

**COMMUNIST HEADACHE**

**I**   
**CLASS**  
**STRUGGLE**

**NOTES FOR WORKING AND LIVING : Vol 3.**

## COMMUNIST HEADACHE

### NOTES FOR WORKING AND LIVING VOL. 3

AUTUMN 1995.

#### CONTENTS:

1. How the other Half Lives...page 1
2. White Punks on Bordiga...page 7
3. Crime, Community, and Capitalism...page 15
4. Information as Commodity...page 21
5. Thesis on Noxious Praxis...page 27

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 initial stage as successful. Needless to say we offer no blueprints and our analyses are far from flawless.

Contact us as follows:

C.H.  
c/o Black Star  
PO Box 446  
Sheffield  
S1 1NY.

In volume 1 :           New struggles in an Old Framework  
                              Some Questions for the Anarchist Movement  
                              Workplace Struggle vs Community Struggle

In volume 2 :           Postmodernism vs Class Struggle  
                              Our Contribution to the Animals Debate  
                              Libraries and journalists on strike  
                              Violence and Adrenalin

# HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES, HOW THE OTHER HALF SUFFERS, HOW THE OTHER HALF STRUGGLES...

## 1. Introduction to Preamble

This text originally began as a straightforward critique of the current Local Exchange Trading Schemes. I wanted to adopt an attack based upon the nature of LETS and not simply on the fact that they didnt fit a communist blueