anti-American atmosphere. The enormous destruction and terrible loss of life in the two world wars, and above all the renewal of the class struggle and the end of the counter-revolution in 1968, have all contributed to discrediting the nationalism which the bourgeoisie used to send the populations to the slaughter in 1914, and again in 1939. Consequently, even though there is no such thing as a "European bloc", much less a "European nation", the bourgeoises of the different European countries, especially in France and Germany, all have an interest in encouraging the rise of anti-American and more vaguely "pro-European" feeling with the aim of presenting the defence of their own imperialist interests against US imperialism as the defence of a "different", or even an "anti-capitalist" world view. For
example, the "anti-globalist" support for a ban on the import of American GMO's into France, in the name of "ecology" and the "defence of public health", is in reality nothing but an episode in an economic war, designed to give French research time to catch up with its American rivals in this respect.\(^7\)

Modern marketing techniques no longer sell products directly, they use a system which is both more subtle and more effective: they sell a “world view”, a “style” to which they attach the products supposed to express that style. The ESF’s organisers use exactly the same method: they offer us an unreal “world view”, where capitalism is no longer capitalist, nations are no longer imperialist, and “another world” is possible without going through a communist revolution. Then in the name of this “vision”, they propose to dump on us old products, long past their sell-by date: the so-called “communist” and “socialist” parties, disguised for the occasion as “citizen networks”.

Since the French bourgeoisie coughed up the funds on this occasion, it is normal enough that its political parties should be the first to profit from the ESF. However, we should not imagine that the business was established by the French ruling class alone, far from it. The campaign to renew the credibility of the left wing of the bourgeoisie, undertaken in the various European and world “social forums” benefits the whole capitalist class worldwide.

The “Libertarian Social Forum” was deliberately announced as an alternative to the more “official” forum organised by the big bourgeois parties. One might ask just how much of an alternative it really was: one of the LSF’s main organisers (Alternative Libertaire) also took an active part in the ESF, while the LSF’s demonstration joined the big ESF one after a brief “independent” stroll.

We do not intend to report exhaustively on what was said at the LSF and will simply mention some of the main themes.

Let us start with the “debate” on “self-managed spaces” (ie squats, communes, service exchange networks, “alternative cafés”, etc.). If we put the word “debate” in quotes, it is because the chair did everything possible to limit any discussion to descriptions of the participants’ respective “spaces”, and to avoid any kind of critical evaluation even from within the anarchist camp. It very quickly appeared that “self-management” is something very relative: a participant from Britain explained that they had bought their “space” for the tidy sum of £350,000 (500,000 euros); another recounted the creation of a “space”... on the Internet, the creation, as everybody
knows, of the US DARPA. Still more revealing was the action proposed by these various “spaces”: free and “alternative” pharmacy (i.e., amateur herbal remedies), legal advice services, cafés, exchange of services, etc. In other words, a mixture of the small shopkeeper and social services abandoned by state cutbacks. In other words, the ultimate in anarchist radicalism is to underwrite the state by doing its work for free.

Another debate on “free public services” fully revealed the vacuity of “official” right-thinking anarchism. It was claimed here that “public services” could somehow involve an opposition to the market economy by satisfying the needs of the population for free—and “self-managed” of course, with consumers’ committees, producers’ committees, and community committees. This and the “local committees” being set up today by the French state for the inhabitants of the Paris suburbs are as alike as two peas in a pod. The question is posed as if it were possible to introduce an institutional opposition to capitalism from inside capitalist society itself, for example by establishing free public transport.

Another characteristic of anarchism which made a strong appearance at the LSF, is its profoundly elitist and educationist nature. Anarchism has no idea that “another world” could emerge from the very heart of the present world’s own contradictions. As a result, it can only imagine the passage from the present to the future world by means of the “example” given by its “self-managed spaces”, through an educative action on the ills of today’s prevalent “productivism”. But, as Marx already put it more than a century ago, if a new society is to appear thanks to the education of the people, who is to educate the educators? For those who plan to be the educators are themselves formed by the society within which we live, and their ideas of “another world” remain in reality solidly anchored in the world of today. In effect, the two “social forums” served up, under the disguise of new and revolutionary ideas, nothing other than a bunch of old ideas which have long since revealed themselves inadequate if not downright counter-revolutionary.

The “self-managed spaces” recall the co-operative companies of the 19th century, not to mention all the “workers’ collectives” of our own time (from Lip in France to Triumph in Britain) which either went bankrupt or remained ordinary capitalist companies, precisely because they were forced to produce and sell within the capitalist market economy; they also recall those “community” enterprises of the 1970s (squats, community committees, “free schools” etc.) which ended up integrated into the bourgeois state as social services.
All the ideas about carrying out a radical transformation thanks to free public services recall the gradualist reformism which was already an illusion in the workers’ movement of 1900 and which fell into definitive bankruptcy in 1914 when it took the side of “its own” state to defend its “gains” against the “aggressor” imperialism. These ideas recall the creation of the “Welfare State” by the ruling class at the end of World War II, in order to rationalise the management and the mystification of the workforce (in particular by “proving” that the millions of casualties had not died in vain).

In capitalism as in any class society, it is absolutely inevitable that the dominant ideas should be the ideas of the dominant class. It is only possible to understand the necessity, and the material possibility, of a communist revolution because there exists within capitalist society a social class that embodies this revolutionary future: the working class. By contrast, if we simply try to “imagine” what a “better” society would be like, on the basis of our desires and imaginations as they are formed today by capitalist society (and following the model of our anarchist “educators”), we can do nothing other than “reinvent” the present capitalist world, by falling into either the reactionary dream of the small producer who can see no further than the end of his “self-managed space”, or the megalo-monstrous delirium of a benevolent world state, à la George Monbiot.

Marxism, on the contrary, aims to discover within the capitalist world today the premises of the new world which the communist revolution must bring into being if humanity is to escape its doom. As the Communist Manifesto put it in 1848, “The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes”.

We can distinguish three distinct, but closely interwoven major elements in this “movement going on under our very eyes”. The first, is the transformation that capitalism has already carried out in the productive process of the entire human species. The least object in daily use is today the work, not of a self-sufficient artisan or local fabrication, but of the common labour of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of men and women participating in a network that covers the entire planet. Freed by the world communist revolution of the constraints imposed on it by the capitalist market relations of production and the private appropriation of its fruits, this destruction of all local, regional, and national particularities will be the basis for the constitution of a single human community on a planetary scale. The progress
of social transformation, and the affirmation of every aspect of social life in this world wide community, will lead to the disappearance of all distinctions (which the bourgeoisie encourages today in order to divide the working class) between ethnic groups, peoples, and nations. We can envisage that populations and languages will be mixed until the day when there no longer exist Europeans, Africans, or Asians (and still less Catalans, Bretons, and Basques!), but one united human species whose intellectual and artistic production will find expression in a single language understood by all, and infinitely richer, more precise, and more harmonious than those in which the limited and decomposing culture of today finds expression.\textsuperscript{11}

The second major element, intimately linked to the first, is the existence within capitalist society of a class which embodies, and which expresses at its highest point, this reality of an international and unified productive process. This class is the international proletariat. Whether they be an American steelworker, a British unemployed worker, a French office worker, a German mechanic, an Indian programmer, or a Chinese construction worker, all are workers with this in common: that they are more and more unbearably exploited by the world capitalist class, and that they can only throw off their exploitation by overthrowing the capitalist order itself.

We should emphasise particularly here two aspects of the working class’ very nature:

- First of all, unlike the peasants or small artisans, the proletariat is the creation of capitalism, which cannot live without it. Capitalism grinds down the peasants and the artisans, reducing them to the status of proletarian - or rather to unemployment in the present decadent economy. But capitalism cannot exist without the proletariat. As long as capitalism exists, the proletariat will exist. And as long as the proletariat exists, it will bear within it the revolutionary communist project for the overthrow of the capitalist order and the construction of another world.

- Another fundamental characteristic of the working class lies in the movement and mixing of populations to answer the needs of capitalist production. "The workers have no country" as the Manifesto said, not only because they possess no property but also because they are always at the mercy of capital and its demands for labour power. The working class is, by nature, a class of immigrants. To see this, we only need to look at the population in any major industrialised town: the streets are full of men and women from every corner of the globe. But the same is true even in the under-developed countries: in the Ivory Coast, many of the agricultural workers are Burkinabé, South African miners come
from all over the country but also from Zimbabwe and Botswana, workers in
the Persian Gulf come from India, Palestine, or the Philippines, in Indonesia
there are millions of foreign workers in the factories. This reality of working
class existence - which prefigures the mixing of populations that we spoke of
earlier - demonstrates the futility of the ideal dear to anarchists and democrats
of the defence of a local or regional “community”. To take just one example:
what can Scottish nationalism possibly have to offer to the working class in
Scotland, composed in part of Asian immigrants? Nothing, obviously. The only
real community that the workers who have been ripped from their roots can
find, is the planetary community that they will build after the revolution.

The third major element that we intend to emphasise here can be summarised
in a single statistic: in all the class societies that preceded capitalism, 95% of the
population (more or less) worked the land, and the surplus that they produced
was just enough to support the other 5% (landlords and the church, but also
merchants, artisans, etc). Today, this ratio has been reversed, while in the most
developed countries even the production of material commodities occupies
less and less of the working population. In other words, at the level of the
physical capacity of the productive apparatus, humanity has achieved a level of
abundance which is to all intents and purposes unlimited.

Already under capitalism, the human species’ productive capacity has created
a qualitatively new situation relative to the whole of previous history: whereas be-
forehand, scarcity, or at times outright famine, was the lot of the vast mass of the
population above all because of the natural limits of production (low productivity
of the land, poor harvests, etc.), under capitalism the one and only cause of scarcity
is capitalist production relations themselves. The crisis that throws workers onto
the street is not caused by an inadequate level of production: on the contrary, it is
the direct result of the impossibility of selling everything that has been produced.12
Moreover, in the so-called “advanced” countries, an ever-increasing part of econom-
ic activity has absolutely no utility outside the capitalist system itself: financial and
stock-market speculation of all kinds, astronomical military budgets, fashion items,
“planned obsolescence” designed to force the renewal of a product, advertising, etc.
If we look further, it is obvious that the use of the earth’s resources is also dominated
by the increasingly irrational - except from the standpoint of capitalist profitability
- functioning of the economy: hours spent by millions of human beings in the daily
migration to and from work, or the transport of freight by road rather than by rail
to respond to the unforeseen demands of an anarchic production process, for exam-
ple. In short, the ratio between the quantity of time spent in producing to satisfy
minimum needs (food, clothing, shelter), and that spent in producing “beyond the
minimum” (if we can put it like that), has been completely overturned.13

When we sell our press, in demonstrations or at the factory gates, we are often confronted with the same question: “well, what is communism then, if you say it has never existed?”. In such situations, we try to give an answer that is both global and brief, and we often answer: “communism is a world without classes, without nations, and without money”. While this definition is very basic (even negative, since it defines communism as being “without”), it nonetheless contains the fundamental characteristics of communist society:

- It will be without classes, because the proletariat cannot free itself by becoming a new exploiting class: the reappearance of an exploiting class after the revolution would in reality mean the defeat of the revolution and the survival of exploitation.14 The disappearance of classes flows naturally from the interest of a victorious working class in its own emancipation. One of the class’ first objectives will be to reduce the working day by integrating into the productive process the unemployed and the masses without work in the Third World, but also the petty bourgeoisie, the peasants, and even the members of the overthrown bourgeoisie.

- It will be without nations, because the productive process has already gone well beyond the framework of the nation, and in doing so has rendered the nation obsolete as an organisational framework for human society. By creating the first planetary human society, capitalism has already gone beyond the national framework within which it was itself born. Just as the bourgeois revolution destroyed all the old feudal particularities and frontiers (taxes on the movement of goods within national frontiers, laws, or weights and measures, specific to this or that town or region), so the proletarian revolution will put an end to the last division of humanity into nations.

- It will be without money, because the notion of exchange will no longer have any meaning in communism, whose abundance will allow the satisfaction of the needs of every member of society. Capitalism has created the first society where commodity exchange has been extended to the whole of production (contrary to previous societies, where commodity exchange was limited essentially to luxury goods, or certain articles which could not be produced locally such as salt). Today, capitalism is being strangled by its inability to sell on the market everything that it is capable of producing. The very fact of buying and selling has become a barrier to production. Exchange will therefore disappear. With it will disappear the very idea of the commodity, including the first commodity of all: wage labour.
These three principles are directly opposed to the commonplaces of bourgeois ideology, according to which there exists a greedy and violent “human nature” which will determine for ever the divisions between exploiters and exploited, or between nations. Obviously, this idea of “human nature” suits the ruling class down to the ground, justifying its class domination and preventing the working class from identifying clearly what is really responsible for the misery and the massacres that overwhelm humanity today. But it has nothing whatever to do with reality: whereas the “nature” (ie the behaviour) of other animal species is determined by their natural environment, the more humanity’s domination over nature advances, the more “human nature” is determined by our social, not by our natural environment.

The three points we have outlined above are no more than the briefest of sketches. Nonetheless, they have profound implications for the communist society of the future. It is true that marxists have always avoided drawing up “blueprints”, first because communism will be built by the real movement of the great masses of humanity, and second because we can imagine what communism will be like even less than a peasant of the 11th century could imagine modern capitalism. This does not, however, prevent us from indicating some of the most general characteristics that follow from what we have just said (very briefly, of course, for lack of space).

Probably the most radical change will spring from the disappearance of the contradiction between the human being and his labour. Capitalist society has raised to its highest point the contradiction - which has always existed in class society - between labour, in other words the activity we only undertake because we are forced to do so, and leisure, in other words the time when we are free (in a very limited sense) to choose our activity.\(^{15}\) The constraint that forces us to work is due on the one hand to the scarcity imposed by the limits of labour productivity, and on the other by the fact that a part of the fruit of labour is seized by the exploiting class. In communism, these constraints no longer exist: for the first time in history, the human species will produce freely, and production will be directed entirely towards the satisfaction of human need. We can even suppose that the words “labour” and “leisure” will disappear from the language, since no activity will be undertaken constrained by necessity. The decision to produce or not to produce will depend not only on the utility of the thing produced, but also on the pleasure or interest of the productive process itself.

The very idea of the “satisfaction of needs” will change its nature. Basic needs (food, clothing, shelter), will occupy a proportionally less and less important place, while the needs determined by the social evolution of the species will come more
and more to the fore. There will no longer be any distinction between “artistic” work and that which is not. Capitalism is a society which has exacerbated to the extreme the contradiction between “art” and “non-art”. Whereas the great majority of artists in history never signed their work, it is only with the rise of capitalism that the artist begins to sign his work and that art becomes a specific activity separated from day-to-day production. Today, this tendency has reached its paroxysm, with an almost total separation between the “fine arts” on the one hand (incomprehensible for the great majority of the population and reserved for a tiny intellectual minority), and the industrialised artistic production of advertising and “pop culture”, both of them being reserved for “leisure activity”. All this is nothing but the fruit of the contradiction between the human being and his labour. With the disappearance of this contradiction, the contradiction between “useful” and “artistic” production will also disappear. Beauty, the satisfaction of the senses and the mind, will also be fundamental human needs that the productive process will have to satisfy.16

Education will also change its whole nature. In any society, the purpose of educating children is to allow them to take their place in adult society. Under capitalism “taking their place in adult society”, means taking their place in a system of brutal exploitation, where those who are not profitable do not, in fact, have any place. The purpose of education (which the “alternative worlders” tell us should not be “for sale”) is therefore above all to equip the new generation with abilities which can be sold on the market, and in this age of state capitalism to ensure that the new generation has the abilities necessary to strengthen the national capital against its competitors on the world market. It is also obvious that capitalism has absolutely no interest in encouraging a critical attitude towards its own social organisation. In short, the purpose of education is nothing other than to subdue young minds and to mould them to capitalist society and the demands of its productive process; small wonder then, that schools are more and more like factories, and teachers like workers on the line.

Under communism, on the contrary, the integration of the young into the adult world will demand the greatest possible awakening of all their physical and intellectual senses. In a system of production that has been completely freed from the demands of profit, the adult world will open to the child gradually, as his capacities develop, and the young adult will no longer be exposed to the harrowing experience of leaving school to be thrown into the ferocious competition of the labour market. Just as their will no longer be any contradiction between “labour” and “leisure” or between “production” and “art”, so there will no longer be any contradiction between school and the “world of work”. The very words “school”, “factory”, “office”,

Jens/Only one other world is possible

65
“art gallery”, “museum” will disappear or change completely their meaning, since the whole of human activity will combine in one harmonious effort to develop and satisfy the physical, intellectual, and sensual needs of the species.

Communists are not utopians. We have tried here to give the briefest, and inevitably most limited of sketches of what must be the nature of the new human society that will be born from present-day capitalism. In this sense, the “alternative worlders” slogan, that “another world is possible” (or even “other worlds are possible”) is a pure mystification. Only one other world is possible: communism.

But there is nothing inevitable about this new world’s birth. In this respect, there is no difference between capitalism and the other class societies which preceded it, where “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes”. In other words, no matter how necessary the communist revolution is not inevitable. The passage from capitalism to the new world will not be possible without the violence of the proletarian revolution as its inevitable midwife. But the alternative, in the conditions of advanced decomposition of today’s society, is the destruction not just of the two “contending classes”, but of the whole human species. Whence the gigantic responsibility that weighs on the shoulders of the world revolutionary class.

Seen from the situation today, the development of the proletariat’s revolutionary capacity might seem such an impossibly far-off dream that there is a great temptation to “do something” now, even if it means rubbing shoulders with those old villains of the Stalinist and Socialist parties, in other words with the left wing of the bourgeoisie’s state apparatus. But for the revolutionary minorities, reformism is not a stopgap that we do “for want of anything better”, on the contrary it is a lethal compromise with the class enemy. The road towards the revolution which alone can create “another world” will be long and difficult, but it is the only road that exists.

From the ICC’s International Review, issue 116, 1st Quarter 2004. (http://www.internationalism.org/)

Notes

1 The teachers’ strikes in France in 2003 were closely followed by strikes by theatre workers
(both players and technicians).
2 Common Agricultural Policy, an enormous and expensive system for artificially maintaining the prices paid to European agricultural producers, to the fury of their competitors in other exporting countries.
3 The article was published in the Labour Standard. See http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/05/07.htm
4 It is particularly amusing to read in the pages of Alternative Libertaire (a French anarchist group) that “we want the demonstration to be as big as possible in order to make them hear once again that we don’t want the capitalist and police Europe” (Alternative Libertaire n°123, November 2003), when in fact the ESF is entirely financed by the state and based on the mystification of strengthening the state in Europe in order supposedly to protect the “citizen” from big industry. There really is no incompatibility in practice between anarchism and the defence of the state!
5 Several of these towns or local authorities are controlled by the French “Communist” Party.
6 It is interesting to see that the British “Socialist Workers’ Party” - an unreconstructed Trotskyist party of the old type - appears in France disguised as a sort of “network” under the very modern name of “Socialisme par en bas” (“Socialism from below”).
7 As Bismarck said: “I have always found the word Europe in the mouth of those politicians who were demanding from other powers something that they did not dare demand in their own name” (cited in the Economist, 3/1/04).
8 Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency
9 Well-known anti-globalist personality, author of a Manifesto for a new world, and one of the leaders of the British “Globalise Resistance”.
10 It is impossible to overstate the extraordinary power and prescience of the Communist Manifesto, which laid the foundations for a scientific understanding of the movement towards communism. The Manifesto itself is a part of the effort undertaken by the workers’ movement since its beginnings, and which it has continued since, to understand more profoundly the nature of the revolution towards which its strength tends. We have chronicled these efforts in our series “Communism is not just a nice idea but a material necessity”, published in the pages of this Review.
11 “In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature” (Communist Manifesto).
12 “In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity - the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed. And why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further
the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them.” (Communist Manifesto).

13 We cannot go into detail on this point here, but we should simply point out that this is an idea to be wielded with caution, since even “basic” needs are socially determined: Cro-Magnon man did not have the same needs as modern man for food, clothing and shelter, nor did he satisfy those needs in the same way or with the same tools.

14 In fact, this is precisely what happened after the defeat of the October 1917 Russian Revolution: the fact that many of the new leaders (Brezhnev for example) started life as workers or as workers’ children gave credence to the idea that a communist revolution that brings the working class to power would in reality do nothing other than put into power a new, “proletarian”, ruling class. This idea that the USSR was communist and its leaders something other than a fraction of the world bourgeoisie, was of course knowingly encouraged by all sections of the ruling class, from right to left. In reality, the Stalinist counter-revolution put the bourgeoisie back in power: the fact that many members of this new bourgeoisie were of worker or peasant origin is of no more significance than when an individual of working-class origins becomes a company director.

15 It is significant that the origin of the French word for labour (“travail”) should have originated from the Latin “tripalium”, meaning an instrument of torture, and should then have passed into English with the meaning of “trouble” or “suffering”. IFPOSSIBLE - find similar etymological derivation for “labour”?

16 An anarchist at the LSF tried, very learnedly, to explain to us that marxists only consider “homo faber” (“the man who makes”), while the anarchists consider “homo ludens” (“the man who plays”). This idea is not any the less stupid for being expressed in Latin.

17 Not to mention “prison”, “gaol”, and “concentration camp”.

18 Communist Manifesto

19 For a much more developed view, see our series on communism mentioned previously, and in particular the article published in International Review n°70.
Identity Theft on a Mass Basis  
_Michael James_

There is a lot of talk these days about identity theft. There is, however, a terrible silence about one of the most systematic, thorough and tragic cases of identity theft in American history: the stripping of class consciousness from the American working class.

This sweeping identity theft is a profound yet subtle process. Most members of the working class don’t even realize they have been robbed. They become _class-unconscious_, as Daniel De Leon said, without suspecting they have been denied the most essential aspect of their identity. Yet, class is arguably the most fundamental element of identity because, as Marx taught, we are material creatures with primary needs for food, water, clothing, shelter, safety, security and belonging. Our class is determined by our relationship to the means of production or the means of life.

Most of us in capitalist society, whether we are black or white, gay or straight, male or female, are not owners of the means of production. Most of us survive by selling our physical or intellectual labor power. We survive and perhaps even prosper somewhat, so long as we can successfully market our sweat.

Where does this identity theft begin? It begins in childhood where schools are a huge part of the problem. History and the social sciences, for example, routinely deny a working-class perspective to children. There is a pretense of neutrality in education, but this is a myth and a bias in itself. Paulo Freire, in his _Pedagogy of the_
Oppressed, wrote that every pedagogy and curricula must 1) invite students to question and resist the prevailing economic system or 2) invite students to accept the prevailing economic system.

Textbooks and teachers hardly present the glory of labor, the primacy of labor and the Marxian reality that only labor can create wealth. More typically, we are academically misguided with the propagandistic Chamber of Commerce myth about the partnership between capital and labor.

Our educational system denies class consciousness to young workers and even invites them to be a partner in their own fleecing! James W. Loewen, author of Lies My Teacher Told Me, wrote, “Six of the dozen high school American history textbooks I examined contain no index listing at all for ‘social class,’ ‘social stratification,’ ‘class structure,’ ‘income distribution,’ ‘inequality’ or any conceivably related topic. Not one book lists ‘upper class,’ ‘working class’ or ‘lower class.’ ” He confirms, “Social class is probably the single most important variable in society.” And he adds that “the working class usually forgets its own history” and, “The tendency of teachers and textbooks to avoid social class as if it were a dirty little secret only reinforces the reluctance of working-class families to talk about it.”

Popular culture, so-called, is another culprit. A critical viewing of television and films reveals that members of the working class are commonly depicted as boorish, crude louts. A 2003 issue of Newsweek carried an article about how certain celebrities and models enjoy wearing ball caps with some company logo on the front. But watch out, the writer warned, if you are not one of the beautiful people someone might think you are a real trucker! And the offensive, predatory, exploiting Jenny Jones once did a show entitled “blue-collar makeovers.”

We who have class consciousness must always remember that all news and entertainment is corporate. Every TV show or magazine bombards us with bourgeois ideology. Michael Parenti, in Dirty Truths, says that workers in TV and films are typically “portrayed as emotional, visceral, simple-hearted and simple-minded, incapable of leadership or collective action” so that “it is individual heroics rather than collective action that save the day.”

Dominant values are another tool used in this robbery. The American value of extreme or rugged individualism, for example, is a barrier to class consciousness. We are urged, beginning in childhood, to be “self made” individuals, to rise above personal limitations, and even to overcome external barriers such as poverty or racism.
The Chamber of Commerce mentality would like nothing more than for all of us to be entrepreneurs, scratching and clawing our way “to the top.”

Our individuality is, of course, a wonderful thing, but it must not be mistaken for capitalist individualism, which isolates and alienates the individual. As Daniel De Leon explained: “Individualism and individuality are opposing terms. The latter is the mark of strength of character; the former is the sign of weakness. The latter, accordingly, is self-possessed, elevating; the former is blustering and degrading. Capitalism breeds individualism; only socialism can nurture individuality.”

Consider the famous hierarchy of human needs outlined by psychologist Abraham Maslow. It truly reinforces the materialism taught by Marx. Maslow suggested that our most fundamental needs are for food, water, sleep and elimination of bodily waste. We next advance to a need for safety, shelter and security. We then are free to address our need for belonging. Only then can we set about fulfilling our need for esteem. It is striking that Maslow declared that we must belong before we can have esteem. In other words, we must be connected and feel our solidarity with something greater than ourselves before we can realize our individuality. This is why the prized individualism of capitalist society is a pathological and alienated endeavor.

Stripped of class consciousness, we are invited to compete rather than cooperate, to advance ourselves at the expense of community or environment. It is a fragile and lonely success we are taught to achieve. The entrepreneurial and individualistic ethos of American capitalist culture is an invitation to define, pursue, and advance self and leave comrades behind. Class consciousness is strength, dignity and awareness. It is more profound and fundamental than racial or ethnic identity.

Multiculturalism, for example, popular among educators, does nothing to challenge the economic injustice inherent to the capitalist system. Malcolm X looked beyond racial divisions to economics: “I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the system of exploitation. I believe that there will be that kind of clash, but I don’t think it will be based on the color of the skin...” And poet Langston Hughes wrote:

*Revolt! Arise!*
*The Black And White World*
*Shall be one.*
*The Workers World!*
The past is done!
A new dream flames
Against the Sun!

Of course, racial identity is a beautiful thing to be celebrated but something even more beautiful is worker solidarity, a united working class—male and female; gay and straight; black, white, brown, yellow and red; intellectual and physical toiler—who stand together against capitalist exploitation. Indeed, class consciousness is the thing the exploiters fear the most.


*Nate Holdren*

“If you make a social revolution, do it for fun.”

It’s 1968 and the world is on fire. Paris, Berlin, Prague, Chicago, Tokyo, Mexico City, Rome – cities separated by geography and culture are united by the flames of riotous protest. The twin embers of outrage at the present and hope for the future flare and ignite. Parisian students occupy university campuses. Workers occupy factories. In the streets, a question is asked - a slow death on an installment plan, or the joy of living? Crowds battle cops for control of streets and public squares, but more, they battle over how life will be lived - the same old shit or a world where many worlds fit. The arguments for and against each side take the shape of overturned cars and barricades, clubs and tear gas. The ‘Events of May’ later prove to be the single biggest influence on a generation of French intellectuals.

The Situationist International, though a small group, was an enormous shaping force on the Paris Events. The SI began as an avant-garde artists’ cabal, creating new visions of urban space, and ended as an ultra-revolutionary sect, pioneering new forms of theory and practice of the city as site of oppression and resistance. Unlike some other so-called revolutionary organizations, the SI wanted not the “self-management of the existing world ... but its uninterrupted transformation.” (p105)
The Situationists took the very old marxist idea that under capitalism most of us are forced to sell ourselves piecemeal at work in order to live, and extended it into a far-reaching condemnation of a society which systematically forecloses human possibilities, replacing activity and creativity with passivity, life with mere survival. In doing so, the SI bypassed the old and stale division between marxism and anarchism, pioneering a perspective antithetical to all bosses and authorities, spurring many people into political and intellectual action.

To really understand the Situationists, one must read the classic works produced by their two leading lights - Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life*. This collection, however, is a fine introduction to the SI, and a historical event where their ideas found practical expression. The collection takes its name from a slogan graffitied around Paris during the month of insurrection, “beneath the paving stones, the beach!”, coined when protesters discovered sand under the cobblestones they tore up to make projectiles to hurl at cops.

This collection reprints pamphlets by which the Situationists first appeared to English speakers, giving readers today a sense of how the SI was perceived by like-minded folks outside of France back in the day. Among the texts reprinted here are the infamous “On the poverty of student life,” condemning the intellectual, sexual, and economic poverty faced by students, printed by Situationist students at Strasbourg using university funds and causing great controversy among the sober authorities. Also included is the spell-binding first-hand account of the May Events by a member of the English revolutionary organization Solidarity. This pamphlet is by far the most energizing in the book, conveying the excitement and sense of possibility which the upheaval in Paris had for participants and observers at the time. All the pamphlets, but this one most of all, along with photos and reproductions of leaflets and graffiti, provide an inspiring depiction of the May Events.

If there’s one major flaw with this book, it’s the failure to make links between the different interruptions of the global order which occurred at the time, and how these struggles and subversive communication circulated globally, surging across and blurring the artificial lines drawn onto maps and between people. Reading this book one almost gets the impression that the Paris Events and the development of the SI occurred in a vacuum untouched by events elsewhere. Still, this book remains an excellent doorway to vitally important ideas and historical events, which resonate deeply with anyone who wants to turn the world upside down, or better yet, to finally put it right side up.

Torgun Bullen

Gerda Lerner, the American feminist and historian, was born in 1920 in Vienna into a prosperous Jewish family. She was forced to flee to America in 1938 when the Nazis rose to power in Austria. Before she retired, she was Robinson-Edwards Professor of History Emerita at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Out of her experiences as a Jew, and as a woman in the Jewish community, grew a life-long commitment to fighting sexism, racism, poverty and injustice. An ex-communist and “post-Marxist”, she has found it necessary to expand on Marx’s class analysis of society, explaining how class has always affected women differently to men.

Having grown up with the impression (like black people used to) that we, as women, ‘have no history’, Lerner’s works are a revelation. According to Lerner; “Women’s History changes their (women’s) lives. Even short-term exposure to the past experience of women, such as in two-week institutes and seminars, has the most profound psychological effect on women participants.” She also says it is wrong to picture women primarily as victims. “Women are essential and central to creating history; they are, and always have been actors and agents in history. Women have ‘made history’, yet they have been kept from knowing their history and from interpreting history, either their own or that of men.”
In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, she traces women’s subordination in the Western World back to the beginning of historical records in Mesopotamia in the fourth millenium B.C. Although her main research was carried out using Mesopotamian records, she also touches on the development of patriarchy in the Old Testament and in Classical Greek thought. She speculates on whether there ever was a system of ‘matriarchy’ in pre-history and concludes that there is no proof of this. By this she means, there is no historical proof that men were ever subordinate to women, the way women have been subordinate to men for thousands of years. She does believe that it is likely that the relationship between the sexes was more equal in pre-history, with women having a high status due to their role as procreators.

Women’s high status in pre-history, she believes, is pointed to by the prevalence of the cult of the fertility goddess, a cult it was very difficult to get rid of even after the state and patriarchy forced the replacement of the supreme mother goddess by a male godhead. In the Old Testament, written from the tenth century B.C. to the fifth, battles were still being fought to prevent people making offerings to the mother goddess and to force allegiance to the newly created patriarch in heaven, ‘Yahweh’.

Lerner stands firmly in the Marxist tradition. She pays tribute to the contribution made to the Marxist theory of origin in Engels’s *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, as well as pointing out some of its shortcomings. For example, she says that Engels’s description of the primitive sexual division of labour “reads curiously like a description of European peasant households read back into pre-history”. We now know that there is more than one pattern for the sexual division of labour. We know that women provide on average 60 percent of the food in hunting and gathering societies. Engels was also influenced by the nineteenth-century standard of female prudery, which he projected back into ancient times by saying that women saw monogamous marriage as an improvement in their situation, as it gave a woman “the right to give herself to one man only”.

Although Lerner acknowledges Engels’s contribution to feminist debate in breaking with the biological determinism of the traditionalists and pointing up “the impact of societal and cultural forces in structuring and defining sexual relations”, she disagrees with the “world historic defeat of the female sex” being a “revolutionary overthrow”, the result of a single and sudden event; i.e., the development of private property. As she says: “If the cause of women’s enslavement was the development of private property and the institutions that evolved from it, then it followed logically that the abolition of private property would liberate women.” Lerner doubts this and argues that the estab-
The establishment of patriarchy was not a violent and sudden overthrow of the old order, but a process taking place from approximately 3100 BC to 600 BC.

She talks elsewhere in her book about “a vast cultural revolution” being necessary in order to transform and abolish patriarchy and about the enduring power of “belief systems, symbols and mental constructs”, as well as of the patriarchal mode of thought “being so built into our mental processes that we cannot exclude it unless we first make ourselves consciously aware of it”.

Regarding Lerner’s position on women and class, it can be summed up in the following sentence: “As men’s class positions became consolidated and defined by their relationship to property and the means of production, the class position of women became defined by their sexual relationships” (p. 96). Women’s access to wealth and any privileges that came with it was always mediated through men; at the start of their lives through fathers and brothers, and later through the man they slept with, whether as legal wife, concubine or mistress. A slave woman could rapidly advance up the class ladder by becoming the concubine of a wealthy man. As rapidly as they could ascend the class ladder, as quickly they could slide down the rungs of privilege. If a man tired of a woman’s sexual services, or she did not produce sons, he could easily divorce her or disassociate herself with her, and unless the woman’s family was willing to take her in, slavery or prostitution were often the outcome (and for women, slavery almost always equalled sexual exploitation): “For women, sexual exploitation marked the very definition of enslavement, as it did not for men.” (p.89).

Probably the most revolutionary assertion Lerner makes in her book, seen from a Marxist point of view, is that “The appropriation by men of women’s sexual and reproductive capacity occurred prior to the formation of private property and class society. Its commodification lies, in fact, at the foundation of private property.” (p. 8). The main thread she follows in support of her argument is that the agricultural revolution created an increased need for labour and women, as women as producers of labour power in the form of children, became highly prized. She quotes the anthropologists Lévi-Strauss, Claude Meillasoux and Peter Aaby as proponents of the theory that it is the exchange of women through which private property is eventually created. She talks about women’s reproductive capacity first being “recognized as a tribal resource, then, as ruling elites develop, it is acquired as the property of a particular kin group”. She goes on to argue:

“This occurs with the development of agriculture. The material conditions of grain agriculture demand group cohesiveness and continuity over time, thus
strengthening household structure. In order to produce a harvest, workers of one production cycle are indebted for food and seeds to workers of a previous production cycle. Since the amount of food depends on the availability of labor, production becomes the chief concern. This has two consequences: it strengthens the influence of the older males and it increases the tribes’ incentive for acquiring more women. In the fully developed society based on plow agriculture, women and children are indispensable to the production process, which is cyclical and labor intensive. Children have now become an economic asset. At this stage tribes seek to acquire the reproductive potential of women, rather than women themselves. Men do not produce babies directly; thus it is women, not men, who are exchanged. This practice becomes institutionalized in incest taboos and patrilocal marriage patterns. Elder males, who provide continuity in the knowledge pertaining to production, now mystify these ‘secrets’ and wield power over the young men by controlling food, knowledge and women. The young men must first offer labor services to the old men for the privilege of gaining access to women. Under such circumstances women also become the spoil for the warriors, which encourages and reinforces the dominance of older men over the community. Finally, ‘women’s world historic defeat’ through the overthrow of matriliney and matrilocality is made possible, and it proves advantageous to the tribes who achieve it.”

Another question Lerner sets out to answer, is the following: “What could explain women’s historical ‘complicity’ in upholding the patriarchal system that subordinated them and in transmitting that system, generation after generation, to their children of both sexes?”

Going back to the dawn of civilization, the division of labour between men and women was already becoming a fact. At the time, the particular division into men’s and women’s work seemed sensible, for example it was not easy for pregnant and breast feeding mothers to take part in a hunt or to cope with the heavy work of plough agriculture. It must be remembered that at the time, women would have spent most of their comparatively short adult life either pregnant or with small children. What seemed sensible at the time, developed over time to concentrate power in male hands. In other words, men and women were unaware at the time of what the division of labour was going to lead to, so there was no ‘conspiracy’ on the part of men and no ‘guilty accomplice’ syndrome attributable to women. So what lead women to perpetuate the system further down the line of historical developments? Here Lerner argues that women were split and prevented from seeing their collective group interest (and still are) in a way that no other group of oppressed people have been. For one, they have their closest relatives and loved ones in the “enemy camp” so to speak, in the form of fathers, husbands, sons and lovers. They also got immediate and tangible benefits from perpetuating a system of considering them-
selves “better” than other women. As a “respectable” woman, defending her chastity before marriage and staying attached to one man, she would stand a better chance of improving her own and her family’s position by marrying “well”; i.e., securing a more prosperous husband. The division of women into the well-known dichotomy “respectable” (attached to one man) and “not respectable” (sexually attached to more than one man) occurred very early on. Lerner writes a very interesting chapter of how the veiling of women played a part in this. The veiling of women is not an invention of Islam, it goes back to at least the second millennium BC in Mesopotamia.

One of the most powerful chapters of this book for me, is the one on “Symbols”. Because at the time “when humankind made a qualitative leap forward in its ability to conceptualize large symbol systems which explain the world and the universe, women were already so greatly disadvantaged that they were excluded from participation in this important cultural advance.” This means that they were excluded from education from the earliest times, and from interpreting and altering the religious belief systems as well as the scientific, political and historical systems of thought. Hence, all our knowledge of history has been passed down to us in the words of “great men”; the events and interpretation of history for nearly four thousand years having been given an exclusively “male slant”, recording only what seemed important in a man’s world. What is needed, according to Lerner, is nothing less than a complete re-interpretation of history, not “adding” the female perspective, but seeing human history as a joint male and female experience and being shaped by the joint actions of men and women: “As long as men believe their experiences, their viewpoint, and their ideas represent all of human experience and all of human thought, they are not only unable to define correctly in the abstract, but they are unable to define reality accurately”.

Lerner describes the real problems women have had with securing enough “private time” for themselves to be able to contribute to the world of learning. She herself could stand as an example of this, only starting out on a serious academic career in her forties, after bringing up children. She describes this situation as follows:

“But the generation of abstract thought and of new conceptual models – theory formation – is another matter. This activity depends on the individual thinker’s education in the best of existing traditions and on the thinker’s acceptance by a group of educated persons who, by criticism and interaction provide ‘cultural prodding’. It depends on having private time. … Universal, women of all classes had less leisure time than men, and due to their child-rearing and family service function, what free time they had was generally not their own. The time of thinking men, their work and study time, has since the inception of Greek
philosophy been respected as private. …women... have for more than 2500 years suffered the disadvantages of fragmented, constantly interrupted time.”

And in the following extract she echoes my unease with prevailing attitudes within not just the capitalist mainstream ideology, but within the thinking in our own sector as well. She talks about how any woman in the past hundred years who aspires to an academic career, must first learn “how to think like a man”.

“The way to think abstractly is to define precisely, to create models in the mind and to generalize from them. Such thought, men have taught us, must be based on the exclusion of feelings. Women, like the poor, the subordinate, the marginals, have close knowledge of ambiguity, of feelings mixed with thought, of value judgements coloring abstractions. Women have always experienced the reality of self and community, known it, and shared it with each other. Yet, living in a world in which they are devalued, their experience bears the stigma of insignificance. They have thus learned to mistrust their own experience and devalue it.”

She then elaborates on this theme in a beautiful and poetic way:

“Women deal with the irredeemably particular: they experience reality daily, hourly in their service function (taking care of food and dirt); in their constantly interruptable time; their splintered attention. Can one generalize while the particular tugs at one’s sleeve? He who makes symbols and explains the world and she who takes care of his bodily and psychic needs and of his children – the gulf between them is enormous.”

Lerner encourages women to “trust our own, the female experience. Since such experience has usually been trivialized or ignored, it means overcoming the deep-seated resistance within ourselves toward accepting ourselves and our knowledge as valid.” She warns that “In line with our historic gender-conditioning, women have aimed to please and have sought to avoid disapproval. This is poor preparation for making the leap into the unknown required of those who fashion new systems.”

I found the following paragraph of great importance to women:

“Finally, it (to step outside patriarchal thought) means developing intellectual courage, the courage to stand alone, the courage to reach further than our grasp, the courage to risk failure. Perhaps the greatest challenge to thinking women is the challenge to move from the desire for safety and approval to the most ‘unfeminine’ quality of all – that of intellectual arrogance, the supreme hubris which asserts to itself the right to reorder the world. The hubris of the god-makers, the hubris of
And what future does Lerner see for men? She outlines it as follows: “We may find that those who had previously taken upon themselves the burden of both action and definition may now have more freedom for playing and experiencing the pure joy of existence.”

Reading this book has for me been as much of a jolt to my thinking as when I came across the literature of the Socialist Party of Great Britain over 20 years ago, and my subsequent introduction to Marxist thought. It has thrown light on many experiences in my own life and made me realise that I am not alone in those experiences. It has also convinced me that we cannot just sit back and expect the abolition of private property to take care of the millennia old disparities between men and women. The acceptance of patriarchal thought is so embedded in our psyches that it has become, as Lerner says, ‘invisible’, and we have to make a conscious effort to reach beyond these constraints.

As women, we must make sure that our voices are heard, that our opinions are not trivialised and that our various contributions are valued. Everything, including the teachings of Marx and Engels, can be improved on.
Contacts

One of the aims of Common Voice and the World in Common network is to try and facilitate communication, co-operation and collaboration between the individuals and groups that comprise the global anti-state, anti-capitalist, anti-reformist political sector. To help achieve this aim we will publish a contacts list in every issue of Common Voice. If you, your group or publication would like to be included please submit the following information either via e-mail to editors@cvoice.org, or via post to World in Common, Box 44, Greenleaf Bookshop, 82 Colston Street, Bristol, BS1 5BB, UK.

Name of organisation: ______________________________
Contact Name: ___________________________________
E-mail address: ___________________________________
Website address: ___________________________________
Postal address: ____________________________________
Telephone/Fax number: _____________________________
Year of formation (for groups/organisations): ___________
Publications (with subscription details): _______________

A short description of your aims/objectives: _______________
_______________________________________________
_______________________________________________

Current Contact List (in no particular order):

Name of organisation: The Land is Ours
Contact Name: Mark. S. Brown
E-mail address: everythingincommon@tlio.demon.co.uk
Website address: www.thelandisours.org
Postal address: 16b Cherwell Street, Oxford OX4 1BG
Year of formation: 1995
Publications: The Land is Ours newsletter (Subscription: £1/donation per issue).

TLIO campaigns peacefully for access to the land, its resources, and the decision-making processes affecting them, for everyone, irrespective of race, gender or age.
Name of organisation: **International Communes Desk**  
**Contact Name:** Anton Marks  
**E-mail address:** anton@kvutsatyovel.com  
**Website address:** www.communa.org.il  
**Postal address:** Yad Tabenkin, Ramat Efal, Israel, 52960  
**Tel:** 972 - 3 - 5344458, extension 4  
**Fax:** 972 - 3 - 5346376  
**Year of formation:** 1976  
**Publications:** C.A.L.L. (Communes At Large Letter) - The bi-annual journal of the International Communes Desk features articles, stories, jokes and updates from communities all over the world.  
**Aims/Objectives:**  
- To spread the communal idea, in its many forms, out of the belief that the communal way of life is not only possible, but essential for the benefit of mankind.  
- To maintain contact with as many as possible communes and intentional communities, in order to learn about their life styles and exchange information, opinions and ideas for mutual benefit.  
- To provide an address for people from all over the world, who are seeking advice and information about the kibbutz in its different aspects and about communities the world over (including help in making contact for those wishing to visit a community or join one).

Name of organisation: **CLASS WAR, Auckland**  
**E-mail address:** classwar@rome.com  
**Website address:** http://go.to/ClassWar  
**Postal address:** P.O. Box 78-104, Grey Lynn, New Zealand 1032.  
An anarchist group in Auckland city, New Zealand. For details on our present campaigns, please visit the website or contact us.

Name of organisation: **Industrial Workers of the World (US)**  
**E-mail address:** ghq@iww.org  
**Website address:** www.iww.org  
**Postal address:** P.O.Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101, USA  
**Tel:** (215)222-1905  
**Year of formation:** 1905  
**Publications:** Industrial Worker (10 issues per annum - US$15)  
**Aims/Objectives:**  
The IWW is a member-run union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities. IWW members are organizing to win better conditions today and build a world with economic democracy tomorrow. We want our workplaces run for the benefit of workers and communities rather than for a handful of bosses.
**Name of organisation:** Industrial Workers of the World (UK)

*E-mail address:* info@iww.org.uk  
*Website address:* www.iww.org.uk  
*Postal address:* IWW, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK  

The Industrial Workers of the World is a union run directly by its members, promoting global solidarity and direct action for the abolition of capitalist wage slavery.

**Name of organisation:** Redline Publications

*Contact Name:* Jim Plant  
*E-mail address:* socliterature@btopenworld.com  
*Postal address:* PO Box 6700, Sawbridgeworth, CM 21 0BS, UK  
*Fax:* 01279 726970  
*Year of formation:* 2001  
*Publications:* The People , paper of the Socialist Labor Party of America, 6 issues surface mail £3.00, airmail £9.00, 12 issues surface £5.00, airmail &17.00. Free sample copy upon request.  
*Aims/Objectives:* Publication & distribution of socialist literature, particularly publications of the Socialist Party of America, but also a wide selection of other titles in the non-reformist, non-stateist, non-Leninist, non-Trotskyist tradition. Free illustrated catalogue available upon request.

**Name of organisation:** New Union Party

*E-mail address:* nup@minn.net  
*Website address:* www.newunionparty.org  
*Postal address:* 1821 University Avenue, W. #S-116, Saint Paul, MN 55104, USA  
*Tel:* 651-646-5546  
*Year of formation:* 1980  
*Publications:* New Unionist  (monthly[?] US$7 for 12 issues)  
*Aims/Objectives:* The New Union Party is an organization of men and women who are committed to building a rank-and-file working-class movement for fundamental social change. Our goal is to replace the present competitive, class-divided system of capitalism with the cooperative industrial community we call economic democracy, a society where the people will be in direct democratic control of their work, their workplaces and the product of their work.

**Name of organisation:** Socialist Labor Party

*E-mail address:* socialists@slp.org  
*Website address:* www.slp.org  
*Postal address:* P.O.Box 218, Mountain View, CA 94042-0218, USA  
*Tel:* (408)280-7266  
*Fax:* (408)280-6964  
*Year of formation:* 1890  
*Publications:* The People  (bimonthly - $5 per year)
Aims/Objectives:
The SLP’s goal is a classless society based on collective ownership and control of the industries and social services, these to be administered in the interests of all society through a Socialist Industrial Union government composed of democratically elected representatives from all the industries and services of the land. Production would be carried on for use instead of profit. The SLP program for achieving revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism is based on the Marxist tenet that socialism can be achieved only through the class-conscious action “of the working class itself”.

Name of organisation: Workers Solidarity Alliance
E-mail address: WSANY@hotmail.com
Website address: www.workersolidarity.org
Postal address: 339 Lafayette St., Room 202, New York, NY 10012, USA
Tel: 212-979-8353
Fax: 973-773-9337
Year of formation: 1984
Publications: Ideas and Action (suspended)

Aims/Objectives:
WSA is an anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian organization of activists who believe that working people can build a new society and a better world based on the principles of solidarity and self-management. Our view is that such a society will be brought about only by working people building their own self-managed mass organizations from the ground up. Independent working class organization exists to some extent today in the form of rank-and-file committees, tenants unions, workers centers and other formations that might represent the forerunner of such a movement.

Name of organisation: World Socialist Movement (WSM)
E-mail address: enquiries@worldsocialism.org
Website address: www.worldsocialism.org/
Postal address: c/o Socialist Party of Great Britain, 52 Clapham High St., London SW4 7UN, England
Tel: 020 7622 3811  Fax: 020 7720 3665
Year of formation: 1904
Publications: Socialist Standard (Monthly journal of the Socialist Party - 1 year sub £12)

Aims/Objectives:
The World Socialist Movement is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organizing democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society we advocate. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.
Name of organisation: The Socialist Party of Great Britain (Ashbourne Court Group)
E-mail address: enquiries@spgb.org.uk
Website address: www.spgb.org.uk/
Postal address: 71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB, UK
Year of formation: 1991
Publications: Socialist Studies (50p per issue)
Aims/Objectives:
Object: the establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and
democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by
and in the interest of the whole community.

Name of organisation: Bureau of Public Secrets
E-mail address: knabb@slip.net
Website address: www.bopsecrets.org
Postal address: P.O. Box 1044, Berkeley CA 94701, USA
Year of formation: 1973
Publications: Situationist International Anthology (texts by the group that
triggered the May 1968 revolt in France); Public Secrets (collected
skirmishes of Ken Knabb); occasional leaflets, pamphlets, etc.
Aims/Objectives:
“Making petrified conditions dance by singing them their own tune.”

Name of organisation: Aufheben
Website address: www.geocities.com/aufheben2
Postal address: Aufheben, Brighton & Hove Unemployed Workers Centre, PO Box 2536
Rottingdean, BRIGHTON BN2 6LX, UK
Publications: Aufheben
Aims/Objectives:
The magazine is an attempt to develop revolutionary theory/practice, based on but we
hope superseding the traditions of the left communists, autonomia and situationists.

Name of organisation: Processed World Magazine
Contact Name: Chris Carlsson
E-mail address: processedworld@yahoo.com
Website address: www.processedworld.com
Telephone/Fax number: 415-626-2060 (tel) 415-626-2685 (fax, call first)
Postal address: 1095 Market Street, Suite 210, San Francisco, CA 94103
Year of formation: 1980
Publications: Processed World published 3x/yr. between 1981 and 1994, then once in
2001 and we plan a new issue this year (2004), currently planned on the theme of “USSA:
Living in a Dying Empire” but subject to later revision.
Aims/Objectives:
We currently plan to publish occasionally as we see fit, depending on energy, ideas and money. The circle of friends around Processed World, which goes back nearly a quarter of a century, has been known to engage in various activities, including art attacks, street theater, flyering, attending Big Summits of the Powers that Be to engage in opposition, public discussions, poster projects, billboard alteration, subversive advertising campaigns, digital lost history projects... and so on and so forth...

Name of organisation: Freedom Press
E-mail address: info(at)freedompress.org.uk
Website address: www.freedompress.org.uk
Telephone/Fax number: 020 7247 9249
Postal address: 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX
Year of formation: 1886
Publications: Freedom newspaper, out every 2 weeks, subs £10 claimants, £14 standard, write to us for a free copy
Aims/Objectives:
Freedom is an independent anarchist publisher. We produce a newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, and we publish books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice. We run Britain's largest anarchist bookshop in East London, house the Autonomy Club meeting host an open-access computer suite. As anarchists we work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that human freedom can only thrive when the institutions of state and capital have been abolished.

Name of organisation: enrager.net
E-mail address: admin(at)enrager.net
Website address: www.enrager.net
Postal address: enrager, 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX
Year of formation: 2003
Aims/Objectives:
enrager.net is an online resource about all aspects of anti-capitalism and anti-authoritarianism. It contains clear information about basic ideas and history, as well as pretty comprehensive listings of groups in Britain, a newswire with both up-to-the-minute syndicated news and more detailed analysis, organising tips about how to start a local group, produce a newsletter or resist in the workplace, lively discussion forums to link up with people in your area, help plan events, and chat about anything from politics to music to monkeys, and much more besides. Check it out!

Name of organisation: Autonomedia
Contact Name: Jim Fleming
E-mail address: info@autonomedia.org
Website address: www.autonomedia.org
Name of organisation: **International Communist Current**

E-mail address: international@internationalism.org

Website address: http://www.internationalism.org

Postal address: BM Box 869, London WC1N 3XX

Year of formation: 1975

Publications: World Revolution (10 issues/year), International Review (Quarterly)

Aims/objectives:
The ICC is an international organisation of the communist left, with sections in 13 countries. Our political positions include the rejection of support for ‘national liberation’ struggles, participation in elections and support for the trade unions. In the face of imperialist war we call for internationalism: the rejection of support for any fraction of the bourgeoisie - whether ‘aggressor’ or ‘defender’; for the rejection of pacifism; and for the solidarity of the international proletariat and its class war against capitalism and for communism.

Our activity
1) Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.
2) Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.
3) The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

Our origins
The ICC traces its origins to the successive contributions of the Communist League of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the International Workingmen’s Association, 1864-72, the Socialist International, 1884-1914, the Communist International, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Lefts.
About World in Common

WE IN WORLD IN COMMON . . . Realize that only through mutual respect and solidarity among the groups that make up our political sector can we realize our common goals.

TOGETHER WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE . . . A global network of individuals and groups united by our opposition to capitalism and the state and by our search for practical alternatives.

WE HOLD THAT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES . . . represent the common criteria for eligibility to participate in the World in Common project:

• Opposition to all forms of Capitalism (past, present, local, global, state or ‘free market’)
• Its replacement by a classless, moneyless world community without borders or states and based upon:
  - common ownership and direct democratic control of the means of production;
  - a free access ‘use’ economy with production geared towards the satisfaction of human needs;
  - voluntary association, cooperation and the maximization of human creativity, dignity and freedom.

• A recognition that such an alternative society can only be established democratically from the ‘bottom up’ by the vast majority of people, without the intervention of leaders, politicians or ‘vanguards.’
• A commitment to continue the process of contact and cooperation with other groups in our political sector. This does not mean ignoring that which makes us unique, rather that we should devote time and energy to building on what we have in common.

Contact Us:

World in Common
Greenleaf Bookshop
Box 44
82 Colston Street
BRISTOL, UK
BS1 5BB

E-mail: contact@worldincommon.org
Editorial

Issue Three of Common Voice was put together during, and in the aftermath of, the bloody slaughter of ordinary men, women and children from a wide range of social backgrounds in London, Egypt, Turkey and Baghdad. While families and friends continue to mourn, news programmes, the press and the alternative media have devoted huge amounts of airtime, column inches and bandwidth in an attempt to come to terms with these tragic events. In this context it may seem rather insensitive of us to devote an issue of Common Voice to the nuances of how a future post-capitalist society might organise production, how Marx viewed capitalist progress, or the (ir)relevance of ‘ultra-leftism’ at a time when revolution is not on the agenda. Yet among the more progressive elements of the alternative media there is agreement that any solution to terrorism, state violence, religious hatred and racism must point to a different set of values to those propagated by the warmongers and fundamentalists. In this sense Common Voice will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who argue that another world is not only possible but eminently desirable.

This issue kicks off with a lengthy, in-depth analysis of the ‘Economic Calculation Argument,’ by Robin Cox. Cox uncovers the main assumptions of the argument which rests upon the idea that a post-capitalist economic arrangement cannot function effectively without the ‘guiding hand’ of the market. In exposing the fallacies of the ECA (based upon the idea that a post-capitalist economy would necessarily involve central planning) Cox demonstrates the viability of a de-centralised, non-market economy based upon a self-regulating system of stock control and ‘calculation in kind.’ Cox’s analysis deserves a wide audience and will be particularly welcomed by those in the anti-market, anti-state sector who call for more concrete examples of how socialism might work ‘in practice.’ Those who fear complex economic jargon – or are mindful of Bob Black’s warning in the Abolition of Work that a free society cannot have Homo Economicus at its centre – should perhaps be reminded that goods and services will still need to be produced, distributed and consumed in a global society beyond capitalism.

In ‘Ten Blokes that Failed to Shake the World,’ Stuart Watkins and Dave Flynn take issue with the various ‘ultra-leftist’ groupuscules whom they argue have failed to submit their own theories and practices to historical critique, preferring instead to remain as the “unsullied guardians of communist ideas.” Describing their move away from ultra-leftism, Watkins and Flynn take issue with its neglect of a practical programme of political action in the here and now, particularly in an era when mass working-class action is sporadic and revolutionary socialism remains a distant dream. Rather disappointingly Watkins and Flynn fail to outline what this might mean in practice beyond a brief mention of workplace organisation, anti-war coalitions and other “consciousness-raising” activities. Perhaps they will elaborate on this further in a future issue of Common Voice.

In Issue One of Common Voice, Jeff Shantz (a member of the North-Eastern federation of Anarcho-Communists) sketched out some common ground between radical ecological thought and theories which draw upon histories of working-class struggle. In this issue Shantz continues this theme by showing how the ideas of feminist, unionist and ‘Earth First!er’, the late Judi Bari, demonstrate a possible synthesis of radical ecological and socialist/ anarchist theory. By drawing upon her experiences of workplace organising and belonging to a non-hierarchical environmental organisation, Bari is able to move beyond the reformism of much green thought by asserting that the problems which groups such as Earth First! address can only be challenged by a social movement with the aim of fundamentally transforming the social relations of industrial capitalism.
While Shantz only hints at the potential of feminism for informing anti-market, anti-state thinking in Bari’s work, the article by Jim Davis tackles feminism head-on, showing how its various insights need to be incorporated into the struggle to transcend capitalism. Davis shows how elements of feminism (like those of the ‘left’ in general) have historically been recuperated by capital and urges its remaining liberatory elements to engage in a total critique of everyday life in order to avoid this recuperation. Davis suggests – and I hope that most of us would agree with him – that a movement to liberate humanity cannot leave the question of patriarchy until “after the revolution”; the struggle against sexism and the sexual division of labour must carry on in the here and now as an element of the broader fight for a world without markets, states and social classes.

In a reprint from a 1952 Freedom Press pamphlet (submitted by Richard Alexander) Tony Gibson attempts an answer to a question we hear only too often: in a post-capitalist society, “who will do the dirty work?” Gibson’s often humorous answer lies in an analysis of work under capitalism which is both de-humanising and coercive. With the abolition of the wages system and the introduction of production for use, work has the potential to become intrinsically satisfying and with economic and political coercion removed, even ‘dirty’ work such as cleaning sewers may become relatively congenial tasks, carried out without compulsion for the good of the community.

One solution to the problem of cleaning sewers under capitalism not yet considered by politicians (but give them time) is to force those convicted of anti-social behaviour to do the dirty work. Blair’s Labour government in Britain is currently on a crusade against all forms of ‘anti-social behaviour’ such as drunkenness and petty theft, which is apparently sweeping our towns and cities making us prisoners in our own homes. What we are witnessing in Britain is in fact an unprecedented crackdown, not only against working-class youth but also on campaigners and protestors, together with the widening of the powers of the police and the state. In this context it may be interesting to ask, as an article from bristle magazine does in this issue, who (or what) is really anti-social? Is it the group of youngsters wearing ‘hoodies’ hanging out on street corners at 9 o’clock at night, or illegal wars, shoot to kill policies and the privatisation of more and more areas of public space?

To my knowledge Marx never had to worry about Anti-Social Behaviour Orders or curfews, but he was concerned with the vexing question of how ‘progressive’ the capitalist mode of production was. Michael Handelman criticises the traditional interpretation of Marx’s views on capitalism, imperialism and progress by showing that Marx himself changed his position from a broadly positive one in his earlier writings to a far more negative and critical view of capitalist progress in his later writings. Using the example of Ireland and, in particular, Russia, Handelman demonstrates how Marx came to reject the view of capitalism as ‘progressive’ and focused instead on the revolutionary potential of the Russian peasant communes. Even so, as Handelman argues, Marx was never to completely abandon his view of capitalism as a ‘necessary evil’ on the road to socialism.

Bringing things more up to date Chris Marsh addresses some of the same issues as Handelman as well as Watkins and Flynn in her article What future for socialism/communism? One answer is that socialism/communism still has a future as a viable alternative to capitalism, but that those of us who hold this to be the case must “unlearn our learning” and jettison some of the old certainties and dogmas characteristic of revolutionary Marxism. In particular Marsh urges us to learn from both attempts at alliance building on the left and from the permaculture movement which through its actions are attempting to help stave off land degradation and ensure that we still have a world left to win. While Marsh’s polemic perhaps raises more questions than
it answers, her intervention is surely to be welcomed and we hope it will generate debate and discussion along with the other articles in this issue.

The issue is rounded off nicely with Torgun Bullen reviewing the work of Simon Baron-Cohen on autism, and a poem by Toija French. We welcome reviews of books, pamphlets, journals, films, websites etc. as well as poems, short commentaries and letters. Please see our submissions page for more details.

*Julian Prior*

August 2005
The “Economic Calculation” controversy: unravelling of a myth

Robin Cox

The economic calculation argument (ECA) has to do with the claim that, in the absence of market prices, a socialist economy would be unable to make rational choices concerning the allocation of resources and that this would make socialism an impracticable proposition. Tracing the historical development of this argument, this article goes on to consider some of its basic assumptions about how the price mechanism actually works in practice; in so doing, it attempts to demonstrate that the argument is based upon fundamentally shaky foundations. A rational approach to the allocation of resources in a socialist economy is then sketched out. Such an approach is predicated on a particular view of socialism as entailing a largely decentralised – or polycentric – structure of decision-making in contrast to the view typically held by proponents of the ECA that socialism would entail central – or societywide – planning. Applying a decentralised model of socialist decision-making, this article identifies a number of key components of such a model and goes on to show how, through the interactions of these key components, the objections to socialism raised by the ECA are decisively overcome.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The “economic calculation argument” (ECA) is principally linked with the Austrian economist, Ludwig von Mises, who wrote a seminal tract (“Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth”) in 1920, purporting to show that socialism was not a realisable system. Mises was not alone in developing this argument; his contemporaries Boris Brutzkus and Max Weber had independently arrived at the same conclusions that same year. Moreover, a number of earlier commentators – for example, Gossen, Wicksteed, Wieser, Bohm-Bawerk, Pareto, Barone and particularly the Dutch economist, Nikolaas Pierson – had all developed partial elaborations of the ECA before Mises.

Following the Russian revolution and the emergence of Soviet state capitalism, a vigorous debate ensued on the feasibility of socialism, a term which had been widely understood to be synonymous with Marx’s non-market communism (or, at the very least, meant a system lacking a market for “factors of production” if not consumer goods). The developments in Russia, while serving to stimulate the debate, nevertheless helped to muddy the waters considerably. Thus, Lenin departed sharply from the classical Marxian definition of socialism as a synonym for communism by portraying it instead as a stage between capitalism and communism. The aborted attempt to introduce so called “war communism” in 1918-1921 (in reality, a rigorous system of centralised rationing which, moreover, still retained elements of the market, rather than “free access” communism) was a further source of confusion; it allowed anti-socialists to argue that socialism had been shown to be impracticable in practice and not just in theory. This, of course, completely overlooked the fact Marxists too had argued that socialism was not feasible in Russia at the time given that the necessary preconditions for a socialist revolution to occur had not yet ripened – a mass working class imbued with socialist understanding and a sufficiently developed means of production.

O’Neill contends that it is wrong to suppose there was just one single unified debate at the time. Instead, there were “at least two debates that concerned two independent objections to socialism”. The first of these was about “rational choice and commensurability” which is central to the ECA itself. The second, mainly instigated by Mises’ torchbearer, F A Hayek, had to do with an “epistemic objection to socialism” concerning centralised – or society wide – planning and the dispersal of knowledge among economic actors in an economy. While these two different streams of discourse may have been conducted along relatively independent lines I will argue (later) that they are nevertheless organically linked. Indeed, much of what is demonstrably false about the ECA stems from a misconceived and myopic assumption that socialism can only be a centrally planned...
economy, a claim that Mises himself tirelessly promoted. This, however, effectively precludes the possibility of a spontaneously ordered or decentralised version of socialism which alone, I would maintain, decisively overcomes the objections to socialism raised by the ECA.

The high watermark of the “economic calculation” controversy was in the 1920s and 30s. O’Neill distinguishes between an earlier and relatively neglected German-speaking phase of the debate which pitted Mises and his supporters against the likes of Otto Neurath, Karl Polanyi and Otto Bauer, and a later English-speaking phase which involved neoclassical “market socialists” like Fred Taylor and Oskar Lange. In the 1940s Mises reputation as a free market economist waned along with the free market itself, as the fashion for Keynesian state intervention took hold. It was only after the failure of Keynesian reformism in the 1970s and the collapse of state capitalist regimes in Eastern Europe in the 1980s that Mises’ ideas were rescued from obscurity and underwent a partial revival.

2. AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

So what exactly is the ECA about? To elucidate its core claims it would be helpful to use a hypothetical – and highly simplified – example.

Assume a factory in socialism manufactures a particular kind of consumer good, X. Assume that in order to manufacture X only two kinds of inputs are needed, A and B. Let us then suppose that there are three different methods for producing 1 unit of X which involve three different combinations of A and B, as follows:

Method 1 requires 9 units of A and 10 units of B Method 2 requires 10 units of A and 9 units of B Method 3 requires 10 units of A and 10 units of B

This prompts the question: which method should this factory chose in order to produce 1 unit of X? One might argue that it would make sense to use as few resources as possible to produce a given output since that would leave more resources over for doing other things. This alludes to what economists call “opportunity cost”. The opportunity cost of doing something is the best alternative you forego as a result. If you use a certain quantity of resources to produce one thing then you deny yourself the opportunity of using those same resources to produce something else. By minimising your opportunity costs you maximise the amount of resources that can be used for other purposes.

In terms of our example, this would require our factory at the outset to reject method 3. Why? Because while method 3 uses the same number of units of B as method 1, it uses more units of A. Compared with method 2, on the other hand, it uses the same number of units of A but more of B. So methods 1 and 2 are both more “technically efficient” than method 3. This means they do not make use of any more of either A or B than method 3 while using less of at least one of these inputs than method 3. In other words, there is no opportunity cost involved in rejecting 3 in favour of 1 or 2 assuming the output is identical in each case. However it is possible method 3 may result in a slightly higher quality version of X because of the additional unit of A or B used (compared to method 1 or 2) in which case a small opportunity cost might be incurred.

All this is fairly straightforward and there is no suggestion by proponents of the ECA that a socialist economy cannot ascertain whether one method of producing something is more – or less – technically efficient than another. A socialist economy will have no problem in seeing the need to reject method 3. The problem arises when we come to chose, in the case of our example, between the remaining methods 1 and 2. How would we know which of these two methods made least use of resources, thereby freeing up more resources for other uses? Here we encounter a quite different notion of efficiency – namely, economic efficiency. According to the ECA this requires us to
directly compare A and B by reducing each to a common denominator so that we can select the least costly combination of A and B – method 1 or method 2 – to produce 1 unit of X. For that, it is argued, you need a price system, allowing units of A and B to be costed in money terms. So if 1 unit of A cost one dollar and 1 unit of B cost 2 dollars, the total cost of producing 1 unit of X using method 1 would be 29 dollars and 28 dollars using method 2. Therefore, it would be advisable for the factory to select method 2 as the “least costly combination” of inputs A and B.

The problem is that a socialist factory would not have recourse to monetary prices in order to make such a “rational decision”. Socialism is based on the common ownership of the means of production. Without private property in the means of production, according to Mises, there can be no market for the means of production. Without a market for a means of production, it will be impossible to attach monetary prices to the means of production. Without monetary prices, reflecting the relative scarcity of these inputs, socialist decision-makers will be unable rationally to calculate how best to allocate these inputs in a way that ensures economic efficiency. In other words they will be unable to compare the proceeds of any economic activity with the costs incurred to determine whether it was worthwhile or not – that is to say, whether or not it realises a “net income”. The likelihood then is that these decision-makers “groping in the dark” will select more, rather than less, costly combinations of inputs and so use up more resources than would be the case had they recourse to a system of monetary prices. The cumulative effect of such economically inefficient decision-making would be to precipitate a sharp fall in output and living standards which the population is unlikely to accept. Hence Mises’ claim that “Socialism is not a realizable system of society’s economic organization because it lacks any method of economic calculation”3.

3. PRELIMINARY CRITICISMS OF THE MISESIAN MODEL

At first blush, the ECA would appear to be highly plausible. However, on closer inspection we can discern hairline fractures in the very foundations of this model which render it highly vulnerable to sustained criticism. Let us consider some of these defects first before turning our attention to the organisation of production and the allocation of production goods in a socialist economy.

A) Subjective valuation and price

According to Mises and the Austrian School of Economics, the value of goods and services is necessarily subjective and does not inhere in the good or service in question; economic costs are essentially subjective, opportunity costs and utility preferences can only be expressed along an ordinal scale – i.e. ranked – as opposed to a cardinal scale which entails precise measurement. How then do we arrive at the necessary data upon which a system of economic calculation is predicated? Salerno puts it thus. The problem with socialism, he claims, is that it lacks “a genuinely competitive and social market process in which each and every kind of scarce resource receives an objective and quantitative price appraisal in terms of a common denominator reflecting its relative importance in serving (anticipated) consumer preferences. This social appraisal process of the market transforms the substantially qualitative knowledge about economic conditions acquired individually and independently by competing entrepreneurs, including their estimates of the incommensurable subjective valuations of individual consumers for the whole array of final goods, into an integrated system of objective exchange ratios for the myriads of original and intermediate factors of production. It is the elements of this coordinated structure of monetary price appraisements for resources in conjunction with appraised future prices of consumer goods which serve as the data in the entrepreneurial profit computations that must underlie a rational allocation of resources.”4
But what is actually happening in this “transformation process” whereby the “incommensurable subjective valuations” of individuals purportedly come to be expressed as objective exchange ratios or prices? Do the latter in fact actually capture the former? There is a kernel of truth in the claim that they do in that obviously if someone is willing to pay a price for a good he or she must *ipso facto* subjectively value that good. Otherwise the “willingness to pay” for it would not have arisen. But, of course, in a market economy mere “willingness to pay” is not enough; the means of payment – purchasing power- is what is crucially required and it is only willingness to pay that is backed up by purchasing power that actually affects prices. This is what economists call “effective demand” (presumably to be distinguished from “ineffective demand”). The subjective valuation that a pauper places on a square meal may be considerable but in the absence of the wherewithal to pay for such a meal, this counts for nothing. In short, the subjective valuations individuals place on goods cannot reasonably be said to be captured or embodied by the objective prices such goods attract in the market. Indeed, one might add that to suggest that they do, flatly contradicts a key myth of bourgeois economics – namely, that our wants are essentially “infinite” and the resources to meet them, limited.

It may be objected that while it does not aim to “quantify” our wants as such (along a cardinal scale), price does nevertheless reflect our subjective valuations insofar as it sheds light on our preferences (along an ordinal scale). Thus, if we prefer roast beef to a McDonald’s hamburger this will be reflected in the higher price we would be willing to pay for such an item. However, this still does not get round the basic problem: in a market economy you cannot express a preference if you do not have the means to do so: purchasing power. You might prefer roast beef but after consulting your wallet may discover to your consternation that you will just have to resign yourself to the hamburger instead. While, according to conventional economics, effective demand determines price in conjunction with supply of the goods demanded, this effective demand is itself grossly unequally distributed by virtue of the unequal distribution of income. Austrians respond to this by arguing that such differentials reflect the valuations individuals place on different occupations and the different contributions they make to society (which “society” duly “rewards” them for) but there is no way of testing this claim since such valuations are themselves subject to the limitations of “effective demand”. Salerno’s “integrated system of objective exchange ratios” (prices) reflects or is conditioned by, this unequal distribution of effective demand. Thus, frivolous luxury goods can be “valued” more highly – i.e., attract a higher price – than food for the hungry because a rich elite has vastly more purchasing power at its disposal to competitively bid for, and so push up the price of, the former compared to the latter.

We should bear these points in mind in considering the merits or otherwise of the ECA; it is based on so-called objective data that are fundamentally biased or skewed and cannot be said to correspond truthfully to the subjective valuations of economic actors in the market as claimed. To believe otherwise is to commit what is called the Fallacy of Composition – the illusion that what is true for each part of a whole must be true for the whole. It is an error that overlooks the interrelationships between the different parts of the whole.

B) What do we mean by “costs”?

D R Steele contends: “The total cost of producing anything is the total effect in reducing production of other things because of the factors used up. This what we mean by the ‘cost of production’. It is this that we always want to minimise when we produce anything”⁵. As we saw earlier, this definition of cost equates with opportunity cost. Opportunity costs are often counter-posed to accounting costs. The latter are usually taken to denote the explicit costs represented by the cash outlays that a firm makes in purchasing its inputs, whereas the former are associated with implicit or hidden costs and may be difficult or impossible to quantify, or even be completely unknown. For example, the opportunity cost of spending more money on a new school may be to forego spending
this money on improving the local ambulance service which could have meant more lives being saved. But just how do you weigh up the cost of a life?

Going back to our example of consumer good X, we can see that the ECA relies on the notion of accounting cost rather than opportunity cost, despite its copious lip service to the latter. This is because it involves comparing the explicit cash outlays to be made on different combinations of A and B to arrive at a notional “least cost combination”. Certainly there is an opportunity cost in making that decision – this almost goes without saying – but this is not what this example of economic calculation is about. It is not measuring what a factory foregoes in opting to produce 1 unit of Y using method 2. Choosing a least cost combination of factors has essentially to do with accounting costs, not opportunity costs. That being so, one might well ask, how does this help one to calculate the “total effect in reducing production of other things because of the factors used up”? Acknowledging there is, theoretically speaking, a “total effect” is not the same as saying that this is what is being precisely measured – or, indeed, that it can ever be precisely measured. Moreover, who decides which is the “best alternative foregone”? One person’s preference may not be another’s. Such considerations are simply brushed under the carpet by the ECA.

Nevertheless, it is on the point of “precise measurement” that the ECA presses its claim. As Steele points out: “In this case, it so happens that it would be sufficient merely to know which was ‘more’ or ‘less’ but that is just an accident of the way I have set up the example. Generally, we should have to know exactly how much more or less. For instance, if the choice were between a method using 4lbs of rubber and 5 pounds of wood and a method using 5 lbs of rubber and 3 pounds of wood, it would not be enough to know that wood were more costly by weight, then rubber; we should need to know how much more costly.”

Certainly, accounting costs are amenable to “exact calculation” using monetary prices but the question is what exactly is being accounted for in the process? “Precise measurements” doesn’t tell us much; a game of monopoly entails precise measurement too but nobody suggests this implies some earth-shattering insight we would be foolish to overlook. What then is the significance of what is being precisely measured using monetary prices?

The ECA asserts that a socialist economy would be unable rationally to chose between different combinations of factors to arrive at a least cost combination. In answer to the obvious retort that a socialist economy would not concern itself with costs in this monetary form, it might be contended that there will still be a need to reckon costs in some other guise and that it is precisely these substantive costs – or if you like, “real world” costs – that the price mechanism is able faithfully to represent via its pattern of objective exchange ratios. But how could this be proven.? To prove this is the case one would have to demonstrate a precise correlation between these “substantive costs” and their monetary representations. One can determine whether such a correlation exists only by measuring one against the other. But that presents a problem for the ECA since, in doing this, one would have inadvertently shown that costs can indeed be independently measured, and rendered calculable, without recourse to market prices.

This places the proponents of the ECA in a invidious position since failure to demonstrate a putative correlation between these substantive costs and their alleged market representations means that all they have to fall back on is a tautology: that only a market economy is able to perform economic calculations couched in market prices. Steele himself has attempted to circumvent this argument with the (specious) claim that it is “parallel to arguments which have frequently been levelled against general theories. Thus every year or so some new genius discovers that Darwin’s theory of natural selection is vacuous, because it says that the fit survive, but there is no way to measure who are fit except by seeing who survive”7. But, of course, the analogy is completely inapt; the relationship between “fitness” and “survival” is a causal one which simply does not apply
in this case. What is involved here is nothing quite so grand as a “general theory” but a modest proposition concerning the alleged statistical correlation between two sets of data without causation being invoked in any way.

Finally, if the ECA is really about narrow accounting costs rather than opportunity costs as such then presumably we have a solid basis for testing the proposition that a system of market prices can faithfully calculate the costs incurred in production decisions. Here we are referring to “costs” in their positive sense, not opportunities foregone. It is evident that in this sense, market-based calculations are far from adequate. There is an enormous literature on the problem of externalities and spill-over effects which illustrates this point very well. Suffice to say that in a competitive market economy there will always be an obvious in-built incentive for competing firms to externalise their costs as far as practically possible or to the extent to which they can get away with doing this. Pollution costs are one example of this and typically necessitate some intervention by the state to impose curbs on the offending firm in question in the interests of other firms who may have to indirectly pick up the tab. “Social costs” are another example. A firm may consider it necessary to lay off part of its workforce to reduce its production costs and remain competitive. However, this reduction of its labour costs has costly repercussions for the workers involved and society in general which tend not to be accounted for on the firm’s own balance sheet.

Attempts to get round the problem of externalities and spill-over effects through the application of concepts such “willingness-to-pay” (WTP) and “willingness-to-accept” (WTA) are problematic and provide little, if any, comfort for proponents of the ECA. WTP has to do with what people would be prepared to pay to mitigate or avert some undesirable effect while WTA refers to the level of financial compensation they would be willing to receive for having to put up with such an effect. Mainstream economists tend to regard the costs involved in both instances as roughly equivalent but there is considerable evidence based on surveys to suggest that this is simply not the case – not according to people’s “subjective evaluations” of environmental losses and gains, at any rate.8 In fact, environmental losses tend to be more highly valued than environmental gains even where similar sums of money are involved. There are a number of other problems associated with these techniques (e.g. the tendency to underestimate the value of future resources; the problem of non-use values and option values which are to do with resources that you do not yourself make use of or might only do so at a later date) all of which highlight the shortcomings of market valuations, shortcomings which the ECA tends to gloss over.

C) The problem of “net income”

According to the ECA not only is there a need to discover the least cost combinations of inputs required to produce a given good; there is also a need to ensure that the revenue obtained from the sale of this good is sufficient to cover the cost of producing it. This can only be done by attaching prices to a firm’s inputs (A and B in our example) as well as its output (good X).

“Net income” is the difference between a firm’s revenue or proceeds and its costs. Positive net income is what is usually referred to as profit; negative net income, as loss. As Mises put it, “Every single step of entrepreneurial activities is subject to scrutiny by monetary calculation. The premeditation of planned action becomes commercial pre-calculation of expected costs and expected proceeds. The retrospective establishment of the outcome of past action becomes accounting profits and losses”.

This statement is revealing. It inadvertently highlights a serious flaw in the ECA. The ability to compute profit and loss is what in theory is supposed to ensure the efficient – that is “profitable” – allocation of resources. But it turns out that it ensures nothing of the sort. Just because a system of market prices affords one a set of figures with which one can perform precise calculations does not
mean that these figures will turn out to be correct – that is to say, will unerringly guide the entrepreneur towards a positive net income.

As Steele puts it: “Since all production decisions are about the future and the future is always uncertain, decision makers have to make guesses, take gambles, play hunches and follow their experienced noses.”10 and “In the market, entrepreneurs anticipate, speculate, agonise, guess and take risks. They also frequently perform elaborate calculations, aware that the results of such calculations are only as good as their assumptions. Always enveloped in a cloud of ignorance, market decision-makers strain to discern the indefinite contours of the changing shapes that loom ambiguously out of the fog.”11

This seems unambiguous enough but then, curiously, Steele feels prompted to ask: “Does the fact that production is actually guided by estimates of future prices, and not by reading off ‘current’ (recent) prices, destroy the force of the Mises argument? Apparently not, for two reasons: 1. past prices are a guide which helps people to make more accurate (though still fallible) estimates of future prices; and 2. people’s estimates of future prices are eventually confirmed or refuted. There is an objective test of the accuracy of the estimates: profit and loss.”12

Steele’s first point rather undercuts his previous claim that production cannot actually be guided by current (recent) prices and he does not quite seem able to make up his mind on how relevant the latter are. By his own admission, entrepreneurs can and often do get things spectacularly wrong when relying on current/recent prices – the energy crisis of the 1970s being a case in point. It is also to be noted that these current/recent prices are a record of accounting costs, not opportunity costs, and so do not shed much light on the opportunities foregone in making a production decision since the latter are a “tacit reference to hypothetical future income”13 which can only be guessed at. He admits that entrepreneurs are fallible yet does not seem to see the inconsistency in admitting this and claiming that the price system ensures “exact calculation”.

Steele’s second point – that there is an objective test of the accuracy of entrepreneurial estimates – is presumably the more important one but, even so, holds no water. Remember that what we are looking for is some way of reliably guiding the entrepreneur to make sound production decisions concerning net income in the future – otherwise there would be little point in going on about the need for “exact calculation”. The fact that the market process is retrospectively “self-correcting” in eliminating or bankrupting those firms that err (incur an economic loss) in their future estimates is completely irrelevant. The resource allocations these firms committed themselves to constitute what economists call “sunk costs” and cannot be retrieved once made. Bygones, as the saying goes, are bygones. More importantly, there is no guarantee that those entrepreneurs, having had the good fortune to estimate future prices accurately, will continue to do so. We are emphatically not talking about some selective process at work here which incrementally refines the abilities of entrepreneurs generally to make sound economic judgements which Steele seems to be implying. If this were the case then the history of the market economy would manifest itself as a progressive reduction in uncertainty and risk.

On another matter, when Steele refers to profit and loss as an objective test of the accuracy of estimates of future prices one presumes he is using “profit” here to mean accounting profit or net income. However, this is a little confusing. This is because he also uses the term “profit” in another, more specialised, sense as well. The entrepreneur’s return on her capital, he contends, is called “interest” (or what we would normally called profit) and where this is equal to her accounting profits “there is no profit in the strict economic sense. True profit is a return above interest; loss, a return below interest”14. The irony is that such profit can only arise where the economy departs from the abstract model of perfect competition and optimal resource allocation. As Lachmann observes “profits are earned whenever there are price-cost differences; they are thus a typical
dis-equilibrium phenomenon”\textsuperscript{15}. Thus, according to the free marketeers’ own theory of how the market behaves, the very imperfections which they deplore (such as monopolistic tendencies) “are, in fact, key profit-generating dynamics in the economic system. In other words, market imperfections are the main source of profit in the economy”\textsuperscript{16}. Such profit, as Steele points out, is the result of the entrepreneur outguessing the market and benefiting society in the process. Presumably, such benefits would not be forthcoming in the idealised (and completely unrealistic) competitive model of the free market which free marketeers strive to realise and that what is needed instead is a less competitive model in which price distortions are allowed more free play. But that, of course, undermines an important assumption of the ECA about the need for market forces to be given free rein in order to ensure the “accuracy” of market prices.

According to the ECA, in the absence of market prices that allow entrepreneurs to make profit and loss computations, economic efficiency cannot be assured. This, it is argued, is incompatible with the maintenance of a developed economic infrastructure. However, we have seen just how problematic such profit and loss computations are in the real world despite the evidence of a developed economic infrastructure around us (which the proponents of the ECA themselves delight in pointing out and attributing to the market). This suggests that there must be something seriously awry with the theory itself.

In any event, the claim that a socialist economy would need to be able to calculate “net income” in some sense does not stand up to close scrutiny. The notion of “net income” in fact derives purely from the functional requirement of capitalism to realise profit through market exchange – that is, it is system-specific. Certainly, this requires inputs and outputs to be reduced to a common denominator – to facilitate comparison and thereby ensure that when one commodity is exchanged for another, they are equivalent to each other. Indeed, market transactions necessitate such equivalence. However, it does not follow that this kind of comparison making use of a common denominator would be required in a socialist economy. In such an economy, “economic exchange” of any sort would no longer apply. It would not be necessary to determine whether “more” or “less” wealth in general was being created than was being used up in the production of that wealth for the very simple reason that the concept of wealth “in general”, a completely abstract and crudely aggregated notion of wealth, is of no practical use in itself and would be utterly meaningless outside the context of commodity exchange. This emphatically does not mean that a socialist economy will have no way of ensuring that resources would be efficiently allocated (which I will consider later); it simply means that such an economy does not need to operationalise this wholly unsatisfactory notion of “net income” in order to achieve this efficient allocation.

D) Estimating the negative effects of misallocation

Mises was clearly adamant that socialism could not be realised because it lacked any method of rational calculation. The implication of such a claim is that the effect of not having such a method would be so devastating as to prevent socialism from ever being realised. However, as Bryan Caplan points out, this flatly contradicts Mises own opinion that “economic theory gives only qualitative, not quantitative laws”\textsuperscript{17}. According to Mises in Human Action (quoted in Caplan), “economics is not, as ignorant positivists repeat again and again, backward because it is not quantitative. It is not quantitative because there are no constants”. But if that is the case, how could you quantify the negative effects of this supposed misallocation in a hypothetical socialist economy and come to the conclusion that they were so severe as to make socialism infeasible?

The Misesian argument would appear to rest on the claim that while there is only a finite number of options concerning the use of inputs that would lead to their efficient allocation, whereas there is an infinity of options that would result in those same inputs being misallocated. The chances are that without the means of making economic calculations, decision-makers in a socialist economy would
chose one of the latter options. As Mises put it, economic calculation “provides a guide amid the bewildering throng of economic possibilities. It enables us to extend judgements of value which apply directly only to consumption goods – or at best to production goods of the lowest order – to all goods of higher orders. Without it, all production by lengthy and roundabout processes would be so many steps in the dark … And then we have a socialist community which must cross the whole ocean of possible and imaginable economic permutations without the compass of economic calculation”

However, as we shall see later, a socialist economy would be quite capable of avoiding this fate through the institutionalisation of a set of constraints that steer decision makers towards the efficient allocation of resources. In any case, Mises’ claim about the lack of a reliable compass to guide these decision makers might as well be directed at market capitalism. This is what can be inferred from the Theory of The Second Best formulated Richard Lipsey and Kelvin Lancaster in 1956. Looking at the “general equilibrium” model of the economy, they argued that in order for equilibrium (pareto optimal allocation) to obtain a number of equilibrium conditions need to be simultaneously satisfied such as the supply of all goods being exactly equal to the demand for them, the output price of goods being equal to marginal cost of producing them and the long term profit for all firms being equal to zero. Where just one of these optimal conditions is not met then the ‘second best’ position can only be reached by departing from all the other Paretian conditions. To put it in a nutshell, any single price distortion leads to all other prices being distorted because of its ramifying consequences for exchange ratios throughout the economy and since price distortions are inevitably going to arise in the market, capitalist decision makers will likewise have to contend with whole ocean of possible and imaginative economic permutations in which their ability to perform precise calculations using market prices will be to little avail. This is because such prices, being distorted as it were, will almost by definition be unable to provide a reliable guide (in terms of price theory). Of course the notion of a “general equilibrium” is merely an abstraction and has no empirical basis in fact. While Mises acknowledged this he did not seem to perceive the devastating consequences that this had for his own theory of “economic calculation”.

The implication of Mises’ argument is that the more scope one allows for the free interplay of market forces the more efficient and reliable the allocation process. Can this claim be empirically tested? It is often argued for example that so-called free market economies perform better than their more interventionist, state capitalist, competitors. But this can be for any number of reasons other than “economic calculation”: differences in natural and labour resource endowments, the prevalence of natural disasters, historical circumstances (e.g. civil conflict), the incentive problem in oppressive regimes (a point that Caplan makes) and economic dependence (a reference to “dependency theory” and the argument that the already developed First World systematically “under-develops” the Third World). There is a further problem of disentangling cause and effect. For example, is it the case that relatively successful economies are successful as a result of implementing free market policies or are those policies themselves the result of economic success? Those economies that are more competitive are likely to be more favourably disposed towards free trade for the obvious reason that they have little to fear from competition, whereas, conversely, less competitive or economically successful economies will tend to want to adopt a more protective and interventionist approach to protect their own interests. Indeed this is what enabled Germany, at the end of the 19th century to overtake Britain in terms of industrial production: Whereas the latter was still relatively laissez-faire in its outlook, Germany and other continental economies at the time relied heavily on tariffs and other interventionist measures to build up their industries.

Empirical support for the economic calculation thesis is thus remarkably weak. In any case, there is not, never has been and never will be such a thing as a strictly “free market” economy in the real world. In the real world, the market necessarily operates closely in tandem with the capitalist state, varying only in the degree to which this happens. As Karl Polanyi has noted: “The road to the free
market was opened up and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organised and controlled intervention”.

E) The costs of economic calculation

What is often overlooked is that accounting, while it might concern itself with cutting costs, is itself a significant cost. This has important implications for the ECA. Parallel to a system of physical accounting (see section 5) what we have today as well is a system of monetary accounting. Monetary accounting is a highly complex process in which all enterprises in a capitalist economy must of necessity engage, even though it plays a supernumerary role as far as the physical process of organising production is concerned. In earlier class-based social formations money played a secondary role in the economic life of society; in modern capitalism, however, its influence is all-pervasive. Its purpose is not to ensure the efficient allocation of resources as such but to expedite market exchanges by providing a universal equivalent against which all other commodities exchange, so enabling the computation of profits and losses by competing actors engaged in these market exchanges. That is why it eventually supplanted the traditional system of barter – because of the obvious structural shortcomings of the latter which impeded market exchanges. For example, you cannot swap your pig for two chickens from your neighbour if he or she already has an ample supply of pigs; paying your neighbour in cash overcomes this problem.

As well as enjoining economic actors to engage in monetary accounting, the development of capitalism gave rise to a whole plethora of institutions and economic activities directly or indirectly concerned with the handling and circulation of money rather than the production of use values as such – for example, banks, insurance companies, pay departments, building societies and so on. Indeed, this already vast and steadily proliferating sector of the economy is a natural outgrowth of the systemic needs of an economic system centred on the competitive accumulation of capital; such institutions and activities arose precisely to service those needs. One might want to argue that a bank, for example, performs a useful role in that it lends money to a factory and thus enables the latter to manufacture useful things that consumers in a market economy may value. Therefore, banks perform no less a useful role than factories in the production of these useful things. But this is to engage in a sleight of hand; it is to overlook the distinction that needs to be made between the specific conditions under which a factory has perforse to operate within a given socio-economic system and the physical process of production itself. It is the former that is precisely being questioned which proponents of the ECA, on the other hand, take wholly for granted and assume is seamlessly linked to the latter. That is to say, they assume what they need to prove: that you cannot operate a modern system of production without market prices (and hence those kind of institutions – like banks – linked with market exchanges in capitalism).

It is the elimination of such activities and institutions, essential though they may be to a functioning market economy but unproductive in themselves from the standpoint of producing use values or meeting human needs, that constitutes perhaps the most important (but by no means only), productive advantage that a socialist economy would have over a capitalist economy. The elimination of this structural waste intrinsic to capitalism will free up a vast amount of labour and materials for socially useful production in socialism. Just how much resources will be made available for socially useful production in this way is a moot point. Most estimates suggest at least a doubling of available resources by comparison with the present. Yet the proponents of the ECA, while claiming that socialism would sink into the slough of inefficiency and falling output without the guidance of market prices, seem wilfully determined to deny socialism this particular productive advantage that it has over capitalism by positing the necessity for institutions such as banks – or some analogue of banking – in a socialist economy. This is a specious claim; it is unwittingly reading into socialism the functional requirements of capitalism.
4 SOCIALISM AND THE RED HERRING OF CENTRAL PLANNING

One of the sacred cows of the Left is the idea of a “planned economy”. This can be quite misleading. Given the Left’s traditional hostility towards the “free market”, this may convey the impression that the free market is somehow antithetical to “planning”. But this is not the case at all. The free market is replete with plans of every kind. The difference is that the interconnections or interrelationships between these myriad plans are unplanned, spontaneous and anarchic.

“Central planning” is the proposal to eliminate altogether this unplanned spontaneity by assimilating these different plans into a single society-wide plan. For free market critics of socialism like Mises and Hayek, it is taken for granted that a socialist economy would be a centrally planned economy in this sense of the term. It is argued that this central direction of economic activity would necessarily go hand in hand with a command structure (what Mises called the “Fuhrer principle”) to ensure production targets are met in accordance with the central plan and without any deviations that would threaten the coherency of the plan. The ineluctable consequences that flow from this are that a socialist economy could not be run democratically, that centralised rationing would have to replace free access and that voluntary labour would have to give way to coerced labour. In short, we would no longer be talking about “communism” or “socialism” as these terms were traditionally conceived by individuals like Marx, Engels, Morris and Kropotkin.

It is beyond the scope of this article to consider in detail the problematic nature of this particular notion of “central planning”. Suffice to say, it would be logistically impossible to collate together all the dispersed information concerning the supply and demand for every conceivable kind of production good or consumer good throughout the economy. In theory, that would entail constructing a stupendously complicated and labyrinthine input-output matrix to accommodate all this information but, even then, unforeseen changes such as natural disasters or population movements would seriously disrupt the input-output ratios with ramifications that would spread uncontrollably to every other area of the economy. This would necessitate a reformulation of the plan in toto. Since change is an endemic fact of life, it follows that the plan would never have the opportunity to be put into effect; it would be constantly confined to the drawing board assuming a big enough drawing board could be found for this purpose. While this does not strictly touch on the ECA as such, it can be seen as a supplementary argument to demonstrate the impossibility of socialism (or communism) as a form of economic organisation. Indeed this explains why critics of socialism so often maintain that the abandonment of a price mechanism could only really work at the level of a “Robinson Crusoe” economy; given the complexity of modern production, it is impossible for any single mind – like Crusoe’s – to grasp the totality of the interconnections this entails.

Is the assumption that a communist or socialist economy would entail centralised or society-wide planning a reasonable one to make? It might if it could be shown that is what was being advocated by supporters of such an economy. Steele is unequivocal in thinking this is the case. He cites Marx’s and Engels’ objections to the anarchy of capitalist production and the allocation of resources “behinds the backs of the producers” as well their advocacy of “conscious social control” and the implementation of a “definite social plan”\(^2\). It may seem a reasonable inference from such language that what Marx and Engels had in mind was indeed the kind of society-wide – or central – planning. to which Steele refers.

However, as Steele himself acknowledges, the word “plan” has many shades of meaning\(^3\); it could embody just a set of intentions or it could embrace also the means to execute these intentions. Some of the points that Steele makes flatly contradict his claim that Marx and Engels stood unequivocally
for central planning. Thus, he acknowledges that “Marx sees the communist administration as a federation of self-governing groups largely concerned with their internal affairs and collaborating for the comparatively few purposes that concern all the groups”\textsuperscript{24}. This vision of communism is unquestionably incompatible with Steele’s version of “central planning”.

The reference to “anarchy of production” is highly misleading and it does seem very much that Steele has got the wrong end of the stick in assuming that Marx and Engels implied by this the desire to replace a situation in which you had a myriad of plans (and the unplanned interconnections between them) with a single society-wide plan where the total pattern of production is planned. On the contrary, it seems more reasonable to assume that by “anarchy of production”, Marx and Engels were referring to the blind ungovernable economic laws of capitalism which intercede in human affairs and get in the way of conscious human intentions. Often this phrase is linked in their writings to the capitalist trade cycle which is a particularly apt manifestation of those ungovernable laws. Here you have a perverse situation of “overproduction” alongside increased misery and want. What could better convey the idea of subjective intentions being wilfully denied and flouted by forces operating beyond the control of those very intentions?

Further evidence in support of this interpretation of “anarchy of production” is provided by Engels’ claim in \textit{Socialism: Utopian and Scientific} that anarchy in capitalism grows to a “greater and greater height”. This is an allusion to the increasing severity of economic crises he imagined would occur in capitalism. Whether or not he was correct in supposing this is besides the point. Steele maintains that Marx and Engels subscribed to the idea that there was an inherent tendency in capitalism towards centralisation and concentration – in other words a gradual diminution in the area of unplanned spontaneity existing between competing units by virtue of the decline in the number of such units competing in the market. Strictly speaking, this would imply less “anarchy” on Steele’s interpretation of the word but as we see in Engels’ case, such anarchy is likely to grow to a “greater and greater height”. Clearly this directly contradicts Steele’s claim that “For Marx, anarchy of production is not an emergent quality of the market. The market does not cause anarchy of production. Anarchy of production causes the market.”\textsuperscript{25}

But even if Marx and Engels were advocates of central planning, that does not mean that every socialist or communist must necessarily follow suit. What of those who clearly do not advocate central planning and, indeed, explicitly reject the idea? Insofar as they embrace a vision of a future society which entails a multitude of interacting plans and significant decentralisation, this may be said to conform to Steele’s notion of “anarchy of production”. The question is, does such anarchy of production necessarily “cause the market” as he provocatively contends?

Steele has little to say on the subject and other attempts to deal with concept of relatively decentralised non-market economy – such as Kevin McFarlane’s tract, Real Socialism wouldn’t work either (\textit{Libertarian Alliance} 1992 Economic notes no.46) have been theoretically slight or plainly misconceived. Such is the grip of central planning on the thinking of free market critics of socialism that they find it difficult to envisage it being organised on any other basis.

As I suggested earlier, this has profound repercussions for the discussion on economic calculation. It is not that the ECA necessarily implies or, in itself, relies on a vision of socialism entailing central planning. However, insofar as supporters of the ECA do hold such a vision, it is precisely this, I will argue, that prevents them from coming to recognise an effective response to the ECA. That is predicated on a solution that necessitates a vision of socialism that, on the contrary, is relatively decentralised and spontaneously ordered. It is to just such a vision that we now finally turn.
5. ANATOMY OF A SOCIALIST ECONOMY

By “socialism” or “communism”, as we saw earlier, was traditionally meant a society without markets, money, wage labour or a state. All wealth would be produced on a strictly voluntary basis. Goods and services would be provided directly for self determined need and not for sale on a market; they would be made freely available for individuals to take without requiring these individuals to offer something in direct exchange. The sense of mutual obligations and the realisation of universal interdependency arising from this would profoundly colour people’s perceptions and influence their behaviour in such a society. We may thus characterise such a society as being built around a moral economy and a system of generalised reciprocity.

Free access to goods and services is a corollary of socialism’s common ownership of the means of production; where you have economic exchange you must logically have private or sectional ownership of those means of production. Free access to goods and services denies to any group or individuals the political leverage with which to dominate others (a feature intrinsic to all private-property or class based systems). This will work to ensure that a socialist society is run on the basis of democratic consensus. Decisions will be made at different levels of organisation: global, regional and local with the bulk of decision-making being made at the local level. In this sense, a socialist economy would be a polycentric, not a centrally planned, economy.

Over and above these broad defining features of a socialist economy one can identify a number of derivative or secondary features which interact with each other in coherent fashion and have particular relevance to the question of resource allocation. As with consumption goods, production goods would be freely distributed between production units without economic exchange mediating in this process. We can list these various interlocking secondary features of a socialist economy as follows:

A) Calculation in kind

Calculation in kind entails the counting or measurement of physical quantities of different kinds of factors of production. There is no general unit of accounting involved in this process such as money or labour hours or energy units. In fact, every conceivable kind of economic system has to rely on calculation in kind, including capitalism. Without it, the physical organisation of production (e.g. maintaining inventories) would be literally impossible. But where capitalism relies on monetary accounting as well as calculation in kind, socialism relies solely on the latter. This is one reason why socialism holds a decisive productive advantage over capitalism; by eliminating the need to tie up vast quantities of resources and labour implicated in a system of monetary accounting.

A criticism of calculation in kind is that it does not permit decision makers to compare the total costs of alternative aggregates of bundles of production factors to arrive at a “least cost” combination. This as we saw earlier, is based on a complete misunderstanding. In a socialist economy there will be no need to perform such an operation. However this does not mean that it will not be possible to compare alternative bundles of factors – like methods 1, 2 and 3 in our example – on some other basis and arrive at a decision as to which is the most efficient to use as we shall see later.

Possibly the most prominent advocate of calculation in kind was Otto Neurath. Neurath wrote up a report to the Munich Workers Council in 1919 entitled “Through War Economy to Economy in Kind” which Mises later attacked. In this report, Neurath argued that the Germany’s war economy had demonstrated the possibility of dispensing with monetary calculation altogether. However his position at the time was somewhat weakened by virtue of the fact that he also subscribed to a
system of central planning. This made him vulnerable to the Misesian arguments against central planning about the problems of collating the dispersed information of economic actors in an economy. Neurath in later life moved away from a centrally planned conception of socialism and developed instead an “associational conception of socialism” which entailed a “decentralised and participatory account of socialist planning”.

In his debate with Mises, Neurath was scathing in his criticism of the “pseudorationalism” employed by Mises and the mistaken assumption that rational decisions require commensurability of different values. This, as O’Neill points out, reduced decision making to a “purely technical procedure” which left out “ethical and political judgement” (as we saw in our discussion of externalities). One of the advantages of a system of calculation in kind is that it opens up the possibility of a much more rounded and nuanced approach to decision-making and gives more weight to factors such as environmental concerns often overlooked in market calculations.

B) A self-regulating system of stock control

The problem with a centrally-planned model of socialism is inter alia its inability to cope with change. It lacks any kind of feedback mechanism which allows for mutual adjustments between the different actors in such an economy. It is completely inflexible in this regard. A decentralised or polycentric version of socialism, on the other hand, overcomes these difficulties. It facilitates the generation of information concerning the supply and demand for production and consumption goods through the economy via a distributed information (and today, largely computerised) network in a way that was possibly unimaginable when Marx was alive or when Mises first wrote his tract on economic calculation. This information, as we shall see, would play a vital role in the process of efficient resource allocation in a socialist economy.

Stock or inventory control systems employing calculation in kind are, as was suggested earlier, absolutely indispensable to any kind of modern production system. While it is true that they operate within a price environment today, that is not the same thing as saying they need such an environment in order to operate. The key to good stock management is the stock turnover rate – how rapidly stock is removed from the shelves – and the point at which it may need to be re-ordered. This will also be affected by considerations such as lead times – how long it takes for fresh stock to arrive – and the need to anticipate possible changes in demand. These are considerations that do not depend on the existence of a market economy at all. Interesting, Marx wrote in Capital Vol. II of the need for a socialist economy to provide a buffer of stock as a safeguard against fluctuations in demand.

A typical sequence of information flows in a socialist economy might be as follows. Assume a distribution point (shop) stocks a certain consumer good – say, tins of baked beans. From past experience it knows that it will need to re-order approximately 1000 tins from its suppliers at the start of every month or, by the end of the month, supplies will be low. Assume that, for whatever reason, the rate of stock turnover increases sharply to say 2000 tins per month. This will require either more frequent deliveries or, alternatively, larger deliveries. Possibly the capacity of the distribution point may not be large enough to accommodate the extra quantity of tins required in which case it will have to opt for more frequent deliveries. It could also add to its storage capacity but this would probably take a bit more time. In any event, this information will be communicated to its suppliers. These suppliers, in turn, may require additional tin plate (steel sheet coated with tin), to make cans or beans to be processed and this information can similarly be communicated in the form of new orders to suppliers of those items further down the production chain. And so on and so forth. The whole process is, to a large extent, automatic – or self regulating – being driven by dispersed information signals from producers and consumers concerning the supply and demand for goods and, as such, is far removed from the gross caricature of a centrally planned economy.
It may be argued that this overlooks the problem of opportunity costs which lies at the heart of the ECA. For example, if the supplier of baked beans orders more tin plate from the manufacturers of tin plate then that will mean other uses for this material being deprived by that amount. However, it must be born in mind in the first place that the systematic overproduction of goods that Marx talked of – i.e. buffer stock – applies to all goods, consumption goods as well as production goods. So increased demand from one consumer/producer, need not necessarily entail a cut in supply to another – or at least, not immediately. The existence of buffer stocks provides for a period of re-adjustment. This brings us neatly to our second point – namely that this argument overlooks the possibility of there being alternative suppliers of this material or indeed, for that matter, more readily available substitutes for containers (say, plastic). Thirdly, and most importantly, as we shall see, even if we assume a worse case scenario – that we face a stark choice between having more tins of baked beans and less of something else by virtue of diverting supplies of tin plate to the manufacture of additional tins – there is still a way of arriving at a sensible decision that would ensure the most economically efficient allocation of resources under these constrained circumstances.

C) The Law of the Minimum

The “law of the minimum” was formulated by an agricultural chemist, Justus von Liebig in the 19th century. What it states is that plant growth is controlled not by the total amount of resources available to a plant but by the particular factor that is scarcest. This factor is called the limiting factor. It is only by increasing the supply of the limiting factor in question – say, nitrogen fertiliser or water in an arid environment – that you promote plant growth. This however will inevitably lead to some other factor assuming the role of limiting factor.

Liebig’s Law can be applied equally to the problem of resource allocation in any economy. Indeed Liebig’s dismissal of the claim that it is the total resources available to a plant that controls its growth finds an echo in the socialist dismissal of the claim that we need to compare the “total costs” of alternative bundles of factors. For any given bundle of factors required to produce a given good, one of these will be the limiting factor. That is to say, the output of this good will be restricted by the availability of the factor in question constituting the limiting factor. All things being equal, it makes sense from an economic point of view to economise most on those things that are scarcest and to make greatest use of those things that are abundant. Factors lying in between these two poles can be treated accordingly in relative terms.

To claim that all factors are scarce (because the use of any factor entails an opportunity cost) and, consequently, need to be economised is actually not a very sensible approach to adopt. Effective economisation of resources requires discrimination and selection; you cannot treat every factor equally – that is, as equally scarce – or, if you do, this will result in gross misallocation of resources and economic inefficiency. On what basis should one discriminate between factors? Essentially, the most sensible basis on which to make such a discrimination is the relative availability of different factors and this is precisely what the law of the minimum is all about.

Indeed one can go further. Because a socialist economy would to a large extent be a self-regulating economy involving a considerable degree of feedback and mutual adjustment, it would be driven willy-nilly in the direction of efficient allocation by the kind of constraints alluded to in Liebig’s law of the minimum. These supply constraints will operate inevitably in every sector of the economy and at every point along every production chain. When a particular factor is limited in relation to the multifarious demands placed on it, the only way in which it can be “inefficiently allocated” (although this is ultimately a value judgement) is in choosing “incorrectly” to which particular end use it should be allocated (a point we shall consider shortly). Beyond that, you cannot
Robin Cox ‘The “Economic Calculation” controversy: unravelling of a myth’

The relative availability of any factor is determined 1) by the crude supply of this factor vis-à-vis other factors in any aggregate of factors required to produce a given good, as revealed via the self-regulating system of stock control and 2) the technical ratio of all those factors in this aggregate, including our factor in question, required to produce this given good. This ratio tells us how much of each factor is needed which we can then be compared with the supply of each factor in order to arrive at some idea of the relative availability of the factor in question in relation to other factors.

Let’s look at how this might work in practice. Let us say one unit of a given good Y can be produced using 3 units of factor M and 2 units of factor N. If there are 6 units of M and 6 units of N then we easily work which of these factors – M or N – is the limiting factor. In this case it is M because if 1 unit of Y can be produced using 3 units of M and there are only 6 units of M it follows that you can only produce 2 units of Y altogether (if you disregard N). On the other hand, if 1 unit of Y can be produced using 2 units of N and there are 6 units of N altogether this would allow us to produce 3 units of Y (if we disregard M). If the total demand for Y was only 2 units or less then we might not have much cause for concern. However if the demand was for more than 2 units of Y we might have to consider ways of increasing the supply of Y, for example by altering the technical mix of inputs so that it requires fewer units of M and more of N. In other words we would be reducing the supply constraints that M exerts in limiting the output of Y. Note that all of this is perfectly feasible without recourse to market prices whatsoever. Note also that it takes cognisance of, and puts into operation, the concept of opportunity costs with which the ECA is ostensibly concerned. Thus, if we decided to divert 4 units of N away from the production of Y to the production of another good – let us call it Z – then we know very well what we have foregone by thus cutting back on the supplies of N needed to produce Y. The 2 units of N that we are left with after the other 4 have been diverted to Z will only suffice for the production of 1 unit of Y. Whereas before we could produce 2 units of Y where M was the limiting factor diverting 4 units of N to Z would mean, in effect, that N would replace M as the limiting factor in producing Y and that the opportunity costs of diverting 4 units of N to Z would amount to the loss of 1 unit of Y.

Slowly but ineluctably we are closing the net around the ECA. It remains for us to identify just one more of socialism’s interlocking production features to close the circle completely.

D) A hierarchy of production priorities

In any economy there needs to be some way of prioritising production goals. In capitalism, as we have seen, this is done on the basis of purchasing power. From the standpoint of meeting human needs, however, this can be extraordinarily inefficient. The economist, Arthur Pigou argued in his influential work Economics of Welfare that it is “evident that any transference of income between a relatively rich man to a relatively poor man of similar temperament, since it enables more intense wants to be satisfied at the expense of less intense wants, must increase the aggregate sum of satisfactions.”29 Pigou’s point is that the marginal utility of, say, a dollar to a poor man was worth much more than it was to a rich man. Thus society as a whole would benefit – that is, its total utility would be enhanced – were an income transfer to take place between the latter and the former. The problem is that this kind of income distribution, however much it makes for a palpably inefficient outcome is not only a consequence, but also a functional requirement, of a market economy. Indeed, this is a point which advocates of a free market economy themselves routinely make. Redistribution, they claim, is likely to undermine the very structure of incentives upon which a thriving economy depends.
It is this grossly unequal distribution of income or purchasing power which has become even more glaringly unequal in recent decades at both the national and global levels, which exerts such a profound effect on the whole pattern and composition of production today – and the consequent allocation of resources that underpins this. It is reflected in the kind of production priorities that manifest themselves around us: conspicuous consumption in the midst of the most abject poverty. Such consumption is the cornerstone of a system of status differentiation which, in turn, provides the ideological underpinnings of an accumulative capitalist dynamic. It is from such a dynamic that the myth of insatiable demand springs. The logic of economic competition expresses itself as an economic imperative that enjoins competing enterprises to seek out and stimulate market demand without limit. Increased consumption translates into increased status while, at the same time, conveniently affording those enterprises increased opportunities to realise profit.

As Thorstein Veblen suggested in his work The Theory of the Leisure Class (1925), within such a status hierarchy in which social esteem is closely related to an individual’s “pecuniary strength” it is how those at the top of this hierarchy exercise their pecuniary strength that provides the key signifier of social esteem in this hierarchy. Hence the emphasis is on extravagant luxury which only the rich can really afford. But as Veblen shrewdly observes this does not prevent those lower down this hierarchy from imitating those higher up – even if this means the wasteful diversion of their limited incomes from meeting more pressing needs: “No class of society, not even the most abjectly poor, forgoes all customary conspicuous consumption. The last items of this category of consumption are not given up except under stress of the direst necessity. Very much of squalor and discomfort will be endured before the last trinket or the last pretence of pecuniary decency is put away.”

The irony is that even a modest redistribution of wealth, if it were possible, would significantly enhance the productive potential of hundreds of millions trapped in the mire of absolute poverty by improving their mental and physical capacities. To put it simply such inequality is not only morally offensive; it is also grossly inefficient.

In a “free access” socialist economy the notion of income or purchasing power would, of course, be devoid of meaning. So too would the notion of status based upon the conspicuous consumption of wealth. Because individuals would stand in equal relation to the means of production and have free access to the resultant goods and services, this would fundamentally alter the basis upon which society’s scale of preferences was established. It would make for a much more democratic and consensual approach altogether and enable a system of values reflecting this approach to emerge and shape this agenda. It is perhaps this that really lies behind the notion of society wide planning – some co-ordinated and commonly agreed approach in setting society’s priorities.

How might these priorities be determined? Here Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” springs very much to mind as a guide to action. It would seem reasonable to suppose that needs that were most pressing and upon which the satisfaction of others needs were contingent, would take priority over those other needs. We are talking here about our basic physiological needs for food, water, adequate sanitation and housing and so on. This would be reflected in the allocation of resources: high priority end goals would take precedence over low priority end goals where resources common to both are revealed (via the self regulating system of stock control) to be in short supply (that is, where the multifarious demands for such resources exceeds the supply of them). Buick and Crump speculate, not unreasonably, that some kind of “points system” might be used with which to evaluate a range of different projects facing such a society. This will certainly provide useful information to guide decision makers in resource allocation where choices have to be made between competing end uses. But the precise mechanism(s) to be used is something that will have to be decided upon by a socialist society itself.
CONCLUSION

We have seen that a socialist economy would need to have some system of production priorities and how this might be arrived at. We have seen how this would impact on the allocation of resources where the supply of such resources falls short of the demand for them. We have looked at the mechanism of a self-regulating system of stock control, using calculation in kind, which would enable us to keep track of this supply and demand. We have established that the need to economise on the allocation of resources is positively correlated with their relative scarcity and that, in turn, is a function not only of crude supply as revealed via the self regulating system of stock control but is also a function of demand and of the technical ratios of inputs involved. Comparison of the relative scarcity of different inputs allows us to operationalise Liebig’s law of the minimum. Having identified our limiting factors we can subject them to the guidance of our established system of production priorities to determine how they are to be allocated. In short, what we have finally arrived at is a coherent and functioning system of interlocking parts that at no point has need of economic calculation in the form of market prices whatsoever. What then remains of the Economic Calculation Argument? Based on a highly unrealistic set of assumptions about how a market economy actually operates in practice, it attacks what is clearly a gross caricature of a socialist economy which would be unworkable, in any case, on grounds other than that of economic calculation. In truth, the fortunes of the ECA were inextricably bound up with the rise of state capitalist alternatives to the so-called free market, parading as socialist economies, which were the real targets of its hostility. By that token, the historical relevance of the Misesian argument has disappeared along with the collapse of these self same state capitalist regimes.

*Robin Cox lives on the Sierra de la Contraviesa in southern Spain ‘trying to be a peasant’, and has an interest in environmental matters.*

1 D R Steele, chapter 4.2, From Marx to Mises: Post-capitalist society and the challenge of economic calculation (Illinois: Open Court, 1992)
5 Steele, p.11
6 Steele, p.10
7 D.R. Steele, Libertarian Student vol. 3 no 1, [n.d.], p.7
8 [http://www.projectcommunis.org/articles/000613.html](http://www.projectcommunis.org/articles/000613.html)
9 L von Mises, p. 229
10 Steele, 1992, p.15
11 Steele, p.169
12 Steele, p.16
13 Steele, p.169
14 Steele, p.419
17 B Caplan, [http://www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/bcaplan/why_aust.htm](http://www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/bcaplan/why_aust.htm)
18 L von Mises, Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1922), pp. 101, 105
20 K Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Boston,1957), p.140
21 K Smith K, Free is Cheaper (Gloucester: John Ball Press, 1988)
22 Steele, p.255-6
23 Steele, p.256
24 Steele, p.316
Robin Cox ‘The “Economic Calculation” controversy: unravelling of a myth

25 Steele, p.50
26 Socialism as a Practical Alternative (London, SPGB pamphlet, 1994)
27 O’Neill, p.35
28 O’Neill, p. 31
Ten Blokes That Failed to Shake the World

Stuart Watkins and Dave Flynn

This article started life as a talk one of us gave to a small group of marxists who meet at Birkbeck College in London. A number of serious criticisms have been made of it, many of which we agree with. However, we stand by the thrust of the argument, and publish here a slightly edited version.

What does it mean to be a communist today? We expect there are many answers to this question, depending on what one understands by the term communism. But where we come from, communists are people who have taken and continue to take a principled stand not just against bourgeois rule and the capitalist system, but also against those who claim to stand for socialism or communism but whose political practice supposedly reveals their ‘leftist’ or ‘bourgeois’ nature. Some have even made the logical leap and contend that the politics of Karl Marx were bourgeois. Our basic contention is that this position is not as radical as it sounds, and is more often than not empty posturing.

Defining exactly what ‘leftism’ is and situating it historically is no easy matter. The term ‘ultra-left’ is equally problematic. But we think we will be well enough understood by the readers of this journal if we say that by the ultra-left we mean all those groups and individuals who use such concepts as ‘the left-wing of capitalism’ to distinguish their practice from that of other socialist and marxist (leftist) parties. Depending on your point of view, this is either the thin red line that distinguishes genuine communism from bourgeois leftism, or ultra-left childishness that refuses to accept a few steps of real movement over the immediate application of the ‘maximum programme’.

Let’s kick off with a quote from the German ultra-leftist Otto Ruhle. In his ‘Basic Issues of Organisation’, he says:

Those who have grown old within the traditional forms of struggle do not reflect that everything in the world is only good and proper in its own time. Once that time is past, what was good becomes bad and what was proper becomes misguided; sense becomes nonsense, merit becomes liability.

Ruhle is attacking leftism from the point of view of communism and revolution at a time when the idea of a working-class revolution didn’t seem mad. We agree with what Ruhle is saying, but in a modern context, perhaps it is ultra-left thinking, which may well have been ‘good and proper’ in its own time, that has become ‘nonsense’, if not actually influential enough to be a ‘liability’.

One of the things that provoked our drift away from the appealing formulas of ultra-leftism was Mark Steel’s book Reasons to be Cheerful – a truly excellent political memoir from the point of view of an SWP member, covering a 25-year period from punk to New Labour, taking in the Miner’s Strike, the Anti-Nazi League and the anti Poll Tax struggles. We first read the book as convinced ultra-leftists, whose hatred of the SWP was surpassed only by a hatred of the bourgeois mode of production. But at the end of his book, we were forced to ask, What’s actually wrong with all this? Steel described in some detail what SWP (‘leftist’) activity involves. And, even making allowances for omissions and the one-sided nature of his account, we’re still puzzling. From Steel’s point of view, the purpose of the SWP was to support and help organise struggles and demonstrations and so on, striving to build them into a mass, organised movement, and, at the same time, build support for socialism (and the SWP). There is a tendency, in some of the cruder ultra-left thinking, to portray this work as a conscious effort to derail ‘genuine’, radical, working class struggle, and take it to a safer (bourgeois) terrain. The obvious question here is, if the working class
can be derailed and confused by a force as minuscule as the SWP, then what kind of a force is it anyway?

In another of his books, Mark Steel caricatures the ultra-left response to leftist activity as being like a group, with a national membership of nine, turning up to the storming of the Bastille with leaflets entitled ‘Why We Aren’t Supporting This Demonstration’. It’s the political equivalent of the Harry Enfield character who, in a ludicrous show of one-upmanship and posturing, continually declares himself ‘considerably richer than you’. Our political activity has never amounted to much more than going up to bemused people on demonstrations and handing them a leaflet that says:

This is all very well, and well done. Jolly impressed. But, just to let you know: we are considerably more revolutionary than you.

Still, it could be worse. We once saw members of the Communist Workers Organisation standing on the side of a demonstration with a loudhailer, shouting, ‘No War But The Class War!’ at people as they walked past. This was reported in their press in glowing terms, saying they were pleased to see that some elements on the ‘bourgeois’ demo were at least delivering a clear class message.

*****

But having a pop at the CWO is too easy. Let’s turn instead to a key ultra-left figure, Anton Pannekoek. In his ‘Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics’, he says this:

The source of the recent tactical disagreements [he meant differences within the German SPD, between figures like Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg] is clear to see: under the influence of the modern forms of capitalism, new forms of action have developed in the labour movement, namely mass action. When they first made their appearance, they were welcomed by all Marxists and hailed as a sign of revolutionary development, a product of our revolutionary tactics. But as the practical potential of mass action developed, it began to pose new problems; the question of social revolution, hitherto an unattainably distant ultimate goal, now became a live issue for the militant proletariat, and the tremendous difficulties involved became clear to everyone, almost as a matter of personal experience.

Like Ruhle, he is arguing for an ultra-left, anti-reformist, revolutionary position. But he is doing it in the context of a time where, as he puts it, ‘new forms of action have developed in the labour movement, namely mass action’. Pannekoek’s comments, we would argue, make sense against this background.

Can the same point be made today? Where is the ‘mass action’ that would make sense of this political position? No one could argue that today we are in a situation where the problem of socialism is a ‘live issue’, ‘clear to everyone … as a matter of personal experience’.

We are, rather, living through a time where the working class movement is so weak that most people are led to doubt its very existence. A time of despair and irony, where the very idea of social progress sounds hopelessly old fashioned, even dodgy. The idea of socialist revolution has again retreated, in Pannekoek’s words, into the position of an ‘unattainably distant ultimate goal’, and the question of what it means to be a communist in such times must be addressed realistically. Paul Foot, analysing the activity of Karl Marx, makes a similar point in his book *The Vote*. We can only imagine what harsh words Marx would have for people who demanded ‘socialism, and nothing but’ whatever the circumstances.
John Sullivan, in his pamphlet ‘As Soon As This Pub Closes’, asks a similar question, and wonders what, if there is ‘no link between immediate struggle and socialist objectives’, an individual can do apart from joining the SWP. If there’s no mass action, why not join the sect that seems to have most success in agitating for it, whatever your reservations about that sect’s particular ideology? Sullivan’s answer to this question is attractive. The ultra-left response to leftist sects sometimes amounts to dismissing them as mad, bad and dangerous to know: theoretically clueless, mentally unstable and, well, bourgeois. Sullivan, instead, urges us to understand them in terms of the social conditions that produced them, and concludes that leftist sects, like religion, are the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and that they’ll only disappear when the world begins to change.

Should we apply the same thinking to ultra-left sects too? Are they a harmless diversion from the cruelties of capitalism? Perhaps. The ultra-left portrays itself as the unsullied guardian of communist ideas, but these ideas too were products of specific social circumstances, and ultra-leftists understandably cling on to them for solace in a heartless world. Speaking personally, they strike us as a suspiciously neat solution to the contradiction that arises when one is committed to militancy and communism in theory, but lives a relatively comfy middle-class lifestyle in practice. Sometimes, to hang onto the gains of our class and our personal gains as individuals, you need to keep your head down.

But Sullivan’s argument still strikes us as too fatalist. He says all this will change when the world begins to change. What do we do in the meantime? Pull up a chair and put the kettle on while we wait for the upturn? As human beings, of course, we need to cling onto our utopian dreams, but, as marxists, we must also carve out a path for practical action in the present. This dialectic between utopia and practical action was summarised nicely by the historian EH Carr in his series of lectures that was published as ‘What is History?’ Carr said that, in a time of doubt and despair, it is particularly important to set out an understanding of the present AND a vision for the future. Utopia and reality, he said, were two essential facets of political science, and ‘sound political thought and sound political life will be found only where both have their place’.

So let’s not be too harsh on the ultra-left. Their vision of communism is what has kept us going in politics. What remains to be done, however, is to carve out a sound political life that is about more than reading texts, and nattering, and handing out patronising leaflets.

*****

An important reference point in helping us to think about these questions is Rosa Luxemburg. She is an interesting, perhaps a key, figure in these debates because, almost uniquely, she is claimed by both the left and the ultra-left as ‘one of ours’. This very fact should be enough to nail the claim sometimes made that the ultra-left is not a part of the left at all. Some people object to the term ‘ultra-left’ for this reason. It sullies the ultra-left by connecting it to leftism. Leftism, they argue, is bourgeois nonsense, whereas genuine communist theory and practice is separated from it by a clear – if thin – red line.

We can’t make any sense of this claim. It seems clear to us that the ultra-left is both historically and theoretically inextricably connected to the left. Its ideas arose as part of the left. The SPGB in this country, for example – the sect we used to be members of – can be seen as an ultra-left split from British social democracy. The Communist Left clearly came out of Bolshevism and European social democracy. It’s certainly true, we think, that both Bolshevism and social democracy degenerated into what the ultra-left now call the ‘left-wing of capital’. But this phenomenon, where working class oppositional movements become co-opted as part of a movement for a healthier capitalism, was obvious even in Marx’s time, as his analysis of struggles for a shorter working day in Capital
makes clear. Recognising the tendency and denouncing it doesn’t make it any easier to deal with in practice.

And anyway, if it’s true that these working-class movements were co-opted by capital, what of the ultra-left? Far from continuing the good fight as the only remaining true communists, as they portray themselves, we would argue that they were merely left marooned, ineffective and isolated, on the ultra-left of a society increasingly dominated by capital. The ultra-left’s main audience and constituency had gone over to the other side. So what remained? The ultra-left simply became a disloyal opposition to leftist, existing in much the same relationship as Trotskyism did to Stalinism – i.e. on a smaller scale. The idea that the objective decline of the left – the collapse of ‘Communism’, the decline of social democracy – would lead to a rejuvenation of ‘genuine’ communism, unsullied by leftist, has, so far at least, proved to be a delusion. How could it be otherwise? The death of the dog has also killed off the fleas.

*****

We have, of course, in the meantime, seen the rise of new oppositional movements, such as the anti-capitalist/anti-globalisation movements, the World Social Forum, the anti-war movement, and so on. But the influence of the left does not seem to us to have gone away, despite over-excited claims to the contrary. We think this is fundamentally because the questions that leftist raises have not gone away. They may have been wished away with simplistic formulas by the ultra-left. But they have not been transcended.

To go back to Rosa Luxemburg, you sometimes get the impression from ultra-left groups that her writings on the question of Reform or Revolution gave a simple and satisfying answer, namely, ‘Er, revolution, please.’ In fact, she argued, in short, that the one was the battleground where the working class was schooled and prepared for the other. In a time when it seems clear that the working class is not organised for reform or for anything else, to carry on with the, ‘Er, revolution, please’, demand seems a bit bonkers. The reform/revolution problem has not been solved, and is not in danger of being solved any time soon.

Perhaps, in this light, the work carried out by the left doesn’t look like such a bad idea after all: struggling, if often in vain, for reforms; engaging in ‘consciousness-raising’ exercises; organising coalitions against capitalist war; struggling to create a climate where the idea that we can fight back and win doesn’t look mad, where we can begin to heal the crisis of social vision, where an alternative to capitalism begins to seem plausible and on the agenda. As Kenan Malik puts it, human beings are conscious agents who realise themselves through projects to transform themselves and the world they live in. And if revolution isn’t on the cards, then we’ll just have to lower our sights.

To conclude, we think that the ultra-left is like a boxer who takes to the ring and doesn’t punch his opponent because he knows that only his big right cross will knock his opponent out. But the opportunity never arises. As anyone who knows anything about boxing could tell you, such a boxer will always lose to the guy who knows the art of the jab, the art of the little dig in the ribs. But worse, to stay with the analogy, imagine a boxer who didn’t do any sparring or training, because he thinks his one-punch knockout is so deadly, there’s just no need. This boxer, too, will always lose to the man who has spared and lost, and fought, and lost, and gained the necessary experience to fight. As Carlo Rotella put it in his book Cut Time, boxing conducts an ‘endless workshop in the teaching and learning of knowledge with consequences’. And the boxing gym, as Loic Wacquant put it in his book, Body & Soul: Notes of An Apprentice Boxer, is a ‘school of morality … that is to say, a machinery designed to fabricate the spirit of discipline, group attachment, respect for others as for self, and autonomy of the will that are indispensable to the blossoming of the pugilistic
vocation’. Perhaps we could think of left-wing sects, and organising in the workplace, and the fight for reforms, and the fight against war and fascism, and so on, as being like the boxer’s gym. No one’s saying this is perfect or The Answer. But no one ever learnt how to swim without getting in the water.

*Stuart and Dave are communists who live in London. They are not currently members of any formal organisation, but write a weblog at* http://despairtowhere.blogs.com/

---

1 See John Crump’s critique of Marx at [http://www.geocities.com/Athens/acropolis/8195/marx_critique.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/acropolis/8195/marx_critique.htm)

2 Actually, we’re nowhere near as gloomy about the prospects for radical politics as this makes us sound. But our point is that these prospects are unlikely to seem exciting or worthwhile if you’re waiting for a movement that lives up to ultra-leftist expectations.
Syndicalism, Ecology and Feminism: Judi Bari’s Vision

Jeff Shantz

According to the late Wobbly organizer and Earth First, Judi Bari, a truly biocentric perspective must really challenge the system of industrial capitalism which is founded upon the ‘ownership’ of the earth. Industrial capitalism cannot be reformed since it is founded upon the destruction of nature. The profit drive of capitalism insists that more be taken out than is put back (be it labour or land). Bari extended the Marxist discussion of surplus value to include the elements of nature. She argued that a portion of the profit derived from any capitalist product results from the unilateral (under)valuing, by capital, of resources extracted from nature.

Because of her analysis of the rootedness of ecological destruction in capitalist relations Bari turned her attentions to the everyday activities of working people. Workers would be a potentially crucial ally of environmentalists, she realized, but such an alliance could only come about if environmentalists were willing to educate themselves about workplace concerns. Bari held no naïve notions of workers as privileged historical agents. She simply stressed her belief that for ecology to confront capitalist relations effectively and in a non-authoritarian manner requires the active participation of workers. Likewise, if workers were to assist environmentalists it was reasonable to accept some mutual aid in return from ecology activists.

In her view the power which manifests itself as resource extraction in the countryside manifests itself as racism and exploitation in the city. An effective radical ecology movement (one which could begin to be considered revolutionary) must organize among poor and working people. Only through workers’ control of production and distribution can the machinery of ecological destruction be shut down.

Ecological crises become possible only within the context of social relations which engender a weakening of people’s capacities to fight an organized defence of the planet’s ecological communities. Bari understood that the restriction of participation in decision-making processes within ordered hierarchies, prerequisite to accumulation, has been a crucial impediment to ecological organizing¹. This convinced her that radical ecology must now include demands for workers’ control and a decentralization of industries in ways which are harmonious with nature. It also meant rejecting ecological moralizing and developing some sensitivity to workers’ anxieties and concerns.

To critics this emphasis on the concerns of workers and the need to overcome capitalist social relations signified a turn towards workerist analysis which, in their view, undermined her ecology. Criticisms of workers and ‘leftist ecology’ have come not only from deep ecologists, as discussed above, but from social ecologists, such as Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, who otherwise oppose deep ecology. Social ecology guru Bookchin has been especially hostile to any idea of the workplace as an important site of social and political activity or of workers as significant radical actors. Bookchin repeats recent talk about the disappearance of the working class², although he is confused about whether the working class is ‘numerically diminishing’ or just ‘being integrated’. Bookchin sees the ‘counterculture’ (roughly the new social movements like ecology) as a new privileged social actor, and in place of workers turns to a populist ‘the people’ and the ascendance of community. Underlying Bookchin’s critique of labour organizing, however, is a low opinion of workers which he views contemptuously as ‘mere objects’ without any active presence within communities³.

Lack of class analysis likewise leads Janet Biehl to turn to a vague ‘community life’ when seeking the way out of ecological destruction⁴. Unfortunately communities are themselves intersected with
myriad cross-cutting and conflicting class interests which, as Bari showed, cannot be dismissed or wished away. Notions of community are often the very weapon wielded by timber companies against environmentalist ‘outsiders.’

Biehl recognizes the ecological necessity of eliminating capitalism but her work writes workers out of this process. This is directly expressed in her strategy for confronting capital: ‘Fighting large economic entities that operate even on the international level requires large numbers of municipalities to work together’5. Not specific social actors – workers – with specific contributions to make, but statist political apparatuses – municipalities. To confront ‘macrosocial forces like capitalism … [Biehl proposes] … political communities’6. All of this is rather strange coming from someone who professes to be an anarchist.

Biehl even states that the ‘one arena that can seriously challenge’ current hierarchies is ‘participatory democratic politics’ but makes no reference to the specificity of the workplace in this regard’. Yet, within capitalist relations, the workplace is one of the crucial realms requiring the extension of just such a politics. And that extension is not likely to occur without the active participation of people in their specific roles as workers. Bari, concerned with encouraging this participation, did not have the luxury of overlooking the everyday concerns of workers.

As a longtime feminist and unionist Judi Bari was well aware of tendencies within the labour movement, and the left generally, to treat concerns of gender or environment as subordinate to the larger movement or worse as distractions. Bari was no vulgar materialist given to economic analyses, however, and she rejected Dave Foreman’s characterization of Local 1 as simply ‘leftists’ or a ‘class struggle group’. She too remained sharply critical of Marxist socialism and what she saw as its acceptance of the domination of nature.

We are not trying to overthrow capitalism for the benefit of the proletariat. In fact, the society we envision is not spoken to in any leftist theory that I’ve ever heard of. Those theories deal only with how to redistribute the spoils of exploiting the Earth to benefit a different class of humans. We need to build a society that is not based on the exploitation of Earth at all — a society whose goal is to achieve a stable state with nature for the benefit of all species.8.

For inspiration Bari turned to non-authoritarian traditions of socialism. Specifically, her materialism took the form of syndicalism – revolutionary libertarian unionism9. Bari developed her green syndicalist approach as an attempt to think through the forms of organization by which workers could address ecological concerns in practice and in ways which broke down the multiple hierarchies of mainstream trade unionism. She recognized in syndicalist structures and practices certain instructive similarities with the contemporary movements for ecology and radical feminism.

Historically anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary unionists fought for the abolition of divisions between workers based upon, for example, gender, race, nationality, skill, employment status and workplace. Revolutionary unions, such as the IWW, in fighting for ‘One Big Union’ of all working people (whether or not they were actually working) argued for the equality of workers and the recognition of their unity as workers while realizing that workers’ different experiences of exploitation made such organization difficult.

Like radical feminists, anarcho-syndicalists have argued for the consistency of means and ends. Thus syndicalists organize in non-hierarchical, decentralized and federated structures which are vastly different from the bureaucratic structures of mainstream trades unions which have been largely resistant to participation by women. The alternative organizations of anarcho-syndicalism are built upon participation, mutual aid and cooperation. Anarcho-syndicalism combines the
syndicalist fight against capitalist structures and practices of exploitation with the anarchist attack on power and awareness that all forms of oppression must be overcome in any struggle for liberty. The IWW has long fought for the recognition of women as ‘fellow workers’ deserving economic and physical independence (i.e. self-determination) and access to social roles based upon interests and preferences. 

Regarding the affinity between anarcho-syndicalist organization and ‘second wave’ feminist practice Peggy Kornegger has commented: ‘The structure of women’s groups bore a striking resemblance to that of anarchist affinity groups within anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain, France, and many other countries.’ Kornegger laments that feminists did not more fully explore the syndicalist traditions for activist insights.

Besides, as Purchase argues, industrial unions ‘are composed of people – feminists, peace activists and ecologists included – and are simply a means by which people can come to organise their trade or industry in a spirit of equality, peace and co-operation.’ The exclusion of workers from new social movements discussions is both arbitrary and inaccurate.

Exactly what sense we are to make of such sweeping dismissals of centuries of sustained resistance to the encroachments of capital and state by ordinary working people is quite unclear. Besides, in the absence of state-supported industrial [or green] capitalism, trades unions and workers’ cooperatives – be they bakers, grocers, coach builders, postal workers or tram drivers – would seem to be a quite natural, indeed logical and rational way of enabling ordinary working people to coordinate the economic and industrial life of their city, for the benefit of themselves rather than for the state or a handful of capitalist barons, and it is simply dishonest of Bookchin to claim that anarchism has emphasised the historical destiny of the industrial proletariat at the expense of community and free city life.

The concerns raised by Foreman, Bookchin and Biehl are well taken. Indeed, much Old Left thinking, of various stripes, did fail to appreciate the causes or consequences of ecological damage. However, as Graham Purchase has pointed out, the reasons for this are largely historically specific rather than inherent. The ecological insights of social ecologists like Bookchin (e.g. ecological regionalism, and green technologies) are not incompatible with syndicalist concerns with organizing workers.

Bari asked how it could be that there were neighbourhood movements targeting the disposal of toxic wastes but no workers’ movement to stop the production of toxics. She argued that only when workers are in a position to refuse to engage in destructive practices or produce destructive goods could any realistic hope for lasting ecological change emerge. The only way to bring the system to a standstill is through mass-scale non-cooperation, what an earlier generation of syndicalists knew as the ‘General Strike.’ Bari’s vision for Earth First! combined a radicalization of the group’s initial ideas of biocentrism and an extension of the decentralized, non-hierarchical, federative organization, the nascent syndicalist structure of EF!, into communities and workplaces.

While agreeing with the old guard of Earth First! that efforts should be given to preserving or re-establishing wilderness areas, Bari saw that piecemeal set-asides were not sufficient. The only way to preserve wilderness was to transform social relations. This meant that Earth First! had to be transformed from a conservation movement to a social movement. Earth First! needed to encourage and support alternative lifestyles. To speak of wilderness decontextualized the destruction of nature.

Jeff Shantz is currently living in Toronto where he has been active for several years with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP). He is the host of the Anti-Poverty Report on community radio station CHRY in Toronto and is a co-founder of his union’s Anti-Poverty Working Group.

References


3 Bookchin goes so far as to claim that the ‘authentic locus’ of anarchism is ‘the municipality.’ This is a rather self-serving claim given that Bookchin has staked much of his reputation on building a ‘libertarian municipalist’ tendency within anarchism. It also runs counter to almost all of anarchist history. (Bookchin, 1997, p.51) (See Bookchin, 1990)
5 Biehl, p.152
6 Biehl, p.152
7 Biehl, p.151
8 Bari, 1994, p.57
9 For a detailed discussion of green syndicalist theory see Shantz (1999).
10 As Purchase (1997, p.32) awkwardly overstates: ‘Moreover the IWW … was the first union to call for equal pay and conditions for women and actively sought to set up unions for prostitutes – and in doing so achieved far more for the feminist cause than any amount of theorising about the evolution of patriarchy could ever hope to have done.
13 Purchase, p.28
14 Purchase, p.25
The Dialectic of the New Feminist Movements

Jim Davis, Ozark Bioregion, USA

1 For as long as the patriarchal mode of domination of people based on sex prevails, there will be an ongoing unrelenting struggle for women’s liberation. At times this struggle will be out in the open, but more often it is hidden within the domain of family politics. During times of great social, economic and political crises this struggle erupts to the forefront to challenge all ideologies which oppress women. But every time this movement has arisen it has been put back down by the forces of the patriarchy: orthodox religions, the state, artificial notions of family structure and the sexual division of labor. These methods of domination have been successful so far mainly because opposition movements have not come up with methods that would overthrow these oppressive forces. And if women are to succeed in the next round of struggle then these powers of domination must be actively and directly opposed.

2 The overthrow of the patriarchy is just one of the struggles against Capital. It has been said that all Socialists must be feminists but that most feminists are not Socialists. This is sadly true and it is for this reason that modern feminism lacks the imagination necessary to confront and overthrow Capital. This is a most unfortunate contradiction which has to be dialectically transcended. If Capital is not directly opposed and struggled against then all human liberation becomes instead the liberation of Capital from traditional fetters. And the liberation of Capital from all restraint is an ever increasing nightmare world that only spells the New Dark Age. This New Dark Age may have already started.

3 Feminism is an essential element in the struggle of human beings against the domination of Capital. However, not all feminist movements are alike or historically continuous. It is this lack of real continuity between the old feminist movement and the present one that leads the new movement to repeat the errors of the past. This is a direct result of the different origins behind the past and present movements. The present movement owes its origin to the internalized contradictions felt by female participants in the civil rights struggle of the sixties. Their initial theory was limited in being a reaction to their positions within the civil rights and anti-war movements. Doing all of the essential work of movement building, which is the active raising of community to struggle, they were assigned to the very bottom ranks by their male ‘comrades’ who saw the ‘Revolution’ as another form of macho-ism. The movement arising out of the society it claimed to be reforming ended up mirroring it. Therefore, women needed to break away in order to resolve the conflict between the movements’ claimed goals and actual practice. It raised up a critique of everyday personal life which became the focus of the struggle.

4 It was at this point that the new feminism started to look about, and dug up the past for ideological support. It seized upon the ideas of the past without questioning the reason for the old movement’s demise. In doing so, the feminist movement drifted from the real human world into that of the Idea, and like all movements based upon thought fragmented into competing sects. And then another conflict arose, this time drawn up according to economic class, as one section of the movement sought liberation by accommodation with Capital by accepting its ideas and becoming Capital (living beings that are under the control of the dead as Capital is the rule of dead labor). In other words, they sought to become part of the managerial ruling class. The rest of the feminist movement were absorbed into various leftist parties or moved into the realm of the absurd like lesbian separatism, goddess worshippers, Firestone’s mechanical sexless utopia, etc. So what started out as
a potentially liberatory movement derailed itself. It avoided the issue of class and increasingly resorted to a false male/female opposition to explain oppression. I feel what is needed now is not the formation of a new feminist movement, rather we should incorporate all of its valid points into a larger movement for human social liberation.

5
What remains of the feminist movements of the 60s and early 70s have become part of the problem. This feminist movement has become recuperated into the capitalist system of domination; it has accepted its role to play. It is the way forward for certain middle-class women and it is the bogey woman for the New Right, thus it performs two functions. These feminists thought they could be social revolutionaries, but the revolution they sought was sold out by them. They accepted a few crumbs from the table of Capital and sold out all humankind. Not willing to face up to the issues of class war, they turned to biology. They sought to explain women’s social oppression upon the accidents of birth. Turning more and more to their own self-interests they wrote off half of all humankind as potential allies. They failed to see that the struggle for women’s liberation is a part of the larger struggle for human liberation from all Dominion.

6
The contradictions between the reality of everyday life and Western ideology came to a head in the 1960s as various oppressed groupings realized that their oppression contradicted ideology concerning freedom and equality. The very visible oppression of African-Americans within the U.S. social structure and their struggle against it, provided the catalyst for other struggles. These oppressed peoples realized that the special oppression they were personally experiencing was an essential part of the capitalist mode of domination, exploitation, and consumption. This realization forced many of them into ever increasing anti-capitalist positions and the most radical of these groups began to advocate the social revolution.

7
However, Capital has the ability to recuperate any opposition movement which does not call into question the very existence of Capital itself. Capital offers the false hope of a way out of oppression, but only for individuals. If one only played by the mystic rules of the marketplace then you can transcend sex, race and caste. These persons then become spectacular individuals who are then paraded about as proof that differences amongst Americans do not really exist and that group struggle for liberation is unnecessary. Thus group liberation is impossible as long as Capital itself is not struggled against.

8
The feminist movement is divided into two mutually opposed camps: one which is reactionary and the other potentially liberatory. It is only potentially liberatory in that it presents a partial critique of everyday life. It failed historically since it did not raise a critique of the totality of everyday life. And when they attempted to turn theory into practice they suffered from a lack of vision. They placed too much trust in technological solutions and faith in the very institutions which oppressed them. Overall, this is not a long term or unsolvable problem and by no means just a feminist problem. The whole range of social revolutionary movements are similarly infected. This can be summed up by a simple observation: all social revolutionaries too often try to seek a single solution for problems which have multiple causes. Capital is not the cause of our social ills, rather it is the long result of centuries of exploitation which takes a variety of forms; it has numerous origins and numerous ends. To overcome it we need to ride the waves of history but not become too attached to a particular wave; struggles come and struggles go, only the struggle in general goes on.
Patriarchy is a pre-capitalist mode of domination whose origins have been lost in the mists of pre-history. It exists in many forms, in all cultures, in all lands and across all known economic systems. The goddess worshipping matriarchy of the feminists is a myth. Modern cultures which worship the goddess oppress women even more than male God religions, so worshipping a goddess is not a sign of non-oppression. What this means is that the patriarchy does not need Capital for its survival and the mere overthrow of the regime of dead labor will not end it. Patriarchal modes of domination can only be overthrown when they are consciously exposed and dismantled. This is not a task for after the revolution. It must take place in the here and now. We must settle in for the long haul and live in our daily lives the future we wish to create. There can be no social revolution without the liberation of women.

The most radical of these new feminists eventually decided to declare their innocence by tossing all of the flame for the continuance of the patriarchy upon the backs of existing men. Even when shown that women play an essential role in the reproduction of patriarchal forms of domination within the family (due to their primary role in the early socialization of children) they still refuse to accept responsibility. These would-be social revolutionaries seek only an easy way out, to avoid the painful tasks of reorganizing their everyday social lives. It is far easier to be a victim and go on placing blame than actively to seek out and make reality with practical solutions. The plain truth of the matter is this: all existing men and women equally are oppressed by the structure of domination we inherited from our parents and cannot be held accountable for the sins of our fathers and mothers. However, this does not mean I justify present forms of oppression which we have a chance to struggle against and overthrow. I feel we must struggle against all systems of domination. And the responsibility to do this lies with us all; men and women must unite against Power. One way to do this is to end patriarchal socialization and to abolish all sexual divisions of labor in our everyday lives. We must not pass onto a new generation the domination we detest. Therefore we must form unity towards the development of a new humanity which grows out of our present struggle for freedom.

The various left parties and groups all seem to offer the same quick solutions to the problems confronting women. All of their solutions are based upon their seizure of power and of the use of state power to overcome oppression. One solution often advanced to the problem of domestic oppression is the nationalization of housework. This is done through the setting up of communal kitchens, house cleaning services and day-care centres. What this solution completely ignores is the latent sexual division of labor. Since the largest section of the adult population without paid work is women, who do you think will run these nationalized services? Women! So under the leftist scheme women are freed from individual domestic labor only to be subjected to industrialized domestic labor. Therefore liberation becomes a mere sham, a spectacular trick played upon women by their would-be liberators. What is needed is not the nationalization of domestic labor, but the communalization of it. This means that all domestic labor is shared equally by all members of society. In the commune of the future all would participate equally in the maintenance of the commune, preparation of meals, and of the caring for its children (even those without children would participate).

Another solution advanced by leftists is to advocate equal pay for equal work or comparable work. Leftists here do not even question the oppression of women as workers, but merely call into question the rate of pay. These leftists are so dominated by the modernist world view that it limits their vision and prevents them from ever transcending the present form of capitalist economy. Thus they say it is alright to exploit as long as all are exploited equally. How far is this from the historic
socialist project of abolition of the wage system! At a time when trade unions were advancing the slogan of ‘a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work’, the revolutionary movement was demanding the abolition of the wage system. The problem with capitalism is not just a question of the amount of one’s paycheck; we need to abolish capitalism and not meekly beg for a pay raise.

Women cannot achieve liberation as long as they remain domestic slaves. Under the present economic situation women are doubly oppressed both at home and in the workplace. This situation needs to be transcended; the sexual division of labor has to be overthrown. Unless this is done, liberation is impossible. So far all leftist solutions rest upon the maintenance of society as it is and not upon the future we wish to create. While the exact forms of the future social family can only be known in outline, we can still try consciously to eliminate the sexual division of labor within our everyday lives. We should strive to make our lives as prefigurative of our vision as is possible while living in the old world order.
Who will do the Dirty Work?

Tony Gibson

EVERYONE who speaks on the subject of anarchism meets the ever-recurring question, ‘But in a social condition of anarchy, who will clean out the sewers?’ There are variants of the question; sometimes the enquiry concerns those who will do the hardest work or the dirtiest work, but generally the sewers are mentioned specifically. It would seem that everyone wants to be sure that he will not have to work in the sewers in a free society. Perhaps the capitalist and authoritarian status quo derives the apathetic support it does conditional on the fact that only a tiny fraction of the working-class are economically forced to work in the sewers. I have had no contact with sewer-workers myself; perhaps, not having had the usual bogey before them, they are unafraid of the coming social revolution, for, after all, they work in the sewers, anyway.

I have for many years evaded this haunting question when speaking to public audiences, for I am convinced that the real motive that prompts it must be left to the psychoanalysts, who could tell us quite a lot about the basis of this sewer-dread in the unconscious mind. I feel that sense of embarrassment that we all feel when we are in danger of unearthing someone else’s pet neurosis. However, I am now prepared to treat the question, in print, as though it were a rational one.

Before considering who, in fact, will clean out the sewers and do other work that is generally considered ‘dirty’, in a free society, let us first consider who does it now. Let us also enquire into the nature of ‘dirty work’. The people who are now concerned with ‘dirty work’ are sewer-cleaners, dustmen, surgeons, housewives, slaughter-house men, hospital nurses, lawyers, soldiers, farmers, politicians, tannery workers, gutter-journalists, etc., etc. The first main distinction we may make is between those who can wash off the dirt of their trade at the end of the day’s work, and those who cannot. Dirty work is not to everyone’s taste. The smells of the sewer or tannery would revolt some people; others would be revolted by the things a surgeon, nurse or slaughter-house man does; others would prefer to do either of these things than touch the filth that lies in the province of the lawyer, politician and gutter-journalist. Our tastes vary.

What is notable about these different occupations is that some are highly paid and some poorly paid. This makes a great difference in our money-conscious society, but perhaps the social prestige attached to the job carries even more weight with many people. A great number of men would rather slave away at an underpaid clerking job with no hope of advancement than undertake the healthier and better paid work of dock-worker. Many girls will work ten hours a day toting bedpans and dressing wounds rather than take work as a bar-maid. The question of pay and of the ‘dirtiness’ of the work does not always override considerations of social esteem (often called snobbery).

For a short while I happened to be cleaning the streets of Cardiff for my living; while attending an intellectual gathering a lady asked me what my work was. I told her. Perhaps she was right in thinking that I wished to be rude to her by telling her the truth. Had I wished to play up to the occasion and avoid paining her, I would have vaguely replied that I worked in an important occupation for the benefit of the municipality.

I have read with interest of the shift of social prestige connected with work in the newly organized state of Israel. There, owing to the peculiar nature of the immigrants, there is a huge surplus of professional men. Lawyers, doctors, professors, architects, etc., are far too numerous and there is no living to be made by the majority of them, but bricklayers, navvies, agricultural workers, etc., are in huge demand. Manual work therefore commands a high wage, and the professional men are taking
to it, but the important shift of emphasis is that now jobs that make your hands dirty are socially approved in Israel, in contrast to the social contempt in which such work is held in other capitalist countries. No doubt if capitalism persists in Israel the situation will deteriorate to match other countries, but while it lasts it is an interesting exposition of how a social attitude can quickly change towards ‘dirty work’.

It has been pointed out time and again that in a sanely organized society there would be no problem of work which is intrinsically dirty, revolting and degrading to the average man. Such things as garbage collection, sewage disposal, rag picking, furnace stoking, etc., are unpleasant operations in contemporary society only because the men employed in them have not the power to alter their conditions of work. If there were not powerless and exploited beings who must accept filthy and unpleasant conditions of work, as there are to-day, these operations would have priority for the best scientific research and technical skill to be applied to them to make them not merely acceptable as occupations, but congenial. For the key to social harmony lies in the relation of human beings to their work. I would define a free society (that is a healthy society) as one in which there is no social coercion compelling the individual to work.

This definition of anarchy may call forth considerable protest from some anarchists, but I mean it in its most literal sense. Superficially, such an idea seems completely unrealistic, and to be dismissed out of hand as foolish idealism by those who have some experience of life. Let me dissociate myself from all idealism. I have had practical experience of idealists who had such faith in and love of ‘Man’ that they would let themselves be exploited by work-shy layabouts rather than face the fact that they were supporting parasites to no good purpose. But I also want to make it clear that there is no freedom, nor stability, nor health in any community of people, large or small, where the socially necessary work is carried out merely from a sense of social duty which is imposed upon the individual. The only justification for work is the fact that we enjoy it. Any society which relies upon political, economic or moral coercion as the mainspring of its productive process is doomed to unhealth and some form of servitude.

Work may be defined as the expenditure of energy in a productive process, as distinct from play which is the expenditure of energy without productive result. Work is characteristic of the healthy adult being, play of the healthy child whose energies are occupied in developing his own capacities. Significantly enough, the play of the children of humans, and of other mammals, is generally a rehearsal of adult work-activities.

It is generally realized that work is a necessity for every adult. Those people who have no economic need to work, by reason of their wealth, have to seek work-substitutes to preserve their mental and physical health. They remain, as it were, permanent children, playing at fishing, hunting, sailing boats, gardening and farming, and often find satisfaction in quite strenuous work-play. The lower mammals are no different from humans; they need to work when they are adult. Being less troubled by intellectual doubt, they pursue their occupations with wholehearted satisfaction. In studying creatures simpler than ourselves there can be no doubt as to what gives them pleasure: the otter likes to fish, the beaver to build dams, the squirrel to collect nuts, the rabbit to burrow. Some people may point to their domestic Pussy, ‘corrupted by a thousand years of unnatural living’, who prefers to lap milk by the fireside than to hunt mice in the cellar, and draw the analogy that modern man is an unnatural animal and needs to be kicked before he will work. In this common analogy there is a biological fallacy. Neither Pussy, nor you, nor I, is a thousand years old: we are not instinctually conditioned by the experiences of our ancestors. We have a certain instinctual endowment which is pretty much the same as when our species first originated, and our behaviour is conditioned by the environment we encounter in our own life span. Turn pampered Pussy loose in the woods and she will revert to a natural feline way of life; remove the pressure of neurotic 20th century civilization.
from you and me and we will have the chance of reverting to a natural human way of life which, I contend, includes as spontaneous a wish for and enjoyment of work as the way of life of any other animal species. At present, many of the civilized varieties of our species appear to be unique in the animal kingdom in that their productive process expresses no joy of life. The position is even worse than this: we take it for granted that all animals enjoy the procreative process, but among many of our species even this function has lost its pleasure.

Do we have to look further for the roots of all the social disharmony and individual misery of our time? With us, work is generally regarded as a regrettable necessity, an activity to be endured only for the sake of the material goods produced, or rather for the wage packet which bears no obvious relationship to the work done. The best that the reformers, social planners and even social revolutionaries can suggest is that we may make the working day shorter and shorter, so that there will be less pain (work) and more pleasure (idleness) in our lives. I have even heard an anarchist meeting discussing whether in the great and glorious by-and-by we should have to do three hours work a day or three hours work a week. This is strictly comparable to the following extract from an American sex-instruction manual:

‘Question. How long does the penis have to stay in the vagina? Answer. Only a few minutes.’
Another regrettable necessity!

I do not care if in a social state of anarchy we work a great deal longer than we do today under capitalism. What I am concerned about is that the work itself shall be intrinsically satisfying. I see no other way of ensuring this than the abandonment of coercion as the mainspring of production.

It is obvious that if the wages-system, which is the chief coercive force compelling men to work at their present jobs to-day, were to break down, the following situation would arise. A large number of people would be liberated but disoriented and they would immediately take the attitude of, ‘From now on it’s spiv and live for me – only mugs work!’ This is to be expected. Domesticated Pussy when first turned loose in the woods looks around for another house to sponge off; she does not immediately take on a natural feline way of life. It is this situation that most social revolutionaries are afraid of, and they seek to set up authoritarian machinery to substitute political coercion for the economic coercion of capitalism. It is true that political coercion is not always easy to apply to the productive processes; under Lenin’s dictatorship it was largely abandoned for the economic coercion of the N.E.P. However, if coercion is still resorted to after the breakdown of capitalism in order that men will still work, the ‘spiv and live’ attitude will be preserved as a permanent social attitude.

The problem is not one of ‘faith’ in human nature, it is one of understanding. Either one realizes that human beings are social animals with basically sound animal instincts for self-preservation, or one does not. Those who do not realize the potential animal health of their own kind are generally idealists who have some idealized concept of Man, and take it for granted that Tom, Dick and Harry must be bludgeoned into working, eating, sleeping, bedding with their wives, and cleaning their teeth in the approved manner or they will die from lack of knowing what Man should be. Tom, Dick and Harry are not always pretty creatures, but they are generally better social specimens than the do-gooders, the dangerous fools who would accept the responsibility for organizing their lives for them.

It is my purpose to draw particular attention to the anti-social nature of conscientious administrators. We all know about the harmful nature of conscious exploiters and racketeers under so-called laissez-faire capitalism, but it is the prophets of planned economy and super-government who are the harbingers of famine, war and desolation for the future.
If through a revolutionary breakdown of capitalist society, the compulsion to go to the accustomed place of wage-slavery is no longer operative, then the disorientated people will have the chance to turn to production for use to satisfy their own needs for work. It is usually assumed that the great problem is what ulterior incentives or compulsions to work must be instituted to satisfy the demands of the consumers. We tend to forget that it is as natural for men to produce as to consume. In any society where the producers of wealth are not subject to coercion, the demands of the consumers must follow what it is the nature of that society to produce, every adult being both producer and consumer. That this is hard for many people to realize, I know, for we are accustomed to think of there being a class of ‘workers’ in society, whose function it is to do as they are told. If the ‘consumers’ demand televisions, battleships, Coca-Cola and coal, then the ‘workers’ have no say in the matter: they must produce them. It is time we tried to conceive a society without the coercion of worker by consumer, for as long as we have this picture engraved on our minds it is impossible to think in terms of practical anarchy.

Anarchist writers have dealt at length with the fact that only a very small percentage of the people in this country are really producing anything useful or performing any socially useful function whatever, in spite of the vast degree of unpleasant activity around us. A gross dislocation of our industry would not therefore be a calamity at all. We need a breakdown of the present industrial system; we need revolution and real anarchy in which to reorganize our productive processes with workers in control of their work and motivated by their own need to work, instead of their need of a pay-packet.

The worst calamity that can take place after the breakdown of capitalism is the replacement of economic coercion by political coercion. We are already experiencing the thin edge of the wedge. Those workers who are no longer on the economic border of destitution sometimes choose to stay away from work. As the economic bludgeon fails to intimidate them, the State has recourse to the political bludgeon, and criminal proceedings are taken. How else would you coerce men to work? Either, the individual must be free to go to work or stay away, and Society can lump it, or Society must preserve its coercive machinery, the State. Anarchism is based on the recognition of the fact that, in freedom, men will choose to work.

‘But surely some workers, the workers concerned with essential services – cleaning the sewers for instance – must be made to carry out their work, even under anarchy!’

Will you go down and clean out those sewers for the sake of Society, Madam? No? Then, Madam, you may have to use the yard. Or perhaps you will find that many people are less squeamish than you, and will take delight, yes delight, in tackling difficult projects, and they will take more interest in disposing of your sewage efficiently, hygienically and usefully than you do yourself. They may even send it back to you in the form of properly grown vegetables.

(Reprinted from the pamphlet with the full title ‘But Mr Speaker, in an anarchist society – “Who will do the dirty work?”’ Published by Freedom Press in 1952.)

from [http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/blackchip/dirtywork.htm](http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/blackchip/dirtywork.htm) (Richard Alexander/MalFunction)
**Really Anti-Social**

*bristle Collective*

With all the hoo-ha about anti-social behaviour and handy new catch-all laws for every occasion, politicians are falling over themselves to slap the ‘anti-social’ tag onto anything they don’t like the look of. By taking advantage of people’s real fears and concerns, and sustaining a climate of suspicion through the mass media, they coerce people into arguing for more social control and law enforcement. The definition of ‘anti-social’ used by the authorities is a predictably narrow one, and one pretty much confined (unsurprisingly) to working class communities.

So who decides what is meant by ‘anti-social’? Shouldn’t we first agree on what is ‘social’? Here’s a common dictionary definition of the word: “social – living in companies or organised communities … interdependent, co-operative … concerned with the mutual relations of human beings ….” (good grief – that sounds like anarchy to us!). Maybe it’s time for us to join in the finger-wagging but point the finger in the other direction, and come up with some ideas of our own about what we think is anti-social.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-social?</th>
<th>Really anti-social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gangs of trouble-making youth on the streets</td>
<td>Illegal wars, invasions, and the murder of civilians. Armed forces recruitment staff targeting poor areas, offering what seems like the only way out. Los of public space – sold off to private companies for ‘development.’ Corporate takeover of our cities, bringing more social control. Slashed public funding for youth and community facilities. Criminalisation of young people ….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street drinking</td>
<td>Gentrification and social exclusion. Overpriced pubs and clubs, encouraging binge drinking, alco-pop culture, and subsequent dependency. People suffering isolation, alcoholism and mental health problems as a result of insecure dead-end jobs and alienated, hopeless lives ….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begging</td>
<td>Corporate greed and tax evasion. Massive wealth inequality. Pay rises for the rich, tax rises for the poor. Council corruption and huge payouts to consultancy firms ripping off taxpayer’s money. No affordable housing but plenty of luxury homes, as local people get priced out. Benefit cuts, and claimants treated like criminals as part of the ongoing clampdown on welfare. New anti-begging laws to punish people for being too visible about their poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyposting and graffiti</td>
<td>Huge advertising companies dominating our lives and communities with billboards and adverts on every bit of space. The cosy relationship between big business and the Bristol City council. Destructive mass consumerism fuelled by the advertising industry ….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Problem” families</td>
<td>The Royal family and other hereditary parasites. Families forced into shit housing on left-for-dead estates. The desperation of poverty which makes people go mad. A society based on profit not people. The destruction of community strength, and divisions and conflicts fostered by the mass media, government and capitalism as a whole. Sexism and the continued exploitation of women. Attacks on asylum seekers, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street crime, muggings etc.</td>
<td>Big business tax fraud. Taxes - the constant theft on a grand scale of our hard earned wages to fund wars, social, control and parasitic government. Attacks on other countries to steal their land and resources. ‘Get rich quick’ selfish mentality and the constant need for more, more, more which the system going. Paranoia, fear and mutual suspicion brought on by years of too much propaganda, news and TV. Poverty and cheap thugs which make people turn communities against each other. Government involvement in the drugs trade. Third world debt ….</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list goes on …. why not send us your nominations for any ruling class ne’er-do-wells in need of a good stiff Anti Social Behaviour Order? Answers on the back of a bristle subscription form, please!

*This article first appeared in bristle magazine, an alternative publication for Bristol and the South West of the UK which aims to provide a space and information for local groups and activists. More information including subscription details is available at [www.bristle.org.uk](http://www.bristle.org.uk)*

---

Marx, Imperialism, and the Question of Capitalist Progress

Michael Handelman

When it comes to the question of how progressive is capitalism, Marx is profoundly ambivalent. The traditional interpretation is that, while Marx views capitalism as an extraordinary brutal system, it also represents a ‘higher stage’ in the development towards socialism. Avineri succinctly summarizes this interpretation when he writes:

... [Marx] is careful not to mistake a condemnation of the social evils inherent in capitalism for a romantic search after the idyllic preindustrial times. It is true that capitalism is the most brutalizing and dehumanizing economic system history has ever known; after all, there have been few critiques of capitalism more outspoken than Marx’s Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts and Das Kapital. Yet to Marx, capitalism is still a necessary step toward final salvation, since only capitalism can create the economic and technological infrastructure that will enable society to allow for the free development of every member according to his capacities.¹

However, in this essay I will suggest that the traditional interpretation is problematic, both because it takes Marx’s thought as monolithic and internally consistent, and because it tends to downplay the shift in Marx’s thought from the 1840s and 1850s to the 1860s and 1870s. The first section of this paper will discuss the prevalence of social evolutionary concepts in the 19th century, and how these ideas must have colored Marx’s view of the world. The next two sections will utilize a case study approach – I will look at Marx’s views on imperialism and the related idea of how he viewed the impact that capitalism would have on the periphery. I’ve chosen these topics, because I think they best illuminate Marx’s views on capitalist progress – if capitalism is ‘progressive’ then capitalist imperialism and the imposition of capitalism on the periphery, while it may be destructive does serve progressive purposes: it helps bring countries into a higher stage of development, creating the material conditions for socialism in these places².

I will discuss Marx’s early views on the subject by looking at how he viewed India, and then Marx’s later views on imperialism and progressivity of capitalism in relation to Ireland and Russia. In conclusion, I will attempt to relate Marx’s views of the progressive nature of capitalism with that of later marxists.

1. Setting the Stage: Social Evolution in the 19th Century

The idea that we progress from a ‘lower stage’ to progressively higher stages in terms of our structure is referred to as social evolution. While the concept of social evolution is not new, the 19th century was the heyday of such a concept. Many of the most well-known social thinkers of the day – Sainte-Simon Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Henry Lewis Morgan and others – embraced a notion of social evolution³.

Further accentuating the belief in social evolution, was the revolution in science, Darwin’s On the Origin of Species, which explained processes of biological evolution. Many of the social theorists in question took ideas from the natural sciences, and then they committed the naturalistic fallacy of suggesting that because there existed biological evolution, it must mean the existence of social evolution. Herbert Spencer in particular, coined the term ‘Social Darwinism’ to describe the application of Darwinian principles to society.
Living in this environment it would be hard not to be affected by ideas of social evolution. There is evidence to suggest that Marx was strongly influenced by such ideas:

In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels describe several stages of ownership forms – tribal, ancient, feudal, and capitalist. [T]he Preface [mentions] progressive epochs. That Marx and Engels had viewed society as developing in stages is further suggested by their enthusiastic reception of Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* and by Engels’ heavy reliance on that work in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State.*

Perhaps most tellingly Engels in his funeral ovation: “Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of evolution in history...”

However, without denying there are social evolutionary elements within Marx’s thoughts, one can derive another interpretation from other passages. Marx, for example, writes that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” – this suggests something extremely important, Marx is not giving agency to something that doesn’t have any agency (history). Another passage further illuminates this point:

History does nothing; it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles. It is men, real, living, who do all this. ... It is not ‘history’ which uses men as a means of achieving – as if it were an individual person – its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.

In contrast, social evolutionists tended to see history as having ‘objective laws’ that lie totally outside human agency (i.e. ‘history just progresses’), Georg Lukacs would later refer to the giving of agency to an abstraction like history, as reification.

Thus, for Marx, it’s not that capitalism was progressive, based on some sort of ‘historical laws’ of social development (as the bourgeois social theorists thought); rather, it was because Marx believed that capitalism would create a revolutionary class (the revolutionary working class) who would bring about the negation of capitalism (socialism/communism). He thought that forcing people into the factories would make workers realize their collective class interests in opposition to the capitalists, and they in turn would become the agents of revolutionary social change (to socialism/communism). If capitalism doesn’t fulfil this function, then for Marx, capitalism is not progressive. In the 19th century, with the emergence of a fairly militant and radical working class, Marx’s conclusion seemed reasonable because he saw the emergence of a revolutionary working class. But if Marx had seen how the progress of capitalism in the 20th century resulted in the working class’s growing mystification (‘repressive consciousness’), he would have seriously doubted the progressive nature of capitalism (and in fact, as we shall see, even Marx started to doubt the progressive nature of capitalism in the 1860s and especially the 1870s). Marx, by emphasizing the role of agency in the creation of human history keeps the door open for the possibility that capitalism will NOT create its own graveldiggers, and thus would instead degenerate into greater and greater barbarism without getting any closer to socialism/communism. In fact, this is what so many Marxists in the 20th century suggest: just such an phenomenon (eg Luxembourg, Lukacs, Korsch, Reich, Adorno, Camatte etc).

### 2. Marx, Imperialism and the *New York Herald Tribune*

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social
state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution.10

England has to fulﬁl a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.11

Much of Marx’s views on imperialism and the non-European world was material published in the New York Daily Tribune (including the above). In many respects, it is often these views that underline arguments that stress Marx’s belief in the inherent progressive nature of capitalism12. While, later on I will discuss the importance of social context, for now it is important to attempt to investigate how Marx viewed the ‘Orient’ and how this colored his writings.

