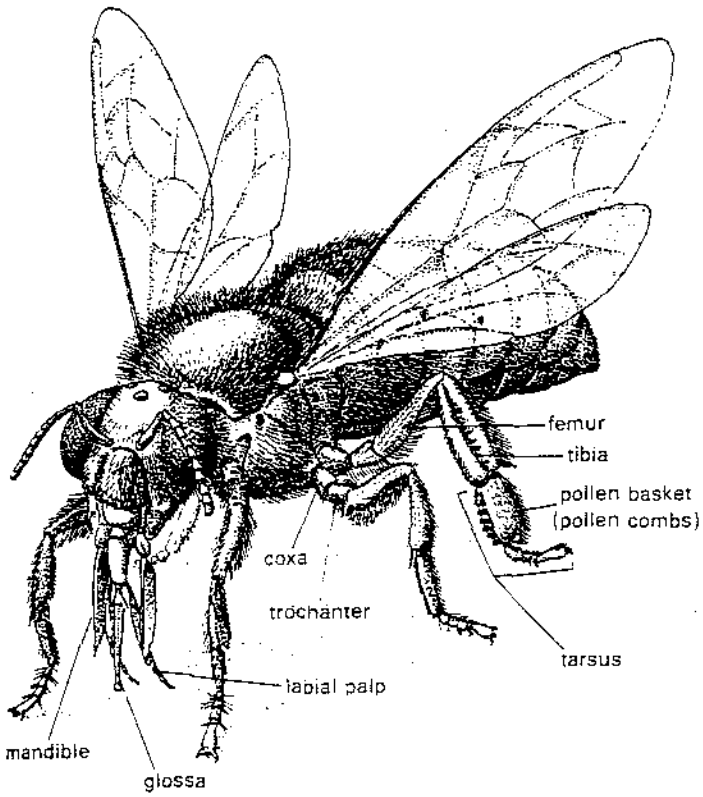
COMMUNIST HEADACHE



Apis mellifera (worker)

NOTES FOR WORKING AND LIVING : Vol 1.

COMMUNIST HEADACHE

NOTES FOR WORKING AND LIVING VOL. 1

AUTUMN 1995.

CONTENTS:

Our notes for working and living represent our efforts to develop a radical methodology for examining this society, and our own observations and recommendations when we apply this methodology to various aspects of the capitalist system.
We are only a small group, and have put out these first three volumes in a hope to engage in some critical debate and to further the revolutionary cause. Communist Headache does not exist as some formal organisation. If we manage to stir some revolutionaries from their various slumbers then we will consider this intial stage as successful. Needless to say we offer no blueprints and our analyses are far from flawless.

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New Struggles in an Old Framework?

(Background - A discussion on animal rights was suggested as a possible workshop at the Northern Anarchist Network conference. We felt that these discussions were often not that, particularly as animal rights is the single issue supreme in the anarchist milieu. Whilst animal rights has been enjoying a raised profile with blockaded ferries, incinerated dairies and heroic martyrs I didnt want to solely discuss animal rights or single issues, but I wanted to consider the wider context of these new struggles in terms of a possible framework that can understand the demands of these new struggles and understand their emergence as single issues.)

1.Some aims

To consider these new struggles we must assume that there is something that is old, and that these old struggles are either less frequent or approaching extinction. This is often the favourable opinion.

What I am interested in is charting a history of the old struggle - which is the struggle at the point of production involving the capital/labour relationship - perhaps best described as the class struggle in the marxist framework. There is also a tradition of defending this old style struggle, not least because it forms the backbone of much of the lefts ideas - this line of thinking then goes on to presume that these new struggles are anything but class struggles, that they originate from a sensationalist media quite happy to see the end of industrial unrest and that they end in enhanced egos and good careers for those involved. This is often the case.

I intend to investigate a path between these two polarized ideas.

2. A method.

Marxism arose from what Marx actually saw happening 150 years ago. It has been used in many different ways to interpret what we should be struggling for, while there has been little attention actually paid to how society has adjusted to this proposed struggle, and how class has been restructured.

If we use the principle of interpreting what we see today in an objective fashion to base our ideas on how struggles will develop then we are faced with problems. An examination of who gets what from the system is often obscured by a particular aspect of the system that strikes a disagreeable chord. The fact that the terrain of struggle is still the production process suggests that the marxist framework can still be considered - there is not a new class of enemy identified as JCB operators and counter staff at McDonalds or Boots. But rooted in this method is the fact that Marx predicted and we are faced with the reality. First we need to examine Marx.

3. Some Definitions

First we can define 'new'. What is meant by these new struggles? We could pick examples such as road protests, animal welfare, forms of policing particularly regarding our rights to entertainment, radical environmentalism, etc. These are things we either feel we should get involved in, or see a good deal of working class comrades getting involved in. The more we cling to a simplified theory of class (and class division) the more we see the middle class enjoying an uncriticised involvement (esp. a leadership role) in such struggles. And the more we see the working class dividing over these issues.

There is often a situation of the immoveable object meeting the irresistable force - with our interpretations of class (and our assumptions of how it can be interpreted) as the immoveable object and the reality of everyday life as the irresistable force.

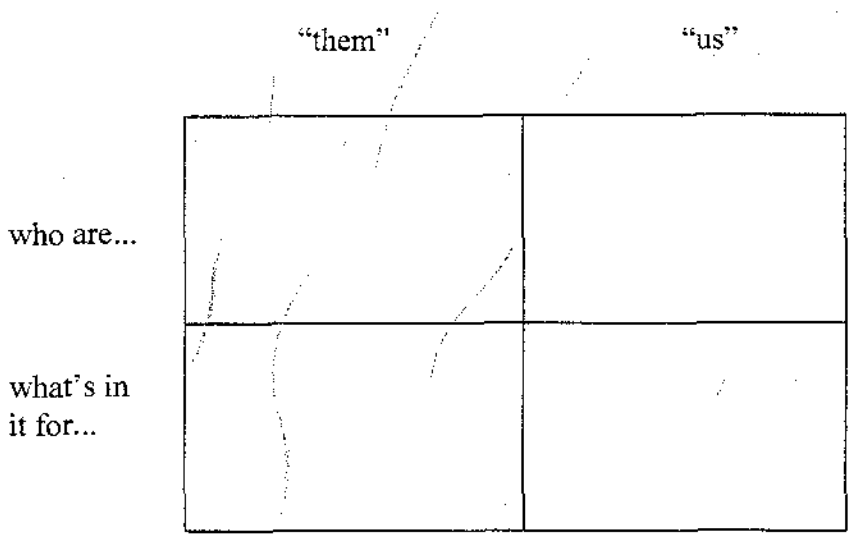
There is some reconsideration occuring, even down amongst the diehard orthodox marxists like the CWO. Whilst all anarchists arent class struggle anarchists I will address this discussion at those anarchists who still see the class struggle as the prime mover towards communism.

In terms of 'struggle' I would suggest something that is irresolvable, identifying something that unites those in struggle and so identifying a common enemy. With such identifications made we can consider the dynamic of the struggle.

4. Old Struggles - Marxisms history.

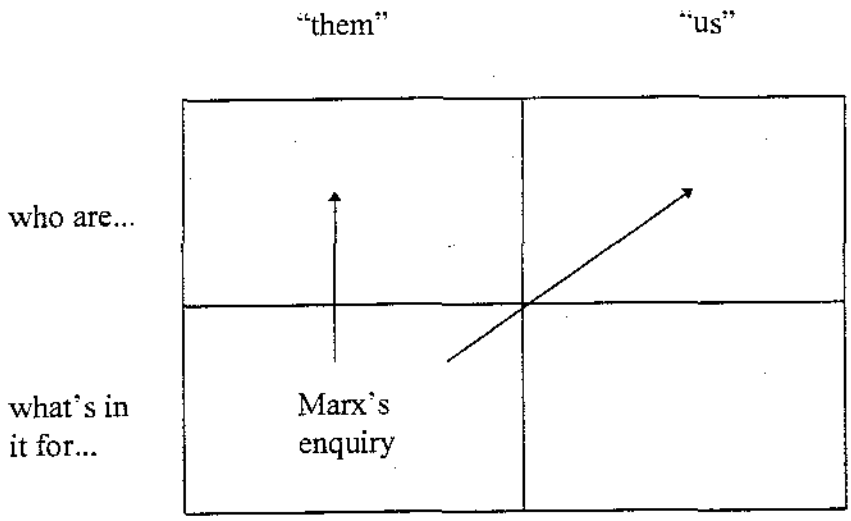
We can begin with Marx himself - We need to understand what Marx saw and what he chose to interpret, then we can begin to unravel how that has changed. Marx was witness to the devlopment of the factory system and the birth of the industrial proletariat. This was a supremely important moment in the history of civilization and Marx prioritsed what he chose to interpret. Though he argues that he was writing a critique of political economy, this critique existed in a wider framework of the birth of a possible new formulation of struggle that was important to a radical like Marx. If we consider the struggle as between 2 poles then we can ask the following questions:

diagram 1 : A framework for enquiring about a struggle.



Marx was obsessed with mechanisms of capitalism - and so was concerned with the question of what is capitalism in terms of whats in it for 'them'.

diagram 2 : The Marxist analysis.



What is capitalism in terms of how does it benefit "them"

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Which then determines capitalists and proletarians

↓

Which then determines the divsion accross means of production

As for the who are 'them' and 'us' then this question answered itself - in that the system pivoted around the means of production, where the 'them' were firmly identified as the factory owners, and consequently the 'us' were firmly identified as the industrial wage slaves.

(i) The first iteration.

This is better known as the marxism in the service of Mao, Trotsky, Lenin, etc. That Marx chose to analyse the mechanisms of capitalism made marxism synonomous with the struggle within the mechanisms of capital itself. This can be considered as the battle for capitalism instead of the battle against capitalism - where we are promised kinder, gentler managers of capitalism such as the SWP. This goes part way to explaining their obsession with top company bosses who regularly quadruple their salaries. The idea that the problem is exchange itself is heretical to trots, who take it upon themselves to wrestle at the chains of the battle for capitalism whilst deciding that your average proletarian cannot form anything more than a trade union consciousness. According to our potential saviours we are trapped in the mechanisms of capital and will only be saved when our new leaders take control to allow us to slave away for the good of the economy whilst they promise not to quadruple their salaries.

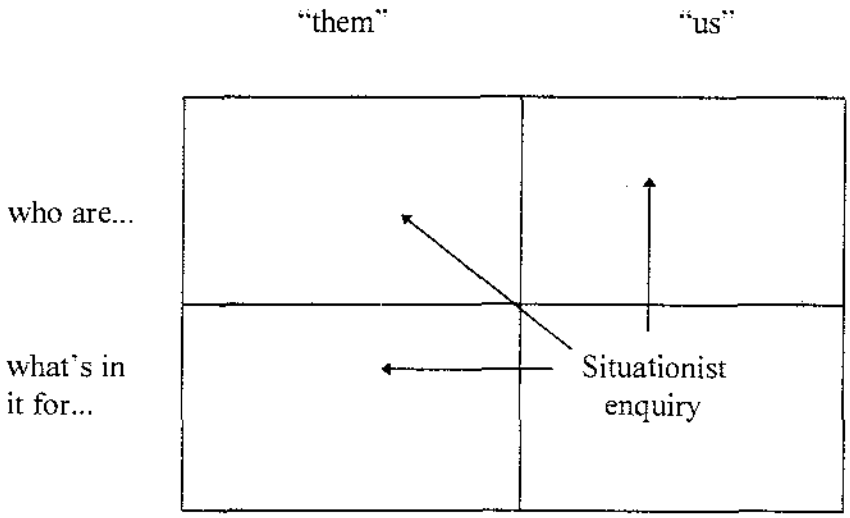
(ii) The second iteration.

As well as choosing to interpret capitalist economics Marx chose to extrapolate his interpretations further in time and so predicted the inevitable crisis of capitalism. This partly explained his slack attitude to the ecology movement. The virus that would destroy capitalism is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall - and this virus grows in the heart of capitalism pushed along by our sporadic struggles. That such an extrapolation may make perfect mathematical sense is nothing, those that still hold faith in crisis theory fail to realise how capitalism has attempted to circumvent this crisis. If groups like the CWO were willing to entertain such an idea then they might understand the new struggles a little better.

(iii) The third iteration.

It was in the 1950's that the question was posed from the other side:

diagram 3 : The Situationist analysis.



The 'Reversal of Perspective' - a negative energy

What is proletarianisation?

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How does capital affect us?

↓

Which then determines the assault on capitalism

By now capitalism had developed into a system where the ability to make surplus value had become an epidemic (as indeed Marx predicyed), and we had seen new organisations of labour represented by scientific management (eg Taylorism) and the perpetual re-creation of needs to be satisfied. It was a world of advertising, images, surveillence and the promotion of lifestyle.

Situationism asked the question "what is proletarianisation", but their answer lead to the formulation of the spectacle - a gross interpretation of a sick society where the options were "to die of starvation or to die of boredom". Seeing an intrinsically bureaucratic society with a workplace based on hierarchy upon hierarchy of paper shufflers the situationists saw the problems of taking their analysis of the subjective conditions of capitalism into the framework for the new struggle. While it would be implausible to consider a division between those dying of boredom and those not, the message can be taken in the spirit of recognising the theft of our creative abilities and forcing a reappearance of the crucial division accross the means of production. The situationists saw the resolution of this in councilist theory.

(iv) The fourth iteration

The autonomist movement emerged with a renewed interest in Marx - both in terms of the book he never wrote on wage labour and in terms of retracing what he did write through the history of the 20th century. Their central argument places an emphasis on our wage labour such that capitalism must adopt to our struggles and demands because capital will always need our labour. And so if we think of the power of our labour first and foremost then we can see that our labour represents the whole sphere of our lives - and capitals struggle is to keep this labour in its service.

This formulation of worker action - capital reaction avoids the pitfalls of subjective pessimism as adopted by the followers of the situationists, but there comes a time when capital reaction contains an element of predicting, controlling and nullifying our next action. It is this that can best explain the structure of our society, and best explain the new struggles.

(v) The first deviation.

The ideas of primitivism are more of a total break from marxism. Again it went back to Marx's original ideas but tried to situate the birth and growth of capitalism within the wider development of civilization. Marx was clear on this - he saw the development of the class system as a positive thing in that it contained the seeds of its own destruction - it was an affirmation of the theory of stages representing progress - whereby the antagonisms inherent in the class system would be stronger than the antagonisms in previous economic systems. It also meant that the productive class would be brought together within this antagonism and so create the material and social conditions for communism.

The adoption of an anti-progress position such as primitivism is another way of recognising that the developed world that we live in - the social and material conditions - are far from satisfactory, and no amount of developing or progress in the marxist sense can start to rectify this situation.

The criticism levelled at adopting such a stance is that many of those adhering to such a view want to simply go back to an imagined earlier and much simpler way of life (though the definition of simpler is a loaded term). This criticism is not without foundation, and is in fact highly relevent to many of the new struggles of today. An anti-progress position is not something adopted out of convenience, to disprove marxisms failures and uncritically embrace all new struggles... many of those who are rebelling against the miserable quality of life are those from the middle class who have had the opportunity and money to taste and reject all that the modern conditions have created. To recognise that the development of class society is not a necessary precondition for its opposite should not necessarily imply that we

need to abandon class struggle - though this certainly doesnt make our task any easier.

Whether this is bringing us closer to understanding the modern conditions and its antagonisms is open to debate. I think that both the situationist critique of spectacular society, and the autonomist emphasis on the importance of our labour can come together in the communist reappraisal of progress. Our labour power, and our threat to withdraw it, should not be seen as a demand for better (socialist) bosses. It should not be seen as a demand to self-manage a system that has been built up with the aim of making as much profit as possible. It should be seen as a way of refusing the material and social conditions that we have had created under the class system, to reaffirm something beyond them.

If we take this as the basis for our struggle then we must fully appreciate what we are up against. A marxist theory of progress suggests that class society is the final antagonism, and that it can and will be destroyed by revolution. When things arent going well the orthodox marxists will say wait, the material and social conditions are still developing, and they are developing in our favour. This is wrong. Capitalism is trying to resolve the antagonisms of class society on its own terms, and wrestle away the upper hand that we have as our labour power.

5. Modern Society.

The structure of modern society is the structure of capitalism trying to survive amidst all of our struggles. These have been struggles based around the point of production. By the time the situationists had asked the questions of our subjective conditions, and the autonomists had extended the concept of the factory struggle into everyday life (the social factory), capital had gone on the offensive to end all the industrial struggles by making sure that no more started.

To many revolutionaries the discussion of our current existance is a blind alley - it is argued that a struggle around the workplace will always emerge which may well go all the way. The case of the miners strike is most easily remembered where the workplace and community fused into one site of struggle - however the revolutionary forces based around the miners strike were defeated, and 10 hard years have passed since then. This is a lot of water under the bridge.

Since then capitalism has been attacking the antagonists and not necessarily its own antagonism - ie the working class have been directly attacked. This proved that the autonomists were correct, but there is little comfort to be gained from this observation. If the working class can be beaten to a pulp then the antagonism of capitalist economics will seal itself. This accounts in many ways for the expansion of the society of the spectacle that the situationists set their theories upon - they were quick to realize that the economy didnt always grow in size - it simply carved up social existance into smaller parts. As the saying goes... everything has a price.

There is alot said about current society. From Major's vision of classlessness to the sociologists vision of a society 'asleep at the wheel' - we cannot escape the fact that there is an onslaught.

The concept of hierarchical consumption has been developed where images and lifestyle play the important role. Huge malls - such as Meadowhall - exist, where the priority is on the participents to strut, vogue and observe

everybody else. Marble pillars and reflective walls complete the atmosphere. There is undoubtedly a classlessness about the new forms of entertainment that offer a total immersion, virual reality, surfing the internet, fantasy football... the list goes on. The information society is not just about workplace automation, surveillance and enhanced communication - it is about maintaining a consensus capitalism that says everything is hunky-dory and we all have new images to live for.

6. Propositions for New Struggles.

I will consider 2 broad categories that can be applied within the marxist framework. On the first level we have those struggling at the points where consensus is the weakest. This is where the veneer that says our system is all o.k. starts to crumble. Animal rights protestors are horrified at the goings on behind the scenes regarding our nation of animal lovers. Roads protestors are horrified at the carving up of outstanding natural beauty in the name of the freedom of the motor age. We can call this the struggle at the point of contradiction.

On the second level we have those who try to live beyond this consensus whilst accepting the rest of us proles are trapped within this consensus. The travellers were never seen as the force towards communism because they were just asked to be left alone to get on with their thing. However, as the consensus of capitalism becomes tighter and tighter, more and more people begin to opt out. Thus the travellers proved an example and influenced the ravers, who began to develop their culture of DIY entertainment such as bedroom produced techno music and pirate radio stations. This is the struggle on the hedonistic level.

Eventually these two struggles will converge. Road protesting is now a way of life for many people. Raving will soon follow.

7. Escalation and Class Struggle.

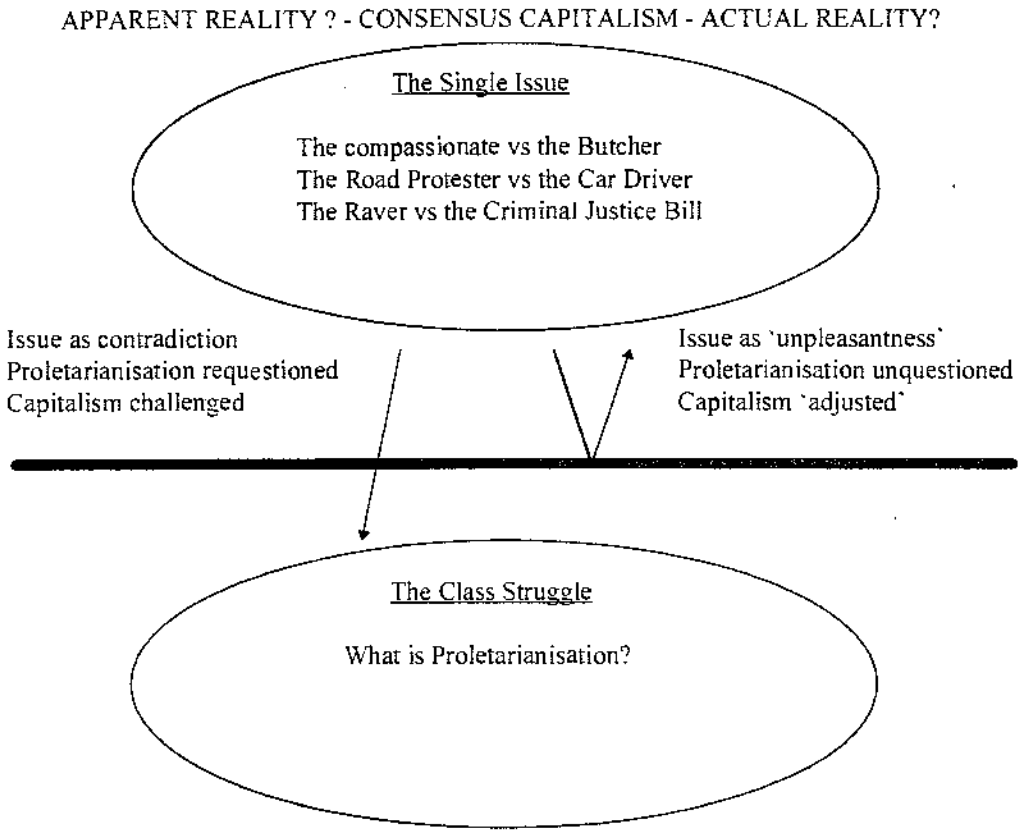
The possible escalation of these struggles is problematical, especially when they are swept away from the old formulation of class struggle based around our productive ability. They can even start to go against it. A struggle at the point of contradiction will initially straddle class barriers in terms of who struggles and who is the enemy. On an immediate level the struggle is often against everyone involved in perpetuating an agreed upon 'nasty' part of consensus capitalism. In the case of live exports we have the farmer, the butcher, the truck driver, the transport company owner, all staff concerned at the port/ferry company. This enemy can then often merge into the rest of society for being too stupid to see this unpleasantness, as the concerned combatants become more concentrated in their thoughts and actions and go off burning down dairies etc.

Consensus capitalism obviously affects many of those who are struggling, as there seems to be an infection of the opinion that we can just get rid of the unpleasant bits of capitalism. This is why the term 'point of contradiction' is suggested rather than 'point of unpleasantness'. A contradiction implies that the whole system needs to continue exploiting humans and resources to keep functioning, an unpleasantness implies that we can just do a bit of tinkering here and there...
[A discussion on the escalation of the hedonist tendency is given elsewhere.]

8. Back to the Future (the battle for reality).

For vehement anti-marxists the truth is plain to see. Marx based his ideas on what he predicted would happen, we are rooted in present day reality (advanced capitalism) and the struggles we wish to address are the ones that directly affect us. But we cannot deny Marx's initial enquiry. That he choses to analyse the system rather than the parts, that he chose to make a pure science out of it and enter the guessing game, and that official marxism is something totally distorted : these are things we should be capable of addressing. If we accept the nature of our proletarianisation then all struggles can be defined and resolved within this sphere... but we must always look towards capitalism for the answer.

diagram 4 : The single issue analysis.



But these struggles do ask questions about the nature of our society - and they do confirm that it is our labour that constructs this society under the command of the ruling class. To move these new struggles towards the framework of the old marxist struggle would represent a huge leap - we would bypass the idea of the threat of withdrawl of labour with the simple necessity of the withdrawl of our labour to create the world we want to live in.

It is the complex dynamic of the single issue that prevents this. First and foremost the make-up of those struggling is of a cross class nature. If we define the middle class by their attitudes, opinions and ways and means of acting (and not just on some mythical continuum of salary or management position) then we can see the problem not as the number of middle class who populate a struggle, but as the inevitable rising to the top of their actions, ideas and expressions within the struggle. This in turn will always see a cross class enemy as it becomes blinded by the increased passion of the intricacies of the single issue. It is here where capital sees the solution to some of these new struggles... the spectre of communitarianism haunts the revolutionary movement.

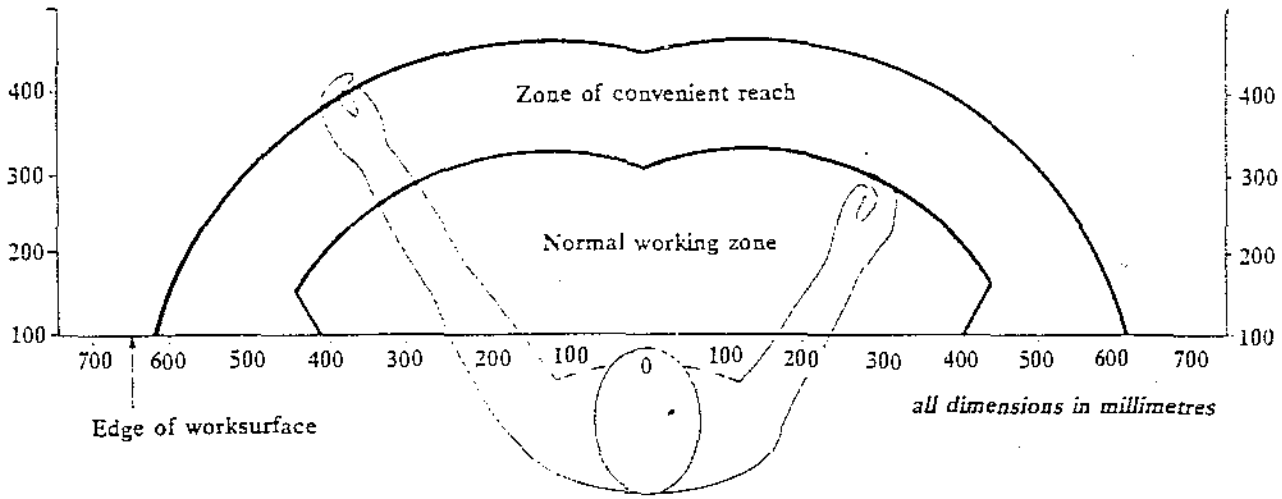
[end]

This is based on a talk we gave at the Northern Anarchist Network meeting in June 1995. We intended to initiate a bit of debate around Marxism and its relevence to the new struggles. The previous day had seen some dogmatic anti-marxist viewpoints expressed so this made our talk potentially more interesting.

Our talk was followed by a talk on the dynamics of some of the new struggles presented by a comrade who is actively involved in some of these struggles. We were not intending to erect sides to defend through the discussion, we only wanted to hear other viewpoints.

The response was very mixed. Many people were keen to talk about the struggles they were involved in (eg roads, raving, animals). We felt that the point of what we were trying to deliver was not grasped. One comrade suggested that we used too many codewords, while another gave a regurgitated warning about dabbling with Marx. A couple of varying viewpoints did emerge including a rampaging speech on class separatism from a comrade who had "been through it all before".

For those interested, we did not include the section on primitivism as a good discussion on this was held the previous day as part of a workshop on anti-industrial struggles. It is included here because we feel it is an important area.



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(The distances shown can be reached by 95% of women)

Some Questions for the Anarchist Movement.

After a certain amount of time elapses during which most questions asked remain unanswered so begins a period when all writing and discussion leaves these same unanswered questions unasked. This represents the ultimate deadzone of critical activity. Of course the Trotskyists can claw their credibility within this mire by their usual tactic of answering all the questions that they so purposely construct. Even the SWP with their 'open meetings' field a series of questions from the spectators only to answer the ones they know they can. Their common criticism of the anarchist movement was that anarchists couldnt agree on anything, and would argue all year over a bar of soap. Now we arent the ones claiming to be the top-dog dialecticians but didnt Marx once mention something about thesis, antethesis, and synthesis. Other comrades tell me that people are becoming disillusioned with politicians and the whole way of the doing things, that anarchism is just around the corner. To these comrades, and to the Trots, I must confess to admitting that I think there needs to be many more questions asked and many more disagreements brought to bear before we can even begin thinking about both the revolutionary process and destination.

It would be interesting to begin with a consideration of how we can examine current society, of how we can embark on this revolutionary journey. We have argued elsewhere about the dangers of fetishizing an analysis of the system of capitalism, as if it were some monolithic, dehumanized and rotten structure belching and steaming in the midst of some unchartered desert. It is common to assume this system of capitalism and its accompanying system of class structures. From here a system-centred approach would only project that we should all strive to understand the system of capitalism, to realise its injustice, and to eventually destroy it. What is less pleasureable to admit is that the system of capitalism has attempted to stop us realising its basic nature... it is at this point of realisation that the autonomist method can climax in its usefulness to be left gasping for air. What is needed is an attempt to understand the dynamics of the people in the system, but to analyse from a class perspective. I can sympathise with Subversion and their anti-sociological approach, whereby they argue that what is important is class struggle as a dynamic category and not as a static thing. But it is perhaps better for revolutionaries to 'realise and suppress' the science of sociology. Sociology has its use in contemporary capitalist society - it is just the academic term for market research in the battle for new commodities or new strategies for plugging old commodities. Sociology has its use for us because it enables us to make our efforts as effective as possible... to offer the right contradictions at the right time and right place.

Marx had his vision of the system consisting of the economic base and superstructure. I'm not sure what the current official marxist interpretation is of the relationship between base and superstructure, but I feel some notes can be made. The determination is not a 1-way process, and perhaps anarchists understand this more than bonehead economic determinists. Yes, the base shapes the superstructure, but the superstructure exists to protect the base and deflect our revolutionary class consciousness, particularly in our age of rampant consumerism and rapid turnover of images to be treasured. However, screaming smash the system, smash the state advances us little further. But how can we approach the questions of analysing the human dynamics of capitalism?

For a start it would be possible to consider an analysis from both the top down and from the bottom up, and attempt to link the two dialectically. Marx's

analysis of the system pushed him into appearing to examine the human side of capitalism from the top down, and this opinion is still held by many left and anarchist revolutionaries complete with its original short-sightedness. Of course, the better marxists will tell you that Marx never did get round to assembling his book on proletarianization, that the notes got subsumed into Capital.

So what do the ruling class get out of the capitalist system? Well, on an obvious level, it would be free access to an unlimited supply to all the fruits of our labours (the commodities we produce) and all the space and time in the world to 'enjoy' them. The classic approach from here is to argue against the injustice of such a system, and to ramble on about readressing the 'haves and the have-nots'. Recent thought has been towards scrapping this idea along with the myth that the material conditions of our society are, by necessity of progress, extremely rich. Whilst the ideas of primitive communism are very useful, they need to be understood more fully. I will pick up this thread later. The ruling class also enjoy the privilige of power over other individuals. Anarchists have always been keen to denounce power, but perhaps less keen to hunt out where power lies within the system and less keen to suggest methods of fighting it. Of course there is good power, such as the power to have control over ones actions and the power of learning knowledge and ability, and there is bad power such as the power over other individuals. This power is like a drug - it leaves you wanting more and more, and forces you to strech what power you have to the most obscene limits. In the news is the naughty reverend in Sheffield with his 'rave church' and the revelations of sexual abuse, which he then topped up by demanding £100,000 from the press for the official scoop. Power can never be justified, there is no shift in the scales come judgement day. Many Trots are downtrodden individuals who fancy a crack at holding the whip, and keeping hold of it. The bloody revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat will abolish power, making bad power no longer useful or acceptable and good power part of our everyday lives. It will not simply turn it around for the benefit of those at the front of the vanguard.

Finally capitalism provides the ruling class with a reason for living... that is the thrill of the challenge of increasing profit. In some respects this can turn the nature of crisis theory on its head, in that the higher the stakes, the more the adrenalin flows. This was the nature of the film 'Wall Street'. For a long time, the controlling sections of our society have been trying to dope the horses when they place their bets. This is the revelation of Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" - everything turns to the scramble for guaranteeing where we spend our wages, what we talk about, etc. The perpetual stream of advertising is the pinnacle of a system that desires us to love the ones we should hate, to aspire to be like them by attaining all the right commodities and the snippets of power that go with them. It becomes increasingly clear that the 'happiness' exhibited by the ruling class is either the happiness of power crazy scumbags or the happiness of actors in a perfume commercial. Zombies / Flesh eaters : the separation perfected!

So an analysis from the top down leaves us with more questions than answers, and perhaps has to be synthesised with its opposite analysis to give us the move forward. Examining society from the bottom up is traditionally the anarchist approach. This concentrates on our lives as proletarians, particularly the positive aspects of our coming together. We must make no excuses to say that we live in ideal social conditions, or that we live in social conditions amongst our class that can be realised in an ideal future society. We have to make do in absurd circumstances - there is undoubtedly some positive aspects to emerge that would only be part of our everyday living in a

new society. What many anarchists stress is that these moments can be the building blocks for a new society - it is however the icing on the cake that is less easy to speculate about.

It is here where we can begin to understand the ways forward and the false paths arising from a synthesis of these two approaches. I would like to develop two areas - firstly some of the ideas of primitivism, and secondly some of the problems of conceptual (ir)relevence.

The main problem facing us is the difficulty of describing a future society, or of describing the elements of a process that can deliver us to this society, when we only have the tools and techniques moulded in our everyday existance. Whilst this is not impossible, we have to be prepared to question the myth that the material conditions we live in are developed in our favour out of a neutral process called progress. And if we question this myth and chose to reject it we cannot simply adopt primitivism as the answer by rooting our visions in a very early period (eg the stone age). The true history of progress has been denied us - this would be a development of our intellect, our entertainment, our ingenuity free from the chains of capital. We cannot postulate about some parallel universe that branches off at the beginning of capitalism - this is left to the utopian sci-fi writers that can fill our eyes with tears.

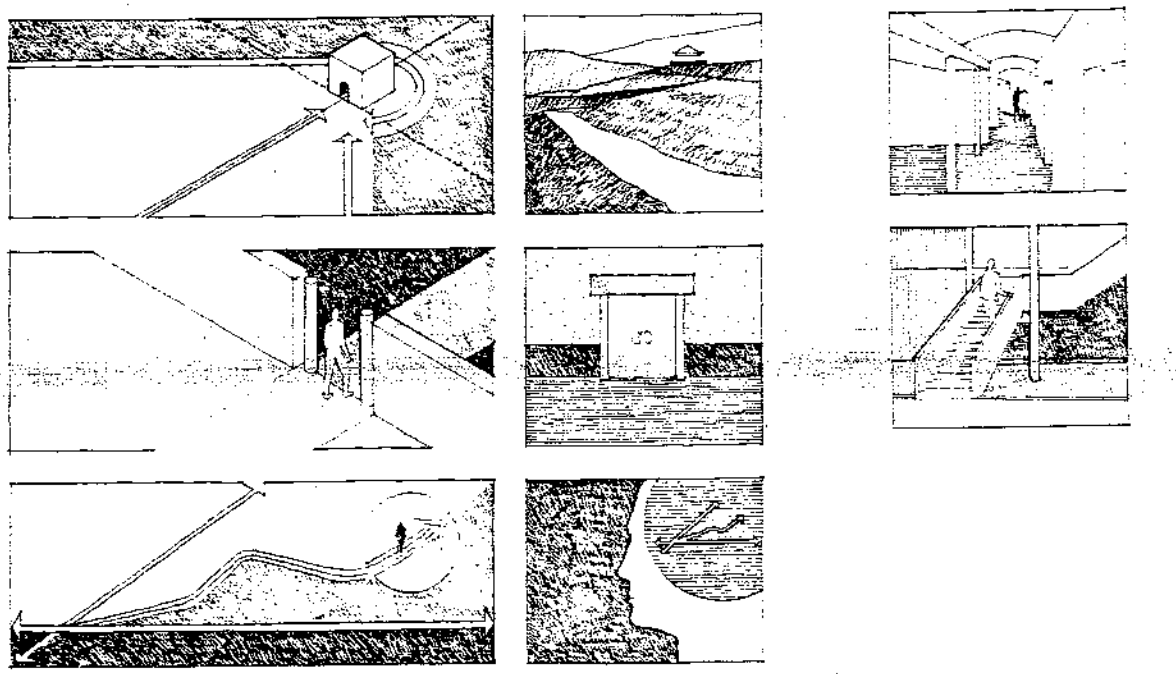
Concerning the ideas of conceptual relevence I can only offer more problems! The positivity of the anarchist project arises from the analysis from the bottom up - the unspoken rule is not to tell people what to do but to show there are better ways of doing better things. This utilises the positivity of our social conditions while rewriting the conceptions of our material conditions. However, we have many hindrances in this task, not least the instruments of control that interpret and mediate our actions to the rest of our class. What I mean by conceptual relevence is by how our actions positively relate to our fellow proletarians after being screened through this mediation process. It is a very delicate balance of forces. It is possible for many individuals and groups to live a life as far removed from their definition of capitalism as to confidently consider themselves as having escaped it. There is a recurring process of rejecting, refusing, rebuilding etc until an apparent success is reached. But as we strive to exemplify new ways of living we can become less and less relevant to proletarians struggling within the system - the practice of dumpster diving as a 'revolutionary' tactic is a worrying sign of such a bridge of relevence being overstretched. For every effort that strives towards leaving capitalism success is rewarded by moving further away from a miserable code of society and yet it is also 'rewarded' by moving further away, in terms of relevence, from those you are trying to illuminate with your ideas. Similarly worrying is the concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones and their hipness in the USA. All these represent is some kind of democratic balance to the aforementioned problems where a certain percentage of the population are influenced to such an extent to move totally outside of (but not necessarily against) capitalism.

Conceptual relevence is further complicated by its rooting in aesthetics and its screening via the mediating processes. Much of modern society is seen through its symbolism and aesthetic values, because these are the easiest things to grab at when the product is sold (again, see the writing of Debord etc). The battle for conceptual relevence oftens resorts to appealing via new aesthetic values, which can often excite those not involved in the process into giving it a go. However, if a new way of living can be interpreted through symbolic gestures and aesthetic values then this same way of living can be

easily recuperated by capitalism. Recent history is a catalogue of such disasters.

On a positive note it would seem that the game of recuperation is a high risk strategy, each advance of recuperation pushing the whole system closer to the abyss. This is not a proposal for a new form of cultural (rather than economic) crisis theory, but a serious question. But recuperation cannot be underestimated - it is a formidable opponent. Capitalism knows better than to put all its eggs in one basket in the hunt for surplus value. At times it will spend more energy and resources on reassessing our strategies and spreading a kind of cultural disinformation. For instance - consider the practices of new agery, spiritualism and their transformation to the sole focus of the middle class... a coup that both neutralizes the radical potential of these practices and the radical potential of the middle class.

Conceptual relevence also relates to the current problems manifested in both the base and the superstructure, and it would be reasonable to suggest that as these problems intensify and as recuperation reaches its limit and begins to backfire on itself, then revolutionary change may appear closer to hand. The Poll Tax was a recent problem that rooted itself in both the base and superstructure, however it didnt go far enough before it was nipped in the bud : for a fleeting moment the principle of refusal was in everybodys heads! The struggle against the CJA is as close to a breakdown in the superstructure that we have seen. Road protesting is becoming a way of living for many people, giving new reasons for and new ways of living. This is becoming increasingly relevent to large contingents of the raving movement, who are in turn highly relevent to bored proletarians, who are in turn rejecting the age old practice of fighting amongst themselves (based on appearance punks were beaten up, ravers arent!). This is only a thread of what is possible... there is much work to be done.



WORKPLACE STRUGGLE Vs COMMUNITY STRUGGLE

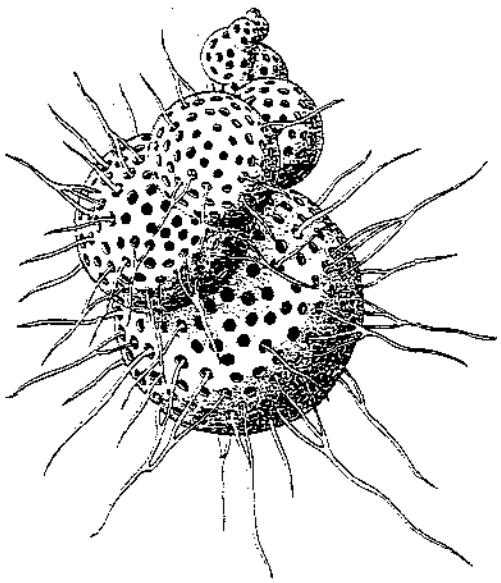
0. Situating the Discussion

1. What is Community Struggle?
(i) Physical Characteristics
(ii) Non-physical Characteristics

2. Community Struggle - Its Rise to Popularity
(i) The Anti Poll Tax Struggle
(ii) The Criminal Justice Bill
(iii) A Reaction to Workplace Struggle

3. Balancing Arguments
(i) Work and Consumption
(ii) Alienation and Socialisation

4. Moving Forward?
(i) Community and Workplace today
(ii) Bringing them together or breaking definitions?



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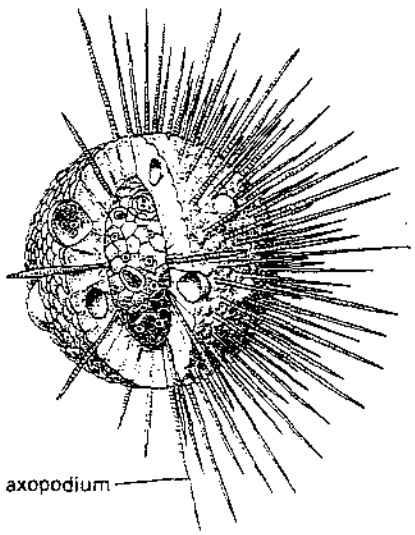
Introduction...

This article was put together with the intention of it being used at a Subversion meeting. It was initiated by a letter I sent to comrades at Subversion attempting to open up a debate on ideas of workplace and community struggles, and particularly on the dangers of opening up such a separation and of placing an emphasis on one whilst limiting the other.
The letter I sent is available from Communist Headache though it is not particularly well put together. Subversion gave a brief reply and invited Communist Headache to their meeting, asking me to come prepared with a contribution. As it was I never managed to finish this work before the meeting, however the meeting was less formal than I expected, and the subject matter ranged over a number of topics. There were no particular strong disagreements amongst the ensemble, and both ourselves and Subversion benefitted from the discussion.
Thus, this document is an expansion of the letter to Subversion, giving it reconsideration in terms of subject and style, and expansion in certain subjects. This document is relevant to our other publications, particularly some of the articles in our first collected works covering anti-social crime, economy, and other such things. Some points made here are better expanded in these articles, or can be reconsidered in a new light.
This document is not a polemic with a specific line. It is a cry for some critical discussion of how we see the class struggle, what we see as effective, and how to bring about this effectivity.



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0. Situating the discussion.

Capitalism is an unfair system, a system that cannot be made fair in any way. Those of us who work in the production industry are paid a wage to produce goods that are sold for a greater value than our wages. As the bosses take our surplus value into the markets to make it into more money we are left to buy our survival using the wages we are paid. As these markets operate on what is most profitable, different companies compete to make us spend our piffling wages on what they tell us to : the victors in this struggle being the capitalists who have invested in this demand. For us life is a struggle, for them life is a gamble. But while they always have the access to the accumulation of our labours, we only have access to the dazzling advertisers telling us what to do, the media telling us that it is all ok, and the market researchers and sociologists checking we are falling in to line.

Because this system is unfair it inevitably creates misery. Capitalisms great trick is to hide this misery by telling us that everything is ok and the best we can do is to go on working to earn the money to buy the commodoties it tells us to buy. The real cause of our misery - the years we spend toiling in the workplace seeing our bodies rot before our eyes and our minds shrivel up through the continued cancellation of tomorrow when we can freely express and satisfy our desires - is thus transformed into the means for a remedy for this misery ie the pursual of wages to enable us to bury ourselves in commodities. In effect, the misery stems from the hours each day we spend at work, but is experienced accross every waking (and sleeping for some people) minute of the day.

Those of us, who through our need to get to the bottom of our misery, have made an effort to understand communist ideas in the critique of capitalist economics, know that the destruction of the capitalist system is the destruction of the system of exchange, and the claiming of the workplaces to satisfy our real needs and desires. But our real needs and desires can never be satisfied until we are in a position to assess them, and to do that we need to understand how the capitalists manipulate the misery we feel every minute of our lives to keep us dominated, alienated and atomised. The struggle at the point of production is the necessity for communist revolutionaries, because it is here that capitalism has its foundations - however the struggle for communism must also involve searching for points where this misery we feel cannot be repressed any longer and opening up the wounds, and understanding how the dominating class manages to keep this misery from surfacing everywhere.

It is a difficult task to forge together these two methods, and history shows that the revolutionary subjects of our class often move from one to another. The present situation sees us with such a clear understanding of how capitalist economics functions that certain elements of our class have developed ideas in a marxist vaccuum and cling to a crisis theory based on the falling rate of profit. Other elements of our class have invested their interests in the idea of community struggle - partly because some marxists have become religious with their crisis theory, and partly because numbers of our class have started to struggle beyond the workplace.

This is a study of community struggles and a critique of what they are represented as. To move forward we need to bring these 2 struggles together, and this hopefully goes someway towards gaining an understanding of how we can acheive this.

1. What is Community Struggle?

(i) Community - Physical Characteristics.

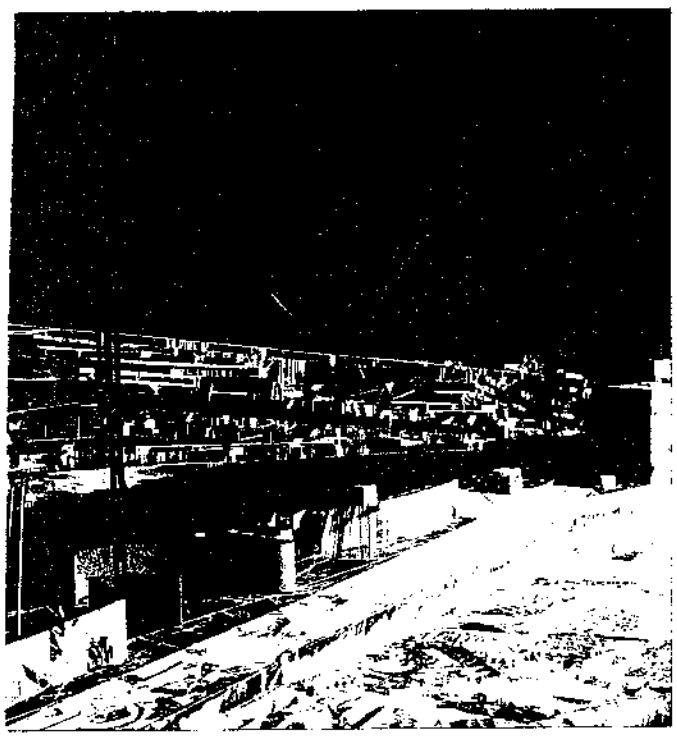
The community I will first consider is the community based on the terrain where we live. When we are not working this is where the majority of us base our lives, particularly those of us concerned with families. It is here that the comrades of Subversion argued against the effectivity of a class struggle when they stated that an area on a map is inevitably going to include local shops and businesses. This assumption is based on an emphasis on the physical characteristics of a community - ie the community as defined by perimeters such as roads, or by a similarity of architectural type, etc. What makes a community is not just this physical characteristic, but the behaviour and the relationships of the members included within this (physically defined) community. Obviously the revolutionary potential of the community does depend on the physical characteristcs for the simple reason that the close proximity of the revolutionary elements is vital.

It is however worth examining the physical characteristics of defining a community as they interact with capitalism, and, as Subversion say, most of the working class live everywhere. Whilst this is true, it is also true that certain communities are very run down or badly designed in the first place, and are basically undesirable places to live. For a start it is the middle class that designed these communities and it is the middle class that perpetuate the idea of snobbery in relation to the areas where we live. Snobbery is very much a middle class phenomenom (in fact it is a non physical characteristic of the

middle class community), but it is a useful tool in keeping us divided and creating the appearance of a relief from the misery we feel. The shittiest estates in and around cities are usually full of those most dispossessed - the unemployed, the low paid, the ex-criminals, single parents - and capitalists have these nicely sewn up with sociologists creating the convenient idea of the underclass and the media doing its job in creating the underclass stereotype. That this person is only trying to live in an area that is badly designed, neglected by the 'caring' arms of the state and constantly oppressed and spyed on by the other side of the state (coppers, social workers,etc) is not taken into account. But what is created is a hierarchy of desirability for living areas from the bottom up, where the underclass at the bottom are responsible for their miserable estates. Capitalists drive to get us to worship money and see everything as value is reflected in this hierarchy. It is quite often seen solely in terms of house prices, where the desirability of an area is measured by the house prices, and not the house prices refelecting a desirability based on clean air, open spaces, attractive architecture, etc.

People are limited to where they can live by what they can afford (either renting or mortgaging) and they generally live in an area that reflects a maximum limit to their available monetary resources. This is done by the middle class who have salaries across a vast range, and so they can fill in the levels of this hierarchy of desirability (of course not occupying the lower levels). That they have opportunity for promotion and increased wages means they can move up this hierarchy and eventually live in areas where they have designed their own homes (important note here is that they are built by our class and so we should never be made to fear the ruins of a violent revolution as Durritti keenly pointed out, even though alienated activity makes us fear the ruins). Snobbery exists as the middle class sneering at us working class, and as the middle class taking out their pathetic and vindictive behaviour on each other. This snobbery is filtered down to us working class who dont have so much upward mobility in our wages so the working class who live in the most desirable areas relative to their income are all pretty much in the same boat when it comes to struggling finacially to pay the bills and clothe the kids.

However this fact is usually swept aside to maintain the aura of this snobbery we have caught from the middle class. The answer is not to fetishize the communities in the grimmest areas of town because it is here where the 'true' working class live. The majority of those in these areas will actively and openly struggle against their misery and dispossession because they have fuck all to lose, while the working class in the more desirable communities have the appearances of snobbery to lose (regardless of the fact that they are equally dispossessed). We must understand that the community struggle will arise in these estates and we must support these struggles and spread them to other 'more desirable' areas by attacking the idea of snobbery (which is easier said than done). Unless we acheive this then all we will see will be the idea and the justification of the idea of the underclass rooting itself in the working class as the cycle of violence in these estates escalates through police provocation and police violence.



(ii) Community - Mental Characteristics

I have outlined some possible ways of interpreting the physical characteristics of the community and how this should be part of struggle. However I need to stress other characteristics of the community so as to argue against Subversions main concern of the manager of the local supermarket and the owner of the local bookies joining forces with an angry proletariat. (Incidentally it is possible to dismiss this concern using only the previous characteristic in that the owners of local businesses exploiting a community - particularly a less desirable one - do not live in that community. This point is made in the same paragraph by Subversion who argue about travelling to work as yet another disclaimer for community struggle. However, I am not trying to prove anyone wrong or right in this study...)

What I will consider are the mental characteristics of a community, as it is these that enable the working class to wage a fight on the physical terrain of the community. What such characteristics are, and how much they flourish today, is a point to debate - however it is necessary to at least try and understand them.

Capitalism is about exploitation and exploitation creates misery. Capitalists know only too well that misery is created but they have perfected systems to combat this misery without using outright oppression. Whats more, they can manipulate misery against itself to save themselves the job of dealing with the worst elements (ie those members of our class caught up in cycles of poverty debt and crime). A strong community would be ideal for keeping misery at bay, but capitalism doesnt have use for a strong community. Those who are ruthless in their search for profit will try to make money out of everything and anything - and so the commonalities that used to add another definition to community (ie areas, buildings, amenities under no ownership therefore a community ownership) are sucked into the logic of private ownership, exchange values and market forces. This effectively dominates the community and breaks it up as a means for relieving misery. Capitalists also want us to invest all our energy and time into pursuing commodities. This conveniently means the markets can function and so the capitalists can turn surplus value into more profit. That it also opens up another avenue to relieve misery is the perfect dream for capitalists. In choosing to create a happy community or to attack sociability the capitalists had no hesitation in which path to take... they work under the logic of exchange and money and we are left with individualism and consumerism.

The point to make here is that the left can only promise us the other path - ie we work very hard and all live happily ever after in a new democratised misery. Whether this other path actually exists under the logic of exchange value and money is a point made by Barrot.

This capitalist dream does not work - many people see through consumerism and individualism and many more are just not up to the task of keeping up with the intensity of their exploitation. This shattering of the capitalist dream is cut accross a class distinction which is indicated in the previous sentance: there is a difference between those who have had the (financial) means to experience the 'good life' and now choose to reject it and those who are struggling in the poverty trap and unable to appreciate the 'good life'. While I am concerned here with the later category, a financial working class for want of a better phrase, the other aspect is considered elsewhere in our writings on the middle class and middle class ideology.

So we have many people trapped in poverty and debt without the visible signs of the apparent relief from misery (the satellite dish on the side of the house, the red tag on the jeans back pocket, etc). Capitalists use these worse off elements to create a hierarchy from the bottom up. Thus in the present system, consumerism and individualism is supported by those who have been denied it because it enables large groups of the working class to thank there lucky stars they're not at the bottom while they aspire to reach something higher.

There is a danger of assuming that this system is total, and totally free from malfunction. Much of what passes for radical critique now roots itself in this assumption. Whilst I will discuss this tendency later, it is my insistance of the necessity of seeing community struggle that prevents me from taking this tendency seriously.

So, based on the fact that capitalism cannot perfect itself and eradicate misery, it is these mental characteristics of the community that become important. I will include the following characteristics - solidarity, mutual aid, co-operation, desire for communication and organisation within such mutual aid, desire for learning and understanding. These characteristics arise as a reaction to the misery of capitalism, and so aim to combat this misery. It is when they combat the misery produced by capitalism without asking for concessions from capitalism itself that they become a revolutionary force. It is revolutionary in many ways in that it sees through the capitalist denial of life being miserable, it sees through capitalism as a valid system in itself, and that it finally sees no use for capitalist exchange and organisation at all.

Those communities worse off have large numbers of people who fight for solidarity, mutual aid, etc. This fight is made even more passionate because of the circumstances of the community - increasing anti-social crime, increasing attacks from the state. It is this 'spirit' that cannot be broken. This spirit is what holds together those sharing childminding, the redistribution of stolen goods (and stealing techniques!), lending an ear and sharing problems, organised protection from police/bailiff/state hassle. The working class in the communities dominated by the middle class still have this spirit born into practical action through misery - though this practical action is often co-ordinated with (and eventually by) the middle class acting mainly out of guilt. Revolutionaries draw different conclusions from this - for my part I think it is important to realise that the middle class can only feel guilt and it is up to us to turn this guilt into a working class anger. This would obviously involve them chucking in their lot with the capitalist work machine (whether they are involved with owning the means of production or implementing the process of domination - again, see our discussion on middle class struggle). But they are infected with the 'problems' of middle-class-ness and they can often bring their natural 'leadership, bubbling confidence and unquestioned snobbery to our working class spirit while refusing to see this rotten society for what it actually is.

2. Community Struggle - the return to popularity.

Numerous articles in revolutionary magazines, and even the whole 'methodology' of revolutionary organisations, have been drifting towards an analysis of community struggle (in the organisational sense see the Class War Federations "Unfinisfed Business"). A cynical approach would be to highlight a weakness in the revolutionary class struggle movement, suggesting that it can only flicker between a position of being stuck in orthodox marxism and a position of trying to interpret struggles actually taking place beyond the workplace as part of some inbuilt populism (though recently an analysis of the Bradford disturbances harked back to Bonnano's neo-anarchism). Whereas we can see the Trotskyists acknowledging other struggles they also either dismiss them as worthless (usually when they are worker-less!) or try to bend them into their workerist reality. A populist approach would be little better as it would suggest that we have no ideas of what struggle is and how and where it arises. The neo-anarchist approach of the'excluded / included' can sometimes fall into this trap - all that can really be said to this is the obvious fact that cause of conflict (class system etc) and manifestation of troubles (excluded/included etc) are often distinct but should not be ignored... tying them together is what we are interested in. But it is obvious that times are changing, even the CWO have taken an interest in the anti CJB struggle!

To have a theory of every minute detail of what is likely to happen as society struggles on under capitalist rule is wishful thinking, though it is no reason to refuse to make a maximum effort to consider all possibilities. As this task is undertaken it is possible to gain a better understanding of how capitalism shapes the minds of our class, and what aspects of the capitalist machinery apply pressure to which places. Though we should never tell people how to think, or indeed how not to think, it is crucial to show new ways of doing things through our own activity and of stripping away the barriers that hide the fact that people are indeed being told how to think. A debate on this is beyond the context of this short study, but it is worth bearing it in mind as I outline a few of the main factors in the resurggence of the community struggle and its interpretations by revolutionaries.

(i) The Anti Poll Tax Struggle.

The anti poll tax struggle has been the principle factor in this swing towards community struggles, it certainly caused a deal of argument amongst the Trots who doomed it to failure unless it was organised in the workplace. The struggle was a success in that it defeated its object, but it wasnt without problems that have seldom been addressed. The generalised refusal of legality and the proletarian offensive on Trafalgar Square now seems something in the distant past. Perhaps those longing for a struggle not dominated by the straightjacket of workerism were swept away with the grandeur of the whole thing and couldnt prevent the struggle from becoming a victim of its own success.

In the beginning there was the rates system... I do not have any articles on the general resistance to rates payment, though I suspect these existed on the poorer estates in cities along with resistance to rent arrears related evictions. Certainly 10 years ago in Sheffield you could enjoy enhanced services such as free swimming and leisure, citywide 5p buses and heavily subsidised 'arts'. Though there isnt anything revolutionary about this, it certainly makes life more bearable. Sheffield in recent years has sailed an unsteady course due to vast expenditure on the World Student Games and the amenities and facilities network has collapsed - the anarchist position of 'smash the state' can sound a bit hollow when it lacks an analysis of the modern state and the safety net it provides. This is something we attempt to address elsewhere with our discussion on the local library strike.

As I outlined earlier, capitalists live by greed and will attack a stabilized (and so hard working) community in search of more outlets for profit raising, they also have the means to raise support for most of their actions. The Poll Tax was an attack on the state in the form of making those who depended most on the state for survival (ie the poorest) pay for what they use. Thus everyone had to pay a flat rate as they were democratically entitled to equal use of the state, and the councils who operated a generous policy (like Sheffield) were savagely cut down because they werent allowed to set higher rates. Two things happened - the poor got the prospect of feeling their poverty to the max, and the facilities on offer dwindled. The dwindling of facilities has a positive argument in that it forces people to satisfy their own desires as a community, but this is difficult when it is something like free swimming for you and 3 screaming kids and all the local rivers are polluted or on private land. However, the community spirit was hardened and the Poll Tax was pushed upon an angry and organised section of the proletariat - the poorest in the poorest communities. For these people it should seem obvious that the community was the best place to organise (not least because most of them were out of work or between spells of unemployment in shit jobs).

The majority of the working class in the slightly better living areas were hit directly in their pockets. The preaching of consumerism and individualism meant that people, as individuals, were suddenly less able to partake in their previous level of consumption. Many came together as individual consumers and organised in the community because that is where they exhibit their consumption. To many the workplace is just the means of facilitating this
consumption.

To organise in the workplace also would have been useful, only if to make the connection between production and consumption (considered later), but organising in the community occurred because either the links were strong there already or that people were attacked as individual consumers. However, the refusal of payment of the Poll Tax suddenly became very symbolic of a kind of general protest at the current state of affairs - a protest that drifts from issue to issue but is always contained (eg animal welfare at the moment). Thus many guilt driven middle class people could join in the protest without considering the reasons why they were protesting beyond the symbolism of the Poll Tax. The positive aspect was the sudden refusal of legality that came with the Poll Tax, but there is a feeling that this refusal was acted out mainly by individuals attaining the right appearance in a community that thrived on something symbolic. As a comrade says - there was an acceptance of the slogan 'proud to be a non-payer' but not the slogans 'proud to be a shoplifter' or 'proud to be a meter fiddler'. It is imperative that we make the most of these 'conceptual links' to a new way of living - most of the time our actions are judged by people through the eyes of the dominant system. The Poll Tax was a wasted opportunity for us to catch the system with its guard down - only highlighted by the difficulties that the struggles against VAT on fuel encountered in getting off the ground. A debate on symbolism and aesthetics in the class struggle would be welcome here.

(ii) The Criminal Justice Bill (and all that).

The most prominent struggles around the criminal justice bill have been the anti road development struggles and the concerns expressed by various groups of ravers and animal rights activists. That this ties in with the idea of community struggle is highlighted in a number of ways. Firstly the struggles against road developments have involved an element of the commonality discussed earlier (though we must understand that so did the 'build the bypass now' struggles!). Twyford Down was considered as an example of the ubiquitously called "area of outstanding natural beauty" (a phrase that makes all good communists reach for the sick bag), but to the working class involved in the struggle it was considered as a commonality. This is a last grasp back to the idea of the community with its commonalities, and is perhaps an indication of the total obliteration of existing commonalities in inner city communities (that is if you can enjoy them for the poisonous atmosphere created by exhaust fumes). The anti M11 struggle was very similar in its appearance. Wanstead is a good example of an inner city community, and driving a motorway right through the middle of it is enough to raise the anger of even the most hardened individualised consumer with their "haven of a telly and a well-bolted door". It is interesting that the struggle involved the symbolic use of trees on George Green again harking back to the idea of ownerless commonalities. Whether this is significent of a weakened community with an absence of strong characteristics like mutual aid, or of a very strong community with a keen sense of class history is another point to consider. What is more important is the strength and character of the community built in the process of struggle.

The hunt-sabs and ravers represent a different kind of community, different from the communities I have discussed and different from each other. They are both examples of people coming together based solely on their interests and desires. Hunt-sabs are representative of a larger community of people coming together to share their revulsion at the absence of compassion towards animals, ravers are people coming together to enjoy the carnival of lights, music and atmosphere outside of what passes for entertainment in the dominant mainstream. Both are communities based on an

interest and both are revolutionary to a certain extent (hence their attention from the CJA), hunt-sabs in that they share an interest in challenging an aspect of capitalism, and ravers in that they share a need to control and develop the fulfillment of their entertainment. I would suggest that all communities of interest groups have some revolutionary potential in that they create and attempt to fulfill their own desires, or that they challenge some aspect of capitalism. This is done to different degrees and may include a combination of both. For example, you could consider a wildlife group more 'revolutionary' than a hunt-sab group because they both challenge an aspect of capitalism (animal abuse) but the wildlife group also offer the self-fulfillment of needs (the pleasure of observing and understanding nature without messing it up). Of course the hunt-sabs are more direct with their affront to an aspect of capitalism, but this serves to illustrate some of the problems encountered by these types of communitities - namely restraint, recuperation and misplacement.

Dealing with the latter first, I am considering desires that may seen totally worthless pursuits and rooted only in the relief from misery. I am not denying that it is positive to express a need to escape from the misery of everyday life, but travelling to dismal depot yards in Crewe to collect the numbers written on the sides of trains is just our alienation laughing back at us. However, we have no authority on deciding what is useful to people and what is a symptom of alienation, but hopefully things would straighten out as we increase the communist class consciousness.

Recuperation is the proces whereby capitalism turns round those elements of resistance into the general mire of capitalism. In an age of media saturation, hungry markets (they are always hungry) and image consciousness, it is quite easily to turn a community struggling from the misery of consumption/production to a community that has its actual 'spirit' of being together replaced by material identification. It is a particularly cruel ability of capitalism to be able to turn the desire to be apart from capitalism into part of capitalism itself.

Restraint is related to recuperation, in that a recuperated desire is a desire under restraint. But capitalism has the ability to develop things that are antagonistic to its continued survival as a means to expand its available markets for exploitation. Two examples : the DIY ethic in the punk community was tolerated to enable new fashions and images to appear, the hooliganism element in football supporting was played on to enable football (and fashion) to attract the young adventurers.

These different ideas need to be played off against both the relevence of a community (and particularly its aesthetics) and the conceptual links to the mainstream (and their aesthetics). Also the spirit of adventure and bucaneering that anti-capitalist activities can foster - you only need to look at the sabs and the political soldiers of AFA, BNP, etc.

Some communities of interest are situated on dodgy ground when they operate strict individual exclusion policies. "You wouldnt understand because youre not gay / not able to feel remorse / not a vegan / etc etc". These groups often end up appealing to the state or the culture industry for recognition and change.

The struggle against road developments can encompass all of these different communities. For instance the M11 campaign involved many poor folks living and working in the Wanstead area, and the struggle against the M77 extension in Scotland is being hyped up as a struggle of the proper working class because the area under encroachment is particularly rundown council housing. Certain protestors have made the struggle against all road development their main reason for living and have formed a new community of interest (and excitement) - choosing to set up home in the trees around threatened areas and enjoy the simple life and solidarity of like minded individuals. This implies the need to distinguish between a purely hedonistic tendency and a concerted effort to overcome capitalism, and beyond this answer the problems of aesthetics such as those associated with new agery and their irrelevence and hostility to your average proletariat. Class War inadvertantly highlighted this problem with their request to leave your juggling balls at home when attending the anti CJB demo!

The struggle against road developments does provide an opportunity to see how the whole of capitalism is moving, and we should link our critiques to an understanding of how the car is promoted as the pinnacle of our alienated, individualist, consumerist lives and of how industry is moving on to a system of dispersed fordism which involves a swift traffic infrastructure as well as a more malleable workforce. It is of course a class issue, and an extremely complicated one at that - but it is not something we should dismiss or run away from (amidst the rampaging billboard liberators, critical massers, ashthma campaigners, etc Aufheben #3 and #4 provide very insightful articles).

(iii) A Reaction to Workplace Struggle?

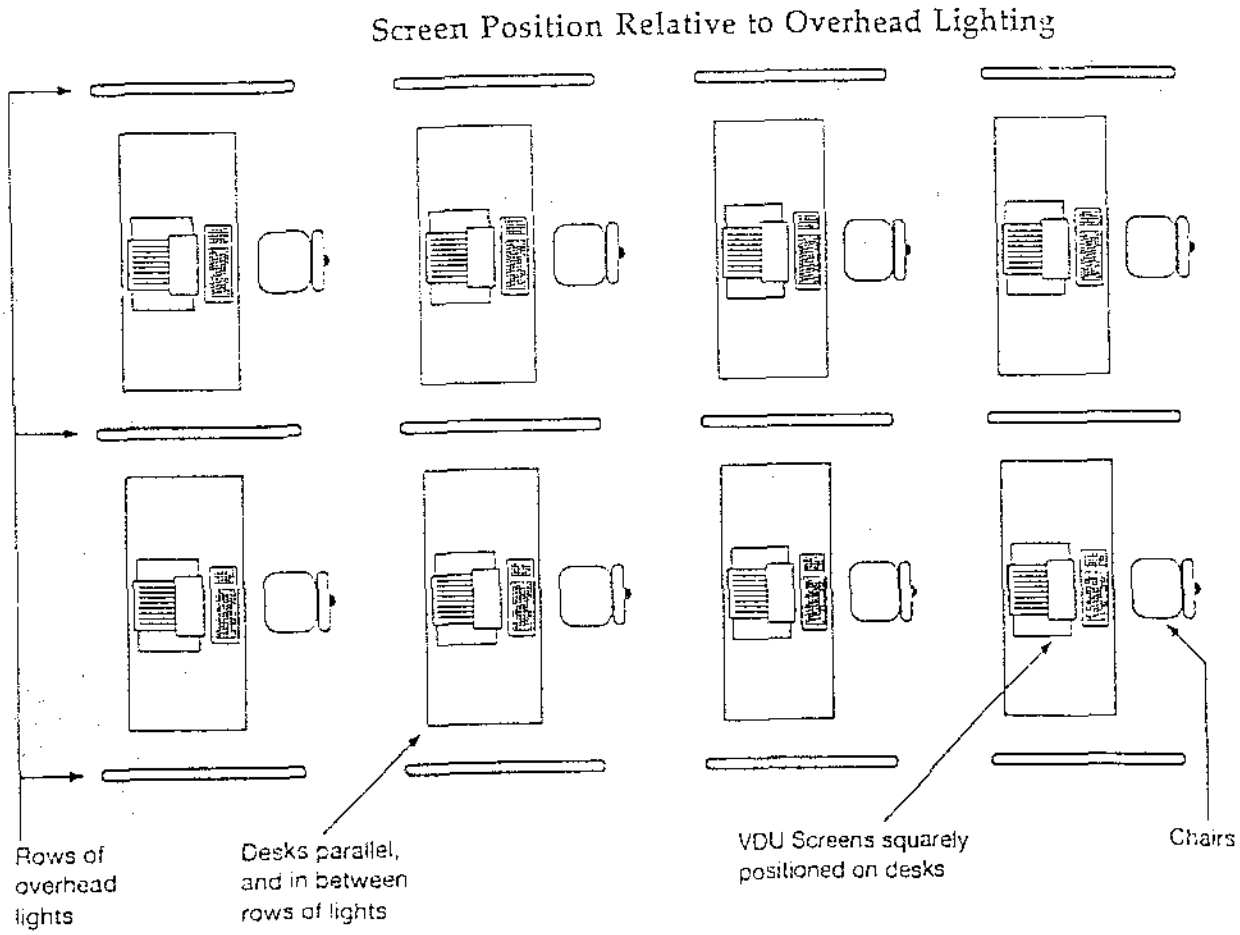
Another possible reason for the shift towards community struggles is the perceived failure of the workplace struggles and the need for a simple solution to this failure. Thus revolutionaries do not look at the strategies they develop for their workplace struggles, or consider how they have impressed themselves upon the workers, they abandon the practice altogether. The 1980's were hard, with the defeat of the miners at the back of everyones mind, though what has tended to happen has been a return to a faith in crisis theory or a reconsideration focussed solely on the unions as being either misread or a spoiling party. Whilst I think it is important to understand why unions are necessarily bad, this argument shouldnt be used as a shield to hide behind developing our critiques further (though it doesnt help when certain elements insist on defending rank and filism at all costs).

The workplace struggle is dead... long live the workplace struggle! The capital / labour relationship antagonism is sure to crop up again, although the ferocity of it is open to question. The striking community as exemplified by the miners struggle occurs periodically with recent examples being the Timex and Middlebrook mushrooms strikes. The miners are unique. Coal doesnt grow on trees and so the workforce arent as flexible as is often the case in the current dispersed fordist situation. The rest of us are flexible, and at the moment that is being used to our disadvantage. There is much work to be done...

3. Balancing the Arguments.

(i) Work and Consumption.

We work to create both goods and potential value for capitalists, we consume to help them make this money into more money. There is no isolated moment in our slavery under capitalism - we struggle at the point of production to create commodities and surplus value, and consume the commodities we have produced under the prompting of capitalist persuaders. The surplus value made in an industry is invested in other industries that are hopefully enjoying, or are about to enjoy, a boost in selling their goods, and so meaning a boost in producing them and so a boost in ripping off a bit more surplus value from us back at the point of production. Decisions, decisions... where to invest surplus value, what's going to be profitable, and so on. As I said earlier, for them lifes a gamble, for us lifes a misery.



As I understand it crisis theory is based on the fact that us working class only have a limited amount of money to spend, and to keep up with competition from their competitors to make the best products the capitalist has to invest in new technologies at the point of prouction meaning a decrease in the possible amount of surplus value. Whether such a possibility is true has been a long debateable point, though what concerns me is the nature of this crisis. Regardless of what I have just explained, the crisis would be created because capitalists are greedy and compete with each other. And so it would be a crisis among the capitalists before it became a crisis of capitalism, and could be part way resolved by capitalists getting together and stopping competition between themselves. The capitalists would then be able to live in comfort on the fruits of our labour while we are content to buy back what we produce. I do not doubt that the capitalists would find it necessary to keep us dominated (power over fellow humans is an addictive drug), and that they may find it hard... but they would manage. So we have capitalism minus the gambling element - which is a fair enough definition of socialism.

The point of this diversion is to illustrate the problems of thinking solely in terms of the point of production. A belief in crisis theory has its roots in this method, but I could envisage a way for captalism to get out of this crisis (if it came). Under the present situation it is hard to see proletarians seizing the means of production, and it is dangerous to convince ourselves that this may occur as capitalism enters into this perceived crisis. We would be metaphorically blind seizing the means of production without considering our desires and our patterns of consumption. It is only the Trotskyists who fight for such a situation and believe it can happen - this is based on the assumption that we can never achieve more than a trade union consciousness and so would be incapable of even contemplating our true desires beyond the world of commodity consumption. The Trotskyists have convinced themselves that they can convince us that they are the best thing for capitalism (even if they promise not to fight amongst themselves when they hold the reins of power like the crisis heading capitalists of today).

Attempts to link a critique of work and consumption are seldom made. Community struggles could provide a way in for this as long as we dont go looking for simple solutions to why a strategy of organizing in the workplAce has apparently failed. The answer to the problems of organising effectively in the workplace does not come from organizing in the community - it comes from the understanding between the two and how they link together. Our desires and our social communicability dictate what we should produce, however in the arena of consumption our desires are satisfied by consuming what is put on offer, and we slave away at the point of production to earn the cash to buy these desired commodities. Because capitalists want to gamble their surplus values they put alot of effort into convincing us what our desires are. So we have to reclaim our capacity to decide on our desires, and then to directly produce the things needed to satisfy these desires. Thus as well as reclaiming the point of production, we need to abandon exchange and money for the irrelevence they are.

This is a supremely difficult task. And so to look for simple solutions, or to hide our dismay at not succeeding, is not the best practice.

If we consider Marx's classic rallying call "from each to their own ability, to each to their own needs" under our analysis of production and consumption we can begin to understand the task ahead. In terms of production we live in a highly developed country where we have the machinery and the technology to easily produce as much as possible of as much as possible. Apart from the fact that this keeps the capitalists licking their lips, it has created 2 major problems for our class that seriously hinder any reality of our seizing the means of production (of course, we can always return to a faith in crisis theory, which in these terms would mean capitalists all choking in unison on the excess saliva produced from over licking their own lips!). Firstly, such a system of an excess of a myriad of mainly useless commodities can only exist if our capabilities to critically assess our true desires are totally taken away from us. Secondly, the configuration of the commodity producing industry has shifted to the effect that most of our class have no confidence in actually understanding what materials and processes go towards making goods and services we use in our everyday lives. With the rise of microchip technology this barrier to our liberation has been nearly perfected (so no - technology does not equal the death of capitalism as some marxists suggest).

Turning back to Marx we can now gain a clearer understanding of the possible primitive communist (anti progress) approach. To me, this would suggest that we would need to reclaim our ability to critically assess our needs and desires, and to understand how we can fulfill them in the shell of industrialisation as it exists today. Thus, the workplace struggle would then have a clearer set of objectives and it would be a safe bet that the industrial structures based around the workplaces would be extensively dismantled. This argument for less amounts of less things is not just simply about reclaiming time to live our own lives (as radical thinktanks like DEMOS would have us believe) - it is about thinking about everything we do, the demands this places on our society and our own contribution to it. The alternative is to seize our workplaces as things exist at the moment and then to

start the process of applying "from each to their own ability, to each to their own needs" as some nightmare iterative programme.

(ii) Alienation and Socialisation.

For Marx, the most crucial distinguishing feature of humanity was the capacity to produce. And so when Marx developed his theories of alienation it was often taken up to be alienation between man and his world from the fact that the proletariat didnt own the means of production and so what each worker produced, or part produced, had no relevence to themselves. This view is common amongst many marxists today who take the line that alienation is a symptom of capitalism and so will be lifted lift a veil of fog when capitalism is destroyed. It is treated with no more seriousness than an outbreak of skin rashes amongst the workers. Marx, as part of his predictions into the future, saw the necessity of the development of the class system and the means of production because it best contained the seeds of its own destruction. The argument went that the socialisation process of bringing the workers together would be a major factor in creating the revolutionary conditions for the overthrow of capitalism. Thus, for Marx, the positivity of the socialisation process vastly outweighed the negativity of alienation. Of course this is true in a utopian sense, but in reality it is somewhat different. By the time Trotsky had his hands on official marxism he was praising the ideas of Taylorism and scientific management as part of this necessity to see this development of the means of production. In fact, Taylorism was a tool of capitalism that exploited an already existing level of alienation.

A truer picture of the weight of alienation was built up around the latter part of this century, when for many theorists it seemed that the balance between alienation and socialisation as determining forces had shifted to the negativity of alienation. For a start alienation was understood in its fullest concept (indeed, suggested by Marx) as an alienation between man and his world, man and his fellow beings. and finally between man and himself. For a while there seemed to be an open war declared in the field of alienation - where combatants were exploring its outermost limits. The whole history of capitalism was reinterpreted towards a process where alienation was developed to such a fine degree that the world of commodities were given a spectacular life of their own. The concept of a forward movement of progress became irrelevent as development in the capitalist sense meant exploiting our alienation as much as possible and carving up social existence into smaller and smaller parts. Of course this is only capitalism realising its cycle by any means available, but to many orthodox marxists a revolutionary enquiry into the mechanics of spectacular society represented nothing more than horseplay. And horseplay is what we have been left with with the philosophical discovery of postmodernism. At the other end of the scale those most involved in the study of alienation often thrashed out their practical activity in the sphere of culture - resorting to intervention and insult throwing. Whilst it is important to combat the systems that exist to extend and further our alienation there can sometimes exist a sense of resignation amongst many self styled pro-situationists activists - often they dont wait to be recuperated, instead they posit themselves as the new avant garde as some kind of spectacular reward for their efforts. Those who we point at here know who they are.

It was situationist theory that first came to face up to the questions of our social conditions. This was labelled as the reversal of perspective - an examination of the subjective conditions of capitalism. The criticism levelled at the situationists was in their overplaying of this reversal of perspective - in 1979 Barrot remarked that "The SI had no analysis of capital : it understood it, but through its effects... The SI saw the revolution as a calling into question more of the relations of distribution than the relations of production. It was accquainted with the commodity but not with surplus value." The situationists rallied against the obscenity of our alienation, using all means to destroy the practices and institutions that deal with alienation. To them, capitalism created alienation but alienation better extended capitalism into new domains. Their input into the Paris 1968 uprising is open to speculation, but their involvement was unquestioned. The criticism from Barrot may seem a bit undeserved as the situationists attempted to graft on a theory of councilism as the 'natural' way forward to reestablishing a semblance of real life. They seemed to hold onto the hope that if the subjective conditions of our lives were driven home to such an extent as to reveal their true nature then the revolutionary process would initiate itself and council communism would be seen as the viable way forward (thus the leftists were targetted more and more as the main problem). They intended to end the separations between production, distribution and consumption by calling for "generalised self management". For instance in their journal thay called for liberated workers to "initiate the reign of freeness by giving away factory and warehouse goods to friends and revolutionaries, by making gift objects (radio transmitters, toys, weapons, clothes, ornaments, machines for various purposes), by organising giveaway strikes in department stores, break the law of exchange and begin the end of wage labour by collectively appropriating the products of work and collectively using machines for personal and revolutionary purposes ; depreciate the function of money by spreading payment strikes (rent, taxes, installment payments, transportation fares), encourage everyones creativity by starting up provisioning and production sectors exclusively under workers control".

A disciple of Barrot could argue that generalised self management could well be taken to mean the self management of something external to us - the economy. The crux of this disagreement is whether it is possible to literally push capitalism out of existence by facing up to and suppressing the realities of our alienation. Barrot seems to think that it is necessary to thoroughly understand the mechanics of exchange, economy and capitalism - which includes understanding the principle of alienation. Whilst we could agree with this, it also seems clear to us that it is easy to fall into the old traps of becoming entrenched in the mechanisms of an alledged pure scientific capitalism and the oncoming inevitable crisis. It would also seem that an understanding of alienation is the necessary 'next step' from Barrots enquiry, and not a regressive one, if we are to come to terms with how capitalism effects us all.

The ideas of primitivism came later from this divergence, with the writings of Perlman and Camatte - both well read marxists. The communist arguments around primitivism as a viable revolutionary tool seem to be constructed around our material conditions (see Aufheben #4 and Wildcat #17 for relevent reading). I would think that this is not a good path to pursue as there is a tendency to list commodities and argue for their usefulness or uselessness. Thus to construct an argument for primitivism is pushed towards affirming something that is wholly negative and can only be negative - that is the material conditions of our alienated lives. For instance, all that can be argued for is that we have no say in what we produce, that imagination and creativity have never existed. It almost seems stupid for communists to be arguing in such a manner - the nature of modern capitalism will shower us with crap, with fads and maybe ith the odd wonderful item. The first conclusion from this is that this is either another argument solely identifying our alienation (as used by the situationists etc) or that it is a plea for quality goods (which i'm sure it isnt). So if we are to assume that the continued bemoaning of our crap material conditions is just the continuation of the tirade against alienation (by highlighting our lives as alienated beings) then we should perhaps face the same criticisms as the situationists. However, the second conclusion is that if it is considered o.k. for a bunch of revolutionaries to argue about what constitutes good/bad material conditions then the social conditions amongst the proletariat are even worse. To decide what makes a good commodity or a pile of crap is to perhaps implicitly imply that the social conditions in our class are such that communication, decision making, ingenuity, argument etc are non-existant. This would then re-open the full enquiry into alienation as a condition amongst our class, and of how to combat it, instead of assuming that because we live in a society dominated ny Nintendo then discussions on forms such as council communism are irrelevent. So it is the social conditions that I am going to return to when summarising on workplace and community.

However, it is also foolish to assume that alienation can be simply abolished by socialisation - there are different categories of socialisation that need to be considered. Barrots critique of emphasising the critique of alienation is equally valid if we see our way forward as consisting solely of the socialisation process. Put simply, socialisation does not imply anti-capitalism. Socialisation will exist to a high degree in communist society - the essence of such socialisation is the coming together to solve any problems, whether they be emotional, practical, organisational, etc. Now, one of the main problems of capitalist society is the alienated individual, and so while ever capitalism creates alienation for its own good it also reverses its effects by bringing together those most desparate and alienated. Again this is a return to the hierarchy of poverty of our class, where those with absolutely nothing to lose will look to each other for support. It is wrong to assume that this coming together is revolutionary, though it can be taken to be an indicator of the socialisation that must exist in communist society - ie a high degree of cooperation, mutual aid, etc. It is also within this coming togther of the cut-off elements of our class that the communist class consciousness can grow : it has the positive energy of a new socialisation and the negative energy of the understanding of proletarianisation.

What must be made clear is that the understanding of the balance between alienation and socialisation must be resolved and applied to the understanding of the balance between work and consumption. This is the way forward to break down the restrictions of a barrier between workplace and community. For instance, the socialisation process in the workplace is an issue that exists beyond some simplified debate of rank and filism, and revolutionary socialisation is something that exists as more than 'boss-hating'. The anti-capitalist realisation may well come from uniting around the exposing of top bosses' salaries, but the pro-communist movement demands something else from the socialisation process in the workplace.

4. Moving Forward.

(i) Community and Workplace Today.

A single letter is printed, without a reply, in Eduction Worker issue 3, the bulletin of the Education Workers Network, an anarcho-syndicalist grouping within the umbrella of the Solidarity Federation. It begins as follows : "How can anyone professing to have anarchist views work within the english

primary and secondary state education system? I'm not asking this question to be provocative, I really dont understand...I imagine that most of this teaching to be keeping order for the majority so that most of the class can learn most of the facts laid down by government..."

There are a few other facts we can add on here to give this a fuller picture of how current revolutionary analysis falls way short of practical use. I am reliably informed that lecturers and teachers are the biggest strikers in the UK in terms of working days lost. So we have industrial action but what does it all mean... well basically it is about pay and conditions and nothing else. ie give us the right money for doing a hard job. When the kids start rioting in schools and colleges because the education they are getting is so unfulfilling then the teachers and lecturers can always ask for more money to match their depreciating and demoralising work conditions. But education is so vital... it is vital to both creating the vision and hope for a new society and creating a realisable process to take us there. So with all these teachers going on strike you would think that we are on the brink of a revolution within education - which is obviously an important step towards communism. Not a bit of it I'm afraid. So what's to blame? Well I would certainly suggest the limited structure of the workplace struggle that has allowed it to slip into trade unionism and the demand for better pay.

A few of the more 'liberal' teachers where I work talk of the 'mutual aid' amongst their neighbourhood - about the great community feeling. Well this phenomenom is nothing new, it is called middle class guilt. A few old hippies-at-heart get high ranking jobs within education, social work, or the local state system and take out their bad feelings by creating LETS schemes etc. Its the Yin and Yan to use their new age ideology - spend all day screaming at kids or disciplining them to obey the system and then balance it out by being caring and kind in your environment. Its strange that most of the political parties are drawing up some kind of blueprint on this new communatarianism, as it is being called. This is identified as the community struggle model, which is developed in these new 'muesli belts' in the cities and has as its practice the neighbourhood watch or playground action schemes. Undesirable juvenile delinquents are not tolerated...why, a good education is probably the best answer! When we live under such a dominant system of capitalism then for young people the best option is to usually break the rules for a piece of the action (ie anti-social crime). The revolutionary solution certainly isnt to educate them to respect the rules of capitalism, and to get their action through the legal channels of working hard and paying the price.

I have tried to outline the current state of play within the community struggle - in terms of its history over the last 10 years and its new popularity as a revolutionary ideology. I will not repeat these ideas here. I am first to admit that the struggle based on our living terrain is not easy to formulate and that the struggle based on the community of mutual aid within our class is often easy to overelaborate on. This year, 1995, has seen a similar pattern of riots in the shittier parts of our cities - notably in Luton and Bradford. Is it revolutionary to look to Toxteth, Brixton, Handsworth etc with a vain hope every time we see a riot on the news? This to me is a sign of a weak way of thinking. While it is obvious that these areas will always be on the boiling point, we should see community struggle as being more than the expression of the ultra-excluded. The revolutionary spirit should be taken to all the working class, to cut through this concept of hierarchy with the underclass at the bottom. This is the angry proletariat, the builders, architects, educators, bakers, gardeners, entertainers of the communist society. Angry because, by necessity of the capitalist system, they have been made to feel their rejection the sharpest simply because they are most rejected. Or angry because they have chosen long ago to simply reject the system, and so find themselves struggling amongst the rejected.

The recent developments of practical activities and ideas from the anti poll tax and CJB movements are more useful here. We have seen reclaim the streets actions across London. But what of the workplace struggle. I would like to comment firstly on the current outlook regarding workplace struggle, and secondly on the current debate on trade unionism. The welfare state is being both run down and tightened up. This creates strike threat in many areas of the state - such as the lecturers and libraries in Sheffield this year. Strikes within the state, or within industries that are due to be privatised, can present interesting situations. We all supported the signal workers even though most of us cant afford to take the train. We all supported the teachers (except Class War) even though they are working within a system that is designed to brutalise our kids into accepting capitalist society. We all supported the journalists (well we didnt!) when the NUJ demanded better pay and conditions. We also supported the striking Benefits Agency staff even though they will be running the Job Seekers Allowance scheme. Putting on my situationist hat how about these poetic ideas : a refusal of fare collecting in the railway strike, extra zeroes on our giros and intimidation of vindictive restart officers as part of the Benefits Agency strike, marxism and anarchism on the curriculum as part of the teachers strike, and as for the journalists...

There is the suggestion that there is an intense period of workplace unrest on the horizon - hence the fretting about minimum wages where figures are popping up all over the left like numbers on lottery balls. But if it is to find favour and effectiveness within the milieu politicised by struggles such as the

poll tax, CJB, then it must extend the boundaries : the signal workers strike was an example of nothing happening.

The debate in the anarchist milieu around trade unionism and rank and filism is symptomatic of a similar straightjacket. Of course trade unionism is nothing more than a bargaining tool with (for) the management. The concern about rank and filism seems to be whether the rank and file organisation will substitute itself for the union, and so open itself up to the same critique as unionism. Wildcat blissfully propose to organise 'outside and against the unions' - but this skips the key questions - ie outside and against are just characteristics of an organisation. What we need to develop are the widest reasons why we should organise in the workplace and let our organisations reflect this. Take the car factory where my brother works. What most of the shopfloor look forward to is the dinnertime football match, this is outside and against the union but is it revolutionary. In many respects the answer is yes because it steps out of the workplace framework to define a new environment for the workplace. I will try to extend these ideas with the summing up of this essay in the final section. .

(ii) Bringing together or breaking definitions?

What is explained about capitalism can be recounted. Capitalism is an unfair system not just because marxists have unearthed the great swindle that it operates. It is unfair because it makes our lives a constant struggle, a misery, a waste of human effort. The great swindle that capitalism operates is thus twofold. It is by its definition an economic swindle that involves those doing the producing being left on their hands and knees struggling to buy back the products of their labours - and it manages to hide this swindle with the greatest feat of all in masking and manipulating the misery that it necessarily creates.

As these swindles were perfected we have been pushed to the position of losing touch with what we actually produce. The state bullies us into accepting a job that we are convinced we are qualified to do and we go to work solely to earn money. This money is necessary to buy back the products we, as the working class, have solely created. If it was a simple case of these products being obviously useful - in that we would have the capacity to understand their use value alone - then it would be a simpler case of spreading the 'truth' about the unfairness of the capitalist system. But capitalism has created the logic of exchange value - necessary in the pursual of profit - but useful in keping us swindled and dominated. We must ask ourselves the question what does going to work mean for many members of our class? For some the answer would be to earn the money to buy back the products we are told will make us happy. This system is not a perfect fit - it is based on lies and exploitation and so it does not function smoothly. It does function very well, but not perfectly.

So an understanding of marxist theory is necessary, as I hope to have stressed. However we need to realise that the basis of our struggle - that capitalism needs us but we dont need capitalism - creates a complicated picture. Thus current society is a mixture of capitalism adjusting to our demands and struggles, capitalism convincing us that we need it, and capitalism developing strategies and techniques that try to ensure that we dont place the major demands on itself. Thus when I talk about community the starting point should be how capitalism has built the terrains and conditions we live in, and that the terrains and conditions are designed to erradicate struggles from the past and to create new diversions from the potential struggles of the future. The driving logic of this has been for capital to carve up our social existance into smaller and smaller parts - every minute detail says something banal about us, and every minute detail can bought, flaunted and discarded. There is also a dividing technique at work here. Those unable to pay the costs of admission into society are banished by the rest of our class.

I have discussed community in detail because I felt that the balance needed redressing - the works on community based struggle seemed to lack an analysis. I'm not saying that what I present is crystal clear, indeed there is much to be done, but at least this opens the way for a fuller analysis. I have suggested 2 arguments to balance. The ideas of work and consumption are key areas that feed directly into any struggles we could develop towards forging the workplace and community struggle together into a revolutionary force. The ideas of alienation and socialisation present us with more of a theoretical study. I will leave this as a blank slate and so any debate from these chapters can be considered a move forwards. However, it isnt an opening to academicise the lost side of marxism. I felt that the situationists were pushing in the right direction with their upfront confrontation with alienation... and that their project can be reassessed in the cold light of our information rich society. I also feel that the development of the study of primitivism is a key step - though I have my reservations due to its duel tendency to be both a submission to alienation or a submission to critical thinking.

But there is much to be positive about in terms of revolutionary analysis. Whilst some of this document is initiated as a friendly engagement with Subversion, they also print the excellent polemic

'4 kinds of cops' regarding the Timex dispute. The development of the inter-enterprises committees in Paris 1968 is also something worthy of study. This is examined by Barrot who concludes: " On the other hand, to revolutionise production, to destroy enterprises as such, the communist revolution is bound to make use of production. This is its essential lever at least during one phase. The aim is not to take over the factories only to remain there to manage them, but to get out of them, to connect them to each other without exchange, which destroys them as enterprises". But Barrot's ideas were influenced by a strong streak that disagreed with the situationist overemphasis on alienation, a perceived over emphasis that led to the situationist banter about the playgrounds of tomorrow etc etc. To me it would seem that it is time to reopen such a disagreement as a minimum to chart a revolutionary path. With this the debates about rank and filism would attain real relevence.

Source Materials for this issue of Communist Headache:

Barrot and Martins "Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement".

Situationist International Anthology.

P. Bourdieu "Distinction".

Class War Federation "Unfinished Business".

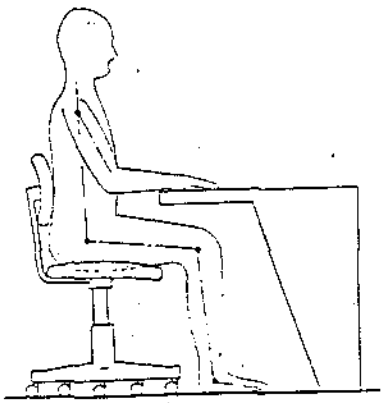
Danny Burns "Poll Tax Rebellion".

Aufheben journal particularly...
Decline of Theory issues #2,3
Auto Struggles #3

Wildcat journal #17 various articles used.

Here and Now #15 "The Search for Security".

Subversion journal as follows...
Unfinished Business Review #11
Letter regarding above #12
Cops - 4 Different Kinds #13
Beyond Rank and Vile Trade Unionism #14
Revolutionaries in the Workplace #15
Continuing debate in letters #15,16



(b) Correct