Marx certainly has a strong element of Eurocentrism in him (Perelman 1989). He had trouble understanding non-European societies, because they didn’t ﬁt into the modes of production he saw in Europe. So he developed another type of mode of production to describe all of Asia – the ‘Asiatic Mode of Production’ (ASM)13. It is quite curious that he would use such a term, because the other modes of production (ancient, feudal, modern bourgeois) are analytical and historical, while the ASM is a geographic term. But this stems from how he perceived Asia, he saw Asian society as static14 and unchanging15 and endogenously despotic16. For the early Marx, the productive forces didn’t develop endogenously; rather, it was up to exogenous forces like British imperialism to develop these productive forces which in turn would create an industrial working class creating the material conditions for socialist transformation17.

However, it is important to recognize the context for Marx’s writings on imperialism18. He wasn’t writing deep theoretical pieces. Rather he was writing newspaper articles for the general public, and thus there is a tendency for him to simplify complex ideas so they are easily digestible to the general public. But more importantly, he was engaging in a polemical debate with another writer for the New York Daily Tribune, Henry Carey.

Henry Carey was an American economist, whom Marx wasn’t particularly fond of.19 Carey was a supporter of protectionism, and had a strong belief that Britain was the reason for American economic problems and the cause behind why there was ‘disharmony’ (i.e. class conﬂict) keeping the United States economy ‘down’. Carey didn’t like the classical economists because they tended to suggest the existence of class conﬂict (eg Ricardo)20 and he believed that the capitalist economic development could occur without such class conﬂict.

He and Marx were battling for ideological control of the NYHT, and thus Marx’s writings should be seen in this light. Marx was writing not to elucidate his views, but rather to undermine Carey’s inﬂuence at the NYHT and its readership. “In this respect they (the articles on India) may reﬂect Marx’s views on Carey rather than on India.”21

In fact, there is textual evidence even from his writings on India that while the dominant tendency in the early Marx’s thought was that capitalism was a necessary evil for progress, there is also a contradictory tendency developing within Marx’s thought that suggest something rather opposite.

England pays now, in fact, the penalty for her protracted misrule of that vast Indian Empire. The two main obstacles she has now to grapple with in her attempts at supplanting American cotton by Indian cotton are the want of means of communication and transport throughout India, and the miserable state of the Indian peasant, disabling him from
improving favourable circumstances. Both these difficulties the English have themselves to thank for."  

However, I think Perelman overstates his case: there are quite a few other passages, not in the NYHT, which also tend to suggest the early Marx predominantly believed capitalist imperialism was a necessary evil for progress:

(1) the well known paragraph of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) in which he likens the cheap prices of British commodities to heavy artillery battering down the Chinese walls, and emphasize that the British bourgeoisie creates a world after its own image; … (3) in numerous passages of the *Grudrisse* written in 1857-158.  

Nonetheless, the fact that so much of the attempt to ‘re-construct’ Marx’s ‘progressivist’ view of capitalism simply on the basis upon the NYHT articles (eg Avineri 1968) should be qualified for both the reason that it was under a certain specific social context, and that Marx’s thoughts on capitalist progress became more nuanced as his thought developed.

### 3. THE POST-1860S MARX’S VIEW OF IMPERIALISM IN IRELAND AND THE RUSSIAN QUESTION

It is interesting to note that Marx’s early views on the progressive nature of imperialism in India are well-known, yet the later Marx’s views on imperialism are relatively unknown, even by many marxists. However, to a certain extent this is understandable, because much of Marx’s later writings on imperialism was not in the form of formal journalistic articles but in more informal pieces (letters, drafts, etc.), many of which were not discovered until the 20th century.

Kenzo Mohri has looked at Marx’s views on British imperialism in Ireland, and this suggests that Marx was developing a much more negative attitude towards capitalist imperialism in the periphery. For example, Marx wrote:

> Since 1846 the oppression, although it has become less barbaric in form, has been annihilating in substance, and there are no alternatives to voluntary emancipation of Ireland by England or the life-or-death struggle.

Marx prefigures Dependency Theory by suggesting capitalism, far from promoting the progressive development of the means of production, is rather promoting the “development of underdevelopment”:

> Every time Ireland was just about to develop herself industrially, she was ‘smashed down’ and forced back; into a mere agricultural country … Ireland was compelled to contribute cheap labor power and capital for the establishment of the ‘great factory of Britain’.

Thus it is fair to say that Marx became more critical about the inherent progressive nature of capitalist imperialism and capitalism more generally, in the 1860s.

But perhaps even more dramatic was his changed attitude towards Russia in the 1870s. Marx’s NYHT writings on Russia are not complimentary in the 1850s (probably some of this dislike stemmed from the fact that Carey was a Russophile). But, in the 1870s, Marx started to become more interested in Russia (and the Russian Peasant communes in particular) and was increasingly convinced that capitalism would, far from being an engine of progress for Russia, be antagonistic to real progress there. Shanin offers four reasons for this shift in Marx’s thinking:
The Paris Commune of 1871 offered a dramatic lesson and a type of revolutionary rule never known before. The very appearance of the ‘dawn of the great social revolution which will forever free mankind from the class-split society’ had altered the terms of establishment of a socialist society and set a new contemporaneous timetable to it. It also provided the final crescendo to Marx’s activities in the First International which ended in 1872, to be followed by a period of reflection. Second a major breakthrough within the social sciences occurred during the 1860s and 1870s – the discovery of prehistory which ‘was to lengthen the notion of historical time by some tens of thousands of years, and to bring primitive societies within the circle of historical study by combining the study of material remains with of ethnography’. The captivating impact of those developments on the general understanding of human society was considerable, centring as it did on ‘men’s ideas and ideals of community’ – then as now the very core of European social philosophy. Third, and linked with the studies of pre-history, was the extension of knowledge of the rural non-capitalist societies enmeshed in a capitalist world, especially the works of Maine, Firs and others on India. Finally Russia and the Russians offered to Marx a potent combination of all of the above: rich evidence concerning rural communes (archaic yet evidently alive in a world of capitalist triumphs) and of direct revolutionary experience, all encompassed by the theory and practice of Russian revolutionary populism.39

We see a very sharp change in his attitude prior to the 1870s. Marx held a rather low view of the ancient peasant communes, suggesting capitalism’s destruction of these communes was progressive, for very much the same reason that he saw capitalist imperialism as positive for India.30 In the 1870s, he increasingly saw the peasant communes in Russia, not as an anachronism, but rather as prefiguring the Geimenweise or material human community.31

It is possible to speculate that Marx was starting to recognize that the cultural and social characteristics that capitalism engendered on people would make the transition to socialism more difficult, rather than easier. Capitalism, by promoting competition, rugged individualism, etc, would make it harder for people to realize their essentially communal natures. It is easier to move from a parochial and provincial communal society to a cosmopolitan communal society achieve than to move from a society which promoted atomization and competition (capitalism) to a communal society.32

Marx’s 1870s work on Russia illustrates quite a few shifts within Marx’s thoughts towards a far more negative attitude towards capitalism – rejecting the idea that capitalism is progress even in the sense of a ‘destructive but a necessary stage’. Conversely, Marx’s views on peasants become much more positive, often tending to see them as a ‘revolutionary agent’ as opposed to seeing them as fairly reactionary, as in his earlier work:

If Russia continues along the road which it has followed since 1861 (capitalist development), it will forego the finest opportunity that history has ever placed before a nation and will undergo all the fateful misfortune of capitalist development.33

If the revolution occurs in time, if it concentrates all its forces … to insure the free flower of the rural commune, then the latter will develop itself before long as an element in the regeneration of Russian society, as a point of advantage when compared to the nations enslaved by the capitalist system.34

The only Possible answer to this question at the present time is the following: If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two can
supplement each other, then present Russian communal land ownership can serve as a point of departure for a communist development.35

However, we can still locate passages in the late Marx to suggest that he continued to hold to the idea that capitalism was ‘necessary evil’ on the road to socialism. In the 1872 edition of Capital, this passage remained:

The ancient social organisms, of production (in the ‘modes of production of ancient Asia, of antiquity’ etc.) are extraordinarily much simpler and more transparent than the bourgeois (mode). But they are based either on the immaturity of the individual human who has not yet severed his umbilical chord connecting him with others in a natural community (of a primitive tribe), or the direct relations of lordship and bondage. They are conditioned by a low level of development of the productive powers of labour and correspondingly the narrowness of the relations of human beings as between themselves and with nature in the process of production of material life.36

Thus, even though we see a shift in Marx’s thought in the 1860s and 1870s away from social evolutionist ideas, he didn’t fully abandon these ideas either. He becomes more sceptical of the inherent progressiveness of capitalism, but he doesn’t totally repudiate the idea as well.

**CONCLUSION: MARX AND THE MARXISTS**

It has often been thought and written that communism would blossom after the destruction of the capitalist mode of production, which would be undermined by such contradictions that its end would be inevitable. But numerous events of this century have unfortunately brought other possibilities into view: the return to “barbarism,” as analyzed by R. Luxemburg and the entire left wing of the German workers' movement, by Adorno and the Frankfurt School; the destruction of the human species, as is evident to each and all today; finally a state of stagnation in which the capitalist mode of production survives by adapting itself to a degenerated humanity which lacks the power to destroy it. In order to understand the failure of a future that was thought inevitable, we must take into account the domestication of human beings implemented by all class societies and mainly by capital, and we must analyze the autonomization of capital.37

“No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.” (Theodor Adorno)

As we saw from the last section, Marx became more pessimistic and negative about capitalist development. He increasingly saw capitalism as being antagonistic to real progress. Twentieth century marxists have increasingly emphasized the negative dimensions to capitalism; and with good reason too: the horrors of the twentieth century brutality and the failure of capitalism to create a revolutionary working class made marxists much more sceptical about the inherent progressiveness of capitalism38.

The marxism that became institutionalized in the Second International (and later the Bolsheviks) had a far more positive view of capitalism than Marx’s writings. They tended to adopt a very determinist reading of capitalist development (and totally ignoring the question of class consciousness). They saw capitalism as progressive and predestined to break down by its own logic and that is when a socialist revolution would occur. But until that breakdown were to occur, capitalism must be seen as progressive because it develops the productive forces.39 Unlike Marx,
they had no appreciation of, for example, the progressive potential of the Russian peasant communes; an oversight that led to tragic results in the Soviet era.\textsuperscript{40}

The basic assumptions that undergirded their positivism and their stageism, is far more reminiscent of a pre-Hegelian materialism (what Marx would describe as ‘vulgar materialism’) than Marx’s work. Amadeo Bordiga was quite correct to see the ‘marxism’ of the Second International was in fact merely the ideology of capitalist development\textsuperscript{41}. In other words, the Second International’s ‘marxism’ was in fact the ideological expression of an effort to complete the capitalist revolution in Central and Eastern Europe\textsuperscript{42}.

It would be absurd of course, to suggest that there is no basis for the Second International and the Bolshevik’s ‘marxism’ in Marx’s thought, because as I suggested before, Marx was still trying to wrestle free from the dominant bourgeois ideologies of his day\textsuperscript{43}.

The horrors of WWI forced many marxists to challenge the basic assumptions of economic determinists who called themselves ‘marxists’, and in the process helped rediscover some of Marx’s insights. For many of these ‘rebelling’ marxists, they wanted to understand why WWI happened. How could WWI with all its barbarism, be seen as a product of a progressive system? Why did the working class, instead of making a social revolution against an obviously decadent capitalism, instead take part in killing their fellow workers? For Rosa Luxembourg, that the working class had to choose between socialism or barbarism\textsuperscript{44} – it was not a matter of ‘social evolution’ it was a matter of what the working class deciding what type of society they wanted. For Georg Lukacs, the progress of capitalism was not synonymous with the progress of a revolutionary working-class consciousness, because, far from producing such consciousness, capitalism produced greater levels of mystification (false consciousness or reification) among the working class – thus suggesting that capitalism was antagonistic to the development of socialism/communism\textsuperscript{45}. For Wilhelm Reich, the progress of capitalism entailed the progress of psychological disfigurement. This disfigurement would create working class subjects who were attracted not to the workers movement and socialism, but rather to authoritarian politics culminating in fascism.

In all these cases we see an increasing interest in questions of subjectivity. One of the reasons why (especially the young) Marx believed capitalism was progressive was because it created a revolutionary working class which would serve to negate capitalism. Seeing the horrors of WWI, Luxembourg, Lukacs, and Reich and others, were not so sure. But they in a similar manner to the late Marx, still retained the somewhat schizophrenic and contradictory view that capitalism was historically progressive. For example, in that same pamphlet in which Luxembourg writes about the choice between socialism and barbarism, she also writes:

Bourgeois class domination is undoubtedly an historical necessity, but, so too, the rising of the working class against it. Capital is an historical necessity, but, so too, its grave digger, the socialist proletariat.\textsuperscript{46}

Nonetheless, their view of capitalist progress is much more qualified than the Second International, the Bolsheviks and possibly even Marx himself (or at least the early Marx).

After the Holocaust, quite a few marxists became even more negative to the question of capitalist progress. For example, many of the members of the Frankfurt School (especially Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse) saw Auschwitz as the inevitable outcome of ‘capitalist progress’. The Adorno quote that started this section, is a succinct description of the overall outlook of many member of the Frankfurt School.
During the Cold War, they further developed their critique of ‘capitalism as progress’ with their analysis of how the development of the Culture Industries (a by-product of capitalist development) served to weaken rather than strengthen the possibility of revolutionary social change because of how the Culture Industries colonize the minds of the oppressed. The retreat into barbarism for Adorno and Horkheimer (and to a lesser extent Marcuse\(^\text{47}\)) was a much more likely scenario than moving towards socialism/communism.\(^\text{48}\)

It is ironic that ‘neo-marxists’ (e.g. the Frankfurt School) believed they were rebelling against Marx’s overly positive views of capitalist progress, when in fact their analyses were prefigured in his mature work. While, it is the Orthodox or Fundamentalist Marxists who claim they are ‘returning to Marx’, are rather returning to the vulgarized marxism of the Second International.

At any rate, Marx’s views on the ‘progress’ that capitalism has wrought is incredibly ambivalent, and contradictory – as this essay has demonstrated, he often disagreed with himself. The most important contradiction within Marx’s oeuvre has been shown by Jacques Camatte – the technological advances that capitalism has engendered allows us to overcome technical barriers to a world revolution\(^\text{49}\). But at the same time, the development that capitalism brings means greater and greater “repressive consciousness” among the working class. The paradox is that the impact of the capitalist development on subjectivity moves it further and further away from socialism, just as capitalism’s technical development increases the technological possibility of a global socialist revolution. It is this paradox, that Marx and the more creative marxists seem to have sensed, with their seemingly contradictory attitude towards capitalist progress.

**Bibliography**


http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/ch01.htm


Marx, Karl, ‘The Future Results of British Rule in India’, *New York Daily Tribune* August 8 1853 in *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* ed. by Shlomo Avineri (Doubleday, 1968)


Perelman, Michael, *Marx’s Crises Theory* (Pranger Publisher, 1987)


Shlomo Avineri, ‘Introduction’, in *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* ed. by Shlomo Avineri (Doubleday, 1968)

Wada, Haruki, ‘Marx and Revolutionary Russia’, in *Late Marx and the Russian Road* ed. by Teodor Shanin (Routledge and Kegan, 1984)


1 Avineri, 1968, p.3

2 ‘progressive’ conclusions as the [Orthodox] Marxist one about the ‘progressive’ role of colonialism[18]’ (Fotopoulous and Gezerlis 2002)

3 Zeitlin, 1996

4 Zeitlin, 1996

5 Engels cited in Zeitlin, 1996

6 Marx, 1848

7 Marx 1845, Ch 6

8 Lukacs, 1971, orig. 1923

9 Camatte, 1973

10 Karl Marx, ‘The British Rule in India’

11 Karl Marx, ‘The Future Results of British Rule in India’

12 eg Warren, 1980; Avineri 1968

13 Avineri, 1968

14 ‘Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive invaders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.’ (Marx, 1968, orig. 1853)

15 ‘Marx saw such societies as perpetuating natural vegetative existence’, i.e. showing cyclical and quantitative changes while lacking an inbuilt mechanism of necessary social transformation.” (Shanin 1984: 5)

16 It is important to recognize that Marx and Engels abandoned the concept of Asiatic Mode of Production in the late 1850s (The *Grundrisse* was the last time they used the term, see *Encyclopedia of Marxism* ‘Asiatic Mode of Production’)! This is very important, because it indicates that Marx and Engels had begun to abandon Eurocentric notions, they started to realize the essential plurality (and non-static) nature of non-European societies and not conceive of them in such a monolithic and unchanging way. The reason for this, may have stemmed from the fact, that Marx’s extensive research on Russia (who he had previously classified as ‘semi-Asiatic’, see Shanin 1984), perhaps convinced him, that the idea of Asiatic Mode of Production was very faulty)
16 For example, Marx used ‘Oriental Despotism’ synonymously with ASM.
17 The Althusserian, Robert Paul Resch, articulates this best when he writes:

“... Marx and Engels rejected the possibility of ‘socialism in one country’. They understood that no economic system can outproduce capitalism because no conceivable system of coercion is capable of extorting as much surplus value from its workers or more effectively compelling its ruling class to expand and innovate. No social system, in short, is more ‘totalitarian’ than capitalism. Understanding the nature of capitalism, Marx and Engels understood that communism as a ‘local event’ – that is, socialism in one country – would be destroyed by its relative backwardness, by its ‘limiting effect on the universalization’ of the ‘intolerable powers of capital.’ The possibility of communism presupposes the development of capitalism as a global system whose class structure is truly international and homogeneous. Capitalism is a global process whereby ‘separate individuals … with the broadening of their activity into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them … a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance, turns out to be the world market.’” (Marx and Engels 1978, 163).

“... If capitalism is indeed a world-historical force and its development global rather than national, then its transformation must also be understood globally rather than nationally. Capitalism will disintegrate only when it has become general, when the ‘universal development of productive forces … produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the ‘propertyless’ mass (universal competition) [and] makes each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others.” (Marx and Engels 1978, 161-62). The contradictions of capitalism – the elimination of real scarcity by creating artificial scarcity, the integration and interdependence of social production by reproducing class inequalities of wealth and power, the development of productive technology by producing crises, dislocation, and suffering – become progressively more irrational and intolerable as capitalism eliminates its rivals and begins to collapse in on itself in an orgy of ‘creative destruction’ whose only real purpose will be the restoration of profitability for the ruling class. However, until it has subsumed completely every aspect of social existence in every region of global space, capitalism will always appear progressive and will always be able to resolve temporarily its contradictions by expansion as well as destruction.” (Resch 1992: Introductory Conclusion)

6 As Karl Korsch puts it so eloquently:

“... With Marx and Engels, as indeed with most writers on the field of social, historical, political thought, books have not only a history of their own, but those histories of books – their times and conditions of birth, their addressees, their very titles and their further adventures in new editions, translations, etc. – form an inseparable part of the history of the theories themselves. It is therefore, a deplorable fact that hitherto not only the bourgeois critics of the so-called ‘Marxian contradictions’ but even the most faithful adherents to Marx’s materialistic science should have quoted his diverse theoretical statements without reference to time, addressees, and other historical indices necessary for their materialistic interpretations.” (Korsch, 1964, orig. 1938, p.12)

19 “...H.C. Carey, the only American economist of importance, is a striking proof that civil society in the United States is as yet by no means mature enough to provide a clear and comprehensible picture of the class struggle.” (Marx in Perelman, 1987)

20 “He attacks Ricardo, the most classic representative of the bourgeoisie and the most stoical adversary of the proletariat as a man whose works are an arsenal for anarchists, Socialists and all enemies of the bourgeoisie system. He reproaches not only him but Malthus, Mill, Say, Torrens, Wakefield, McCulloch, Senior, Whately, R. Jones, and others, the leading economists of Europe, with rendering society asunder and preparing civil war because they show that the economic bases of the different classes are bound to give rise to a necessary and ever growing antagonism among them. He tried to refute them … by attempting to show that economic conditions: rent (landed property), profit (capital) and wages (wage labour), instead of being conditions of struggle and antagonism, are rather conditions of associations and harmony. All he proves, of course is that he taking the ‘underdeveloped’ conditions of the United States for ‘normal conditions’.” (Marx cited in Perelman 1987, p.14)

21 Perelman, 1987
22 Marx cited in Sayer and Corrigan, 1984, p.81
23 Mohri, 2000, orig. 1989, p.136
24 Mohri, 1989
25 Marx, 1867 cited in Mohri, 1989, p.138
26 This is very interesting because many Dependency theorists have criticized Marx for adopting a unilinear and progressive understanding of capitalism in the peripheries. For example, “Whatever its speed and whatever its zigzags, the general direction of the historical movement seems to have been the same for the backward echelons as for the forward contingents.” (Baran cited in Mohri, 1989, p.134)
27 Marx cited in Mohri, 1989, p.138
28 Perelman, 1987
29 Shanin, 1987, p.6
30 “... In a letter to Engels he was clearly delighted with ‘all that trash’, i.e. The Russian peasant communal structure ‘coming now to its end’” (Shanin, 1984)
Goldner, 1991 – this is perhaps the best introduction to the little known Italian left-communist Amadeo Bordiga in the English language.

Shain, 1984; Wada, 1984

Marx cited in Wada, 1984

Marx cited in Wada, 1984

Marx and Engels cited in Wada, 1984

Marx cited in Chattopadhyay, 2003

Jacque Camatte, ‘Decline of the Capitalist Mode of Production or Decline of Humanity?’, 1973

This is not to deny the existence of Marxists who continue to hold to the idea that capitalist development is a necessary stage to get to socialism. I’ve already mentioned a few of them throughout my essay, (i.e. Bill Warren, Robert Paul Resch). However, these figures are in a minority among Marxists. Alan Lipietz perhaps best captures my feelings to arguments associated with Warren and Resch – ‘Marx or Rostow?’ (Lipietz, 1982)

Aufheben, 1993

“In the battle between Lenin and the Populists in the 1890’s, the battle to introduce this truncated 2nd International ‘Marxism’ into Russia, the whole pre-1883 dimension of the Marxist analysis of the ‘Russian question’, unearthed by Bordiga, was totally lost in a productivist chorus. The linear, mechanistic affirmation of ‘progress’ that is the core of Enlightenment historical thought, which was taken over into a ‘stage’ theory of history by vulgar Marxism, has no feel for the Russian agrarian commune, as Marx did. The Gemeinwesen (material human community) telos of communism is suppressed for productivism.” (Goldner, 1991)

Goldner, 1991

I think it is important to recognize a discrepancy that can locate if one compares ‘What is False Consciousness?’ (WFC) with this paper. In WFC, I suggest a phenomenon of the ‘bureaucratization’ of the working class movement which accounts for the ‘betrayals of the working class’ that the Second International, SPD and other groups engaged in:

“After Marx died, an increasingly economistic interpretation of Marx started to predominate within the socialist movement. In essence, Marxism became a form of reformist economic determinism. According to this reformist tendency, by its laws of motion, capitalism was doomed to breakdown, and thus, reforms could accelerate its breakdown.” (Aufheben, 1993). They didn’t talk about the working class’s revolutionary potential. Rather, they tended to accept its potential as a given, but only when capitalism broke down. There was very little discussion of how the working class’s view of the social world affects the possibility of revolutionary struggle.

There were structural factors associated with this changing ideology. Increasingly, trade unions and left political parties were becoming bureaucratized. People at the top of these unions and parties did not want a revolution – rather they wanted to maintain their social privileges.

This helps explain why most of the European socialist parties supported WWI, despite the fact it involved mass slaughter of the working class. The leaders of the trade-unions and the socialist parties believed that opposing the war, would make them lose their status as relatively privileged individuals. In addition, because workers thought the socialist and trade union movement had their best interests in mind, they accepted the movement’s views. (ie their false consciousness).

(Student ID: #324597 yr: 2003)

The argument I outlined in WFC is derived from Weber, the Italian Elitist School of Sociology (eg Pareto, Michels, Mosca etc) and among Marxists, Lukacs. The argument I have developed in this paper, is somewhat different, suggesting that the official organs of the working class movement became something to complete the ‘capitalist revolution’, it was a ‘substitute bourgeois revolution’. It may be possible these two theories are compatible and thus can be integrated together, but I haven’t worked out how such a synthesis could occur. My current view is, is that the analysis I’ve provided in this paper is theoretically a lot stronger and more satisfying.

15. “As many people asked themselves after discovering the 1844 Manuscripts, the Grundrisse, the Hegelian ‘fingerprints’ in Capital, the Theses on Feuerbach”, Lukacs, Korsch, etc., how could the classical workers’ movement have been taken over by ‘vulgar Marxism’? Why does pre-Kantian materialism (i.e. materialism that, unlike Marx’s, has not passed through the dialogue with German idealism and Feuerbach) seem so similar to the 18th century materialism of the Anglo-French Enlightenment, i.e. the ideology of the bourgeois revolution? How does one arrive at a Marxist explanation of the historical hegemony of vulgar Marxism, since Marxism rejects out of hand the psychological/moralistic judgment that ‘they had the wrong ideas’? The answer did not seem so complicated: if the materialism of the classical workers’ movement centered in the SPD from 1860 to 1914, and extended by the Russian Revolution, was epistemologically little different from revolutionary materialism of a bourgeois character, it must be that the classical workers’ movement in Central and Eastern Europe was an extension of the bourgeois revolution. Placing oneself in the position of the admirers of the heroic early SPD, it is hard to think of any other explanation that makes sense. This is, after all, not so very far from Trotsky’s theory of combined and uneven development: where the bourgeoisie is weak and unable to take on the ancien régime, the task falls to the working class. (Trotsky’s effort was to believe that the working class was making the socialist revolution.) This ‘vulgar Marxian’ provided the ‘world view’ expressed in the popular pamphlets of the late Engels, and the writings of Bebel, Kautsky, William Liebknecht, the pre-revisionist Bernstein, and Plehanov – the grey eminences of the Second International, who educated Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It should never be forgotten that Lenin did not begin to see through Kautsky and the SPD ‘center’ of
orthodoxy until 1910-1912, and in 1914 could not believe the newspaper reports that the SPD had voted for war credits. He was that close to these influences. He wrote ‘Imperialism’ to explain the collapse of the SPD; Trotsky later added the ‘absence of revolutionary leadership’ to explain the defeat in Western Europe after the war. Raya Dunayevskaya’s portrait of Lenin rushing to the Zurich library in September 1914 to read Hegel’s Logic (35) to understand the debacle of the SPD may or may not be apocryphal; nevertheless, the ‘late Lenin’ had no impact on official Marxism after 1917, including in the Fourth International. (Goldner, 1991)

16. “This is not to say that there is no basis for this productivist discourse in Marx’s work; it is simply to say that the gulf that separates Marx from all 2nd, 3rd (and 4th) International Marxism is precisely that he is beyond ‘pre-Kantian’ materialism and way beyond ‘monopoly capital’ economics that both express a state civil service view of the world.” (Goldner, 1991)

44 Luxembourg, 1916
45 Lukacs, 1971, orig. 1923
46 Luxembourg, 1916

Marcuse is somewhat more optimistic about the possibility of radical social change in the late 60s, than either Adorno and Horkheimer (Adorno was so pessimistic about radical social change, that he retreated in aesthetics – seeing this as a site to keep alive a radical/critical world-view. Horkheimer retreated into religion) However, by the 1970s, he became somewhat more pessimistic (Bronner, 1994)

48 Bronner, 1994
49 Nick Dyer-Witheford perhaps captures this argument best, when he writes: “Strangely, in the era of that supposedly marked the triumph of the free market, the most technologically advanced medium for planet-wide communication was in fact created on the basis of state support, open usage and cooperative self-organisation. A proliferation of autonomous activity transformed a military-industrial network into a system that in many ways realises radical dreams of a democratic communication system: omni-purpose, multi-centred, with participants transmitting as well as receiving, near real-time dialogue, a highly devolved management structure [bold is mine] …” (Dyer-Witherford 1999: 249)
What Future for Socialism/ Communism?

Chris Marsh

Last century, perhaps until Thatcher’s era and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, socialism/communism was widely understood as the alternative to capitalism. Now socialism/communism is popularly regarded as having been tried and failed, as history not futurity. The ‘American Dream’ is supposed to be a (multicultural) classless society, so why look ahead to a time when ‘class society [will be] finally abolished’? An aging set of diehards try to keep socialist ideas going, for academic interest more than to engage in the political process, but younger generations of radicals are more engaged with alternative alternatives to capitalism:

- the merely ‘anti-’ movements and the World Social Forum with its mass international gatherings;
- the lifestylers, dropouts and sideliners, some of whom – as in the permaculture movement and the ecovillage network – are organised and have agreed goals, methodologies and ideologies, and – to the extent that they are ‘political’ – lean towards anarchism and social ecology rather than to socialism/communism; and
- lastly, as ever, there are lobby groups, reformers/reformists, and charities, lately grown like Topsy into a major sector of society, with NGOs and big campaigns fronted by A-List celebrities, bankrolled by billionaire philanthropists and by every shape and size of Fund and Trust. World-changing and do-goodery is an industry in the twenty-first century. No wonder socialism/communism is history.

Very occasionally, a spark of interest in socialist ideas in the mind of a young student flames into a passion. For a while he (usually) will raid the shelves of second-hand marxist literature, and seek enlightenment from old comrades holding forth in a pub or bookshop back room. There is evidently a romantic, wacky appeal in Reds and all that. And there is something else: a feeling, an urge, a desperation, a sense that all is not well, there has to be another way, and maybe we took the wrong road all those years ago. Sadly, though, the old comrades don’t have the answers, and the young enthusiast drifts off, perhaps to ‘Make Poverty History’ – or down some other road paved with good intentions.

What then do we have to offer, and what must we do – those of us who believe in socialism/communism – to get revolution back on the world agenda? In recent years we have stuck to the prediction/prescription whereby the class struggle will be resolved by the overthrow of the global class of capitalists by the global working class, to bring about a society where each person contributes to the common wealth according to his or her ability, and takes from it according to his or her self-determined needs. This desirable outcome is supposedly held back only by the global working class not realising its commonality of interest and potentially supreme power, so the job of socialists is to inform and educate the working class, and engender solidarity. One reason we fail in this role is our tendency to fall into factions espousing variations of the socialist case, so efforts are made towards solidarity through forming alliances. In Britain in recent years this manifested as the ‘Socialist Alliance’, but that fell apart again because of disagreements between one much larger group – the Socialist Workers Party – and the others (together making up some 46% of the whole) who were always out-voted. (Like mainstream society, socialists fetishise ‘democracy’ as ‘the majority of those who get to vote get to decide’). What is left today after that fiasco is a patchily active Party called ‘Respect’ (led by the SWP and fronted by George Galloway, who is proudly paraded as Respect’s first Member of Parliament) and a smattering of disgruntled individual socialists and tiny leftie groups, some still hoping to re-launch the Socialist Alliance in the autumn of 2005.
Is forming alliances not the way then? Will individual socialist parties only attract support and votes if fronted by a charismatic leader? Do the compromises that have to be made on procedure or policy make this strategy a waste of time?

In March 2005, a ‘Socialist Unity Conference’ was held on behalf of the 46% against the decision to close the SA in favour of Respect. The Report of the event conveys its sponsors’ scrupulously ‘democratic’ conference conduct, and outlines their policy under the headings ‘Socialism’, ‘Republicanism’, ‘Internationalism’ and ‘Environmentalism’. The Manifesto of the original Socialist Alliance is still available on an obsolete web site, and incorporates a whole wish list full of good intentions, impossible to achieve (or render obsolete) ahead of fundamental revolution. An alliance of socialists may perhaps be excused for compiling so ‘reformist’ a document on the grounds that it was put together for SA candidates standing in local government elections. Galloway’s Respect Party seems to have inherited much of the same material about ending the occupation of Iraq and raising the minimum wage etc., and has a similar excuse. Their Constitution says this:

Our overall aim is to help create a socially just and ecologically sustainable society[,] a society in which social justice is defined as incorporating: the organisation of society in the most open, participative, and accountable way practicable based on common ownership and democratic control; the maximum freedom for the individual commensurate with the freedom of others; the fight against, and ultimate abolition of, racism, sexism and all forms of discrimination on grounds of religion, disability, age or sexual identity; the ultimate abolition of all forms of economic exploitation and social oppression; the promotion of peace and a system of justice which gives defence from tyranny, prejudice and the abuse of power; [and] the promotion of social, economic and cultural structures which are ecologically sustainable and supportive to global ecosystems.

That passage can be read as a socialist agenda, but Respect literature is predominantly reformist, and membership is open to anyone generally sympathetic to the Party’s aims. It must be uncertain how long the patchy support Respect enjoys will last, especially if George Galloway moves on or its special appeal to Asian communities wanes.

What can socialists/ communists learn from this failed attempt at alliance building? How can we avoid a similar debacle in future? First of all, clearly, we need to do some work on what makes genuine participatory democracy. Secondly, we must avoid the trap of trying to exploit upsurges of popular protest. The current ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign is such a trap waiting for us to fall into. One World-in-Commoner returned from the big G8 demo in Edinburgh with this message: ‘It’s easy to dismiss the motives and politics of the vast majority of marchers as reformist, pro-fair-trade etc. but it was encouraging to see so many from diverse groups and nations who oppose poverty and want something done about it. I think any movement towards socialism/communism will need to embrace inclusiveness and diversity while maintaining a principled opposition against reformism.’ (My italics) But this is teetering on the brink of another bandwagon ‘trap’ like the one Respect fell into. A group determined on turning the G8 demo into a ‘Carnival for Full Enjoyment’ had this to say: ‘Since the G8 last met in the UK in 1998, we’ve seen more social cuts, privatisation and compulsory work schemes in Europe and beyond. This is part of a continuing enclosure of resources and means of living — such as water, land and housing — around the world. Now the G8 bosses meeting in Gleneagles claim to address concerns about climate chaos and world poverty. But they really aim to strengthen the system at the root of these conditions, and to find more efficient ways of managing, exploiting and enclosing us. We can only stop it by abolishing a profit-based economy; by dismantling the states and borders that divide us.’

insight, socialism/ communism can be reclaimed as *the* alternative to capitalism, but with a different – and much more radical – agenda from the old marxist prediction/prescription.

The new agenda involves ‘unlearning our learning’9. Rather than constantly looking back to marxist literature that is from fifty to over one hundred and fifty years old, we must be prepared to look ahead, stop being coy about what a socialist future would be like, and make alliances with people who are sidelining capitalism now. We should give up on the notion that capitalism is a necessary stage in a process leading to a socialist society. In fact human survival is uncertain due to over-exploitation of the land we depend on for everything – a crisis that has crept up on us due to alienation from the land from long before the capitalist era. Land degradation is a huge subject and I will not attempt even to define it here, but there are texts available.10 It is the issue of climate change which is the hot topic at the G8, and the Editorial in the latest issue of *Permaculture Magazine* included this grim summary:

The British Antarctic Survey reports that the West Antarctic icesheet is melting. If it collapses the sea levels could rise more than 16 feet. Both London and Bangladesh will be drowned. Meanwhile, American scientists now predict that the likelihood of the Gulf Stream ‘pump’ switching off due to excessive meltwater in the Arctic is greater than 50%. And the glaciers in the Himalayas that ensure the annual flow for the river systems of the Indian subcontinent and SE Asia are retreating. Without the irrigation they provide, 1 billion people will be displaced. Then there are the matters of CO₂ dissolving in the oceans, acidifying the seas and making them virtually uninhabitable; a 1°C rise in temperature making tropical rainforests unviable; and a 1-2°C rise making trout disappear from the Rockies. Even if we stopped all emissions now there is still likely to be a 0.6°C rise because the effects of climate change happen over decades, not years. The grimmest prediction is that there will be a 90% die off of the global human population.11

Capitalism – for reasons well understood by socialists – will not be deterred by concerns about pollution. However, it may have to respond to the twin concern of ‘Oil Peak’, and in his book on this12, Matt Savinar points to the US ‘descent into fascism’, and says the US government will ‘go to war to get oil and kill anyone who gets in the way.’ That sounds bad enough, but Savinar goes on to explore possible alternatives to oil and says why they cannot stem off the inevitable:

… even ‘free energy’ – were it a reality – would not change the fundamental issue that humans are up against: the earth has a carrying capacity, and we have used up the super-abundant resource, oil, over the last 150 years to systematically deplete virtually every other resource: top soil, fresh water, forests, biodiversity and minerals. This is why we will not just be quietly slipping back to the 1700s but will be more likely to go straight back to the Stone Age. For example, pre-industrial societies mined copper from ores with 30-50% metal. Nowadays, a typical copper mine averages less than 0.8% copper which can only be extracted using large amounts of energy. No oil, no copper and no anything else that we take for granted in the modern world.13

Twenty years ago one could argue that climate change – then called the Greenhouse Effect – could be averted by addressing land degradation. Land regenerated after millennia of over-exploitation to feed urban populations14 and planted with trees, would thrive on the newly released carbon dioxide. I spent the 1980s arguing against the ‘pollution’ bias in the British environmental movement: toxic waste, nuclear waste, acid rain, CFCs etc., with only two concerns relating to land use: saving the tropical forests and conserving the pretty bits of the British countryside. At that time, even environmentalists were alienated from the land and oblivious to land use concerns. Today there is more awareness, particularly of the desirability of buying local food, not just because it is more
nutritious, but also to support local growers and save ‘food miles’ and packaging. The idea of planting trees to mop up CO2 is still current\textsuperscript{15}, but few people believe that is the solution to climate change, and of course the oil peak scenario must mean that the remaining oil should be conserved for chemical products, not burned.

I mentioned earlier the need for socialists/communists to ‘unlearn our learning’, which requires an honest appraisal of the precious marxist canon, and being prepared to discard what is obsolete. For instance, socialism was not conceived by Marx as a rescue package for a dying and depleted planet; his enthusiastic predictions depended on the ‘massive … productive forces’ achieved under capitalism, whose social relations would become fetters, so that – following the pattern of earlier transitions – socialism would burst forth\textsuperscript{16}. Marxists have seen social change as a linear progression:

Capitalism has not existed for all time but is the outcome of a process of social evolution. Starting with primitive communism in which property was held in common, followed in turn by the kind of society known in Greece and Rome, based on production by chattel slave labour, and by Feudal society out of which capitalism grew. In each of the societies after primitive communism there has been exploitation of one class by another but the form of exploitation has changed. The feudal serf was not ‘owned’ as the chattel slave had been, but he was tied to the land of the manorial lord and under obligation to give unpaid labour on the lord’s land while free to maintain himself by his labour on land under his control. … The evolution of property society reaches its limit with the advent of capitalism. The establishment of Socialism and with it the end of exploitation is the beginning of a new era in the history of mankind. The working class will therefore be the last exploited class to achieve its emancipation.\textsuperscript{17}

This simplistic European Marxist prediction/prescription results in a bizarre collusion between socialists/communists and the capitalist system they deplore, because capitalism is accepted as a necessary stage on the way to a socialist society. So whilst we dismiss the aims of Make Poverty History as reformist, we have no radical position to take against the G8 development project in Africa.

The aims of Make Poverty History are: ‘trade justice, debt cancellation, and more and better aid for the world’s poorest countries’.\textsuperscript{18} ‘Trade justice’ is seen as the primary aim, and the most demanding and contentious. It is based on the premise that the people of Africa are poor because their countries are ‘underdeveloped’, and all will be well if the rich countries concede to them fair trade in their cash crops, raw materials and manufactures. Bob Geldof has been fronting a TV programme on Africa, and (not being a regular viewer) I happened on the first of these in which he showed a part of Africa – I think in Tanzania – where people were living sustainably and happily in small hamlets – tiny social groups – in amongst their food-growing gardens. But these people are being resettled because their old land is being expropriated for cash crops. Geldof interviewed one of the recently resettled people, who said they couldn’t get on harmoniously in the new large communities and the poorer patches of land they have been given are some distance from the settlement and in the rainy season cannot be reached due to mud.\textsuperscript{19} Intrigued by this confirmation of my long-held antipathy to so-called development, I searched on the web for something more authoritative, and found Chapter 8 of an e-text of \textit{African Agriculture: The Critical Choices}.\textsuperscript{20} The author, Henry Mapolu, describes the same process as in the Geldof programme taking place from the colonial period to the 1980s. Mapolu relates how the people resist resettlement and cash cropping, and resume subsistence farming in the old way, which may be why the process of resettlement is never complete and still goes on.
Enforced resettlement – often described in and labelled with different terms – has been a crucial aspect of human history, but it has happened patchily, sporadically and out of sight. The more modern history books and various political texts make occasional references to complex rural systems disrupted despite resistance. A thousand years ago, in the Anglo-Saxon period, much of Britain was a patchwork of hamlets with their own gardens, open-field strips and pastures, before the Norman conquest brought in feudalism, and later there were further disruptions with the Enclosures and Clearances. In 1853 Marx writes of an ‘Indian society [with] no history … but the history of successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.’ These rulers operated hands-off systems of exploitation management whereby they creamed off surpluses but left the ‘fabric of traditional rural independence alone’, a practice which the British disrupted by instituting formal deeds to land. In his article, Marx writes of England’s ‘double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerative—the annihilation of the old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.’ Marx’s conclusion is worth quoting in full:

The devastating effects of English industry, when contemplated with regard to India, a country as vast as Europe, and containing 150 millions of acres, are palpable and confounding. But we must not forget that they are only the organic results of the whole system of production as it is now constituted. That production rests on the supreme rule of capital. The centralization of capital is essential to the existence of capital as an independent power. The destructive influence of that centralization upon the markets of the world does but reveal, in the most gigantic dimensions, the inherent organic laws of political economy now at work in every civilized town. The bourgeois period of history has to create the material basis of the new world—on the one hand the universal intercourse founded upon the mutual dependency of mankind, and the means of that intercourse; on the other hand the development of the productive powers of man and the transformation of material production into a scientific domination of natural agencies. Bourgeois industry and commerce create these material conditions of a new world in the same way as geological revolutions have created the surface of the earth. When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples, then only will human progress cease to resemble that hideous pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain.

That process is taking a long time to work its way through the world, partly due to resistance to resettlement, but also due to former colonies being deliberately underdeveloped. India today is certainly becoming more urban, but 70% still live in rural villages, 90% of which have a population of less than 2000, into which business is managing to make some inroads. Gramsci’s ‘Theory of Subordination and Hegemony’ shows that he followed Marx in seeing it as necessary for the peasant societies of Southern Italy to be disrupted and dislocated, through war if necessary, in order to bring them into solidarity with the working class of the industrialised North. But wresting the land from the peasants, and the alienation from the land of urban populations (in Britain’s so-called villages and towns, as well as in cities proper), has allowed land degradation worldwide to spread and worsen largely unobserved and ignored except by specialists. And land degradation – exacerbated by climate change and oil peak – renders capitalism unsustainable and a new world founded on its achievements an impossible dream.

My aim in this article has been to begin to wean socialists/ communists off the old Marxist prediction/prescription, in order that we may again become the alternative to capitalism. Questioning the prediction/prescription is the first stage – and I have suggested that this requires that we ‘unlearn our learning’. Next I have suggested that we align ourselves to other radical world
changers, rather than get on populist bandwagons or make reformist compromises that perpetuate the collusion with capitalism that the social evolution model got us into. The permaculture movement and the global ecovillages network, in particular, are actually more radical than socialists/communists because they are addressing the most serious threat to life on earth: land degradation, and they are putting their principles, theory and expertise into practice all around the world. A little exploration of how far these initiatives have progressed will show that they need to get political if the land use revolution is to move fast enough to avert the looming crisis. And there will come a time when their progress is perceived as threatening to capitalist vested interests, and campaigning for mass support will be essential. Socialists/communists have nothing to lose but our obsolete theory. We have a world to win.

   http://www.growbio-intensive.org/biointensive/soil.html
   http://www.uea.ac.uk/dev/faculty/stocking/ldd_paper.pdf
14. The book which first showed me that organic farming would not solve all the problems associated with post-WWII industrial agriculture was: Vernon Gill Carter and Tom Dale, *Topsoil and Civilization* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974)
15. According to this web site: http://www.americanforests.org/resources/ccc/, you have to plant one new tree per 300 kg of CO2, assuming the tree absorbs 0.9 tons in 40 years.
   http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu28ae/uu28ae00.htm#8.%20tanzania.%20imperialism.%20the.%20state%20and%20the%20peasantry [accessed 4 July 2005]
24 Marx, pp.332-6

Reviewed by *Torgun Bullen*

Simon Baron-Cohen is Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge in the Departments of Experimental Psychology and Psychiatry. He is also Co-director of the Autism Research Centre (ARC) in Cambridge and Director of CLASS, the Cambridge Lifespan Asperger Syndrome Service. *The Essential Difference* is a book written as a result of his interest in and research into autism. Autism is a spectrum of neurological ‘disorders’ (many prefer to call them neurological variations), which range from a mildly affected diagnosis of ‘Asperger Syndrome’ or ‘High-Functioning Autism’ to ‘Classic Autism’ at the other end of the spectrum.

The behavioural characteristics associated with autism are:

- significant difficulties with social interactions
- significant difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication
- significant difficulties in the development of play (no imaginative play)
- highly restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour and interests
- highly resistant to even slight changes in routines

There are many more males with a diagnosis of autism than females. For example, the National Autistic Society cites ratios of 4:1 (a Swedish study in 1993) and 3:1 (the ratio of male to female clients in NAS adult services).

Baron-Cohen states the theory of his book in the opening paragraph:

The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.

Briefly, he defines the concepts as follows: ‘Empathizing is the drive to identify another person’s emotions and thoughts, and to respond to them with an appropriate emotion.’ ‘Systemizing is the drive to analyse, explore and construct a system.’

Baron-Cohen essentially believes that autism is behaviour associated with ‘the extreme male brain’.

Because of the political sensitivity of the subject, Baron-Cohen hesitated for many years before writing the book. It is easy to see that a theory such as this could be used by extreme right-wingers to further their notion that women are less able than men. For socialists and feminists, perhaps his theories do not make for very comfortable reading. However, observing the typical interests and behaviour of men and women in society, I cannot but wonder whether these differences can all be accounted for as purely the result of upbringing.

Why can nearly all men with a home computer quote the relevant numbers about the size of its memory and hard drive, the speed of the chip and all the other hardware details – and most women who own computers just have not bothered to take note? ‘It works, it does what I want it to do’, seems to be the attitude of most women and they leave it at that. A very competent female computer programmer I knew (with a first degree in computer science) did not know the specifications of her home computer. How many women do you know with gadget mania? How many men? Virtually all the men in the office where I work are obsessed with gadgets. They come in with the latest hand-held devices that do god-knows-what, the more buttons, the better – the faster, the better; the more intricate, the better.

Baron-Cohen is at pains to point out that he is not a ‘male supremacist’. He emphasises that there is range of these behaviours; that they overlap to a great degree; that most men and women fall within the broad overlap in the middle, where they are all more or less equally good at empathising and systemising. He quotes very eminent female scientists that he works with and gives them credit for their achievements. He is in favour of encouraging women into the sciences and states the need for us all to consider the individual first and foremost, and what that individual can achieve in life. He stresses that he is only speaking of statistical averages, that there will be women out there with ‘typical male brains’ and men with ‘typical female brains’.

His interest kicks in at the extremes of the abilities, particularly ‘the extreme male brain’. Whether ‘the extreme female brain’ exists is still a subject for research, he says. Most mathematical geniuses are men. Most fanatical collectors are men – the object of the collecting being to construct a system for the collection and to complete it. Men like keeping lists, ordering lists, ticking things off their lists. Take bird watchers, for example, or men interested in the football league tables, or philatelists. These interests are virtually all male interests.

People with Asperger syndrome are often exceptionally gifted, in one narrow area, which can absorb all their energies. This is nearly always on the mathematics or science side of things, hardly ever do they get involved with anything involving the creative use of language or areas requiring good imagination or social skills.

Baron-Cohen argues that social interaction is very complex, with inputs coming from all directions simultaneously and that the ‘rules’ (if there are rules) are constantly changing. Systemizing is more rigidly rule-based, whereas ‘the rules’ in empathizing keep changing:

Consider the rule ‘if people get what they want, they will be happy’. Say that you followed the rule and gave Hannah what she said she wanted for her birthday; why is she still not happy? Systemizing just cannot get a foothold into things like a person’s fluctuating feelings.
People on the autistic spectrum have great difficulty with the changing ‘rules’ of social interaction. A typical example quoted in the book is a professor of mathematics at Cambridge diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, doing research into extremely difficult mathematics – but unable to conduct simple conversations on the telephone because he has no concept of polite chit-chat. Social niceties is unknown territory to him; for example, when guests visit him and his family at home, he may suddenly and unannounced disappear into a room to sit and read on his own.

Baron-Cohen discusses evidence for greater empathy in girls from studies made into the play and behaviour of children. In a chapter discussing the difference between the way boys and girls play, he concludes:

> On average, boys produce much more antagonistic behaviour, and shockingly, you can see these differences from as early as two years old. As we saw earlier, little boys also tend to have more trouble learning to share toys. In one study, young boys showed fifty times more competition, while girls showed twenty times more turn-taking. These are everyday examples of large sex differences in empathizing.

In order to infer what another person might be thinking or feeling, you need a ‘Theory of Mind’. Baron-Cohen says that “A number of studies suggest that by the age of three young girls are already ahead of boys in their ability to infer what people might be thinking or intending – that is, in using a ‘theory of mind’.”

When people are diagnosed for autism, it usually involves a ‘theory of mind’ test. For a young child, it may typically go as follows:

The person conducting the test, the child and a third person are in the room. A toy is put away in a toy chest, in full view of everyone in the room. The third person leaves the room. The conductor of the test takes the toy out of the chest and puts it behind some books on a bookshelf. The third person enters the room again. If an autistic child is asked where the person who has just re-entered the room thinks the toy is, he or she will usually answer: ‘On the bookshelf.’ Although this is just a simple test, it illustrates the fact that for severely autistic people, it is impossible to imagine what another person’s experiences and feelings mount up to. They think everyone else’s picture of the world is the same as their own.

People with classic autism more often than not have very little or no speech. Those diagnosed with high-functioning autism can have good or seemingly ‘normal’ speech, but in most cases developed their speech late as toddlers. Even extremely bright and able people with Asperger’s syndrome sometimes have very stilted or odd speech. Baron-Cohen puts forward the theory that the greater female ability to communicate ties in with their relative superiority at using language. About sex differences in the use of language, he says the following:
On average, women produce more words in a given period, fewer speech errors (such as using the wrong word) and perform better in the ability to discriminate speech sounds (such as consonants and vowels) than do men. Their average sentences are also longer, and their utterances show standard grammatical structure and correct pronunciation more often. They also find it easier to articulate words, and do this faster than men. Women can also recall words more easily. Most men have more pauses in their speech. And at the clinical level of severity, males are at least two times more likely to develop language disorders, such as stuttering.

Baron-Cohen puts the sex differences in systemizing and empathizing ability down to social as well as biological factors. If some of these factors are biologically determined, the next question to answer is why evolution favoured different abilities in men and women. He goes on to suggest possible answers to this question.

The important thing to bear in mind in reading this book, is that Baron-Cohen’s theory only generalises about men's and women’s varying abilities. Of course there are men with very good empathizing abilities and also many brilliant female scientists. The fact that he points out that there is a trend or a tendency in abilities and interests for either sex, does not mean that he therefore wants to exclude either sex from entering any field of study.

Of what interest is all of this to socialists? I think it is interesting for a number of reasons. For many years, most of the socialist movement adhered to something very close to a ‘blank sheet’ theory of human behaviour. When we were born, as males or females, all of our subsequent behaviour would be determined by society, none of it would be shaped by the genetic component – so the theory went. This is quite clearly wrong. Of course the environment is very important, but so are our genes. As socialists, our fear of the label ‘genetic determinism’ is so strong that I am concerned that we sometimes ignore recent important research – such as the research currently being conducted into autism.

I am coming to the conclusion that, in general (again, I emphasise, ‘in general’), women provide the social ‘glue’ that makes our communities and homes pleasant places to be in. It is a contribution that is woefully underestimated in our society, but one that should be celebrated and emphasised in our efforts to bring about a revolution. If we want to grow our movement, a competitive, ‘fight-club’ type of environment is not going to be attractive to most women (or to a lot of men, for that matter).

There is not going to be uniform behaviour in socialism. Behaviour will be shaped by the environment but also by a genetic component (like, in all probability, autism). Because our behaviour will vary, there will also in all likelihood be some anti-social behaviour that we will need to keep in check by a system of ‘rules’ or ‘socialist law’.

For a fuller explanation of the theories behind *The Essential Difference* it is a good idea to also read *Mindblindness* by Simon Baron-Cohen. A short summary of it follows.
Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and the Theory of Mind
Simon Baron-Cohen

Normal humans everywhere not only ‘paint’ their world with colour, they also ‘paint’ beliefs, intensions, feelings, hopes, desires, and pretences onto agents in their social world …. A growing society of cognitive scientists has concluded that humans everywhere interpret the behaviour of others in these mentalistic terms because we all come equipped with a ‘theory of mind’ module (ToMM) that is compelled to interpret others this way, with mentalistic terms as its native language. We are ‘mindreaders’ by nature, building interpretations of the mental events of others and feeling our constructions as sharply as the physical objects we touch.

So say John Tooby and Leda Cosmides in their Foreword to this book. In it Baron-Cohen develops his interpretation of the mental modules necessary to play ‘social chess’ – to be able to put oneself in the place of somebody else, to make reasonable guesses as to their mental states and to take action accordingly.

‘Neurotypical’ people are able to use these modules to good effect, to show empathy and understanding of others when needed, to join a new social group or conversation without too many problems, to share jokes and witticisms, to understand sarcasm. Sometimes the ability to understand quickly the intention of others can save one’s life.

Autistic people find these social situations most of us take for granted a struggle and a constant puzzle. Although many understand and make jokes, most things are taken seriously and literally. They are vulnerable to people out to cheat and deceive, as they do not pick up the signs.

Baron-Cohen groups the modules necessary for a full range of mental state concepts into four (a brief summing up):

The Intentionality Detector (ID)

The ability to predict the movement of an animal (or human) in terms of where it is going and what its goal is – then possibly take avoiding actions.

The Eye-Direction Detector (EDD)

The importance of eyes to animals – the EDD’s function is firstly; to detect the presence of eyes, and secondly, to detect the direction of the eyes. (What is the object of interest?)

The Shared Attention Mechanism (SAM)

This is the ability to confirm that the other animal and the Self are both interested in a third object.
The Theory-of-Mind Mechanism (ToMM)

This is a system for inferring the full range of mental states from behaviour and for turning all mentalistic knowledge from all modules into a useful theory. For example, it is capable of understanding pretence, ‘… a host of studies show that around the age of 18-24 months human toddlers begin to pretend and recognize the pretending of others, and this seems to mark a qualitative change in their play.’

Mindblindness explores why mind reading is an evolutionary advantage, discusses whether our nearest relatives, the chimpanzees and the apes, have a TOMM and explains why Baron-Cohen and his research team believe that autism is caused by having a TOMM which does not function ‘normally’.

The book has a long and interesting chapter on ‘The Language of the Eyes’, discussing the vast range of emotions we are able to convey with our expressions in and around our eyes. He lists an impressive English vocabulary for describing the meanings the eyes can convey and quotes poetry, like the following passage from Ralph Waldo Emerson in ‘Conduct of Life: 5. Behavior’:

An eye can threaten like a loaded and levelled gun, or can insult like hissing or kicking; or, in its altered mood, by beams of kindness, it can make the heart dance with joy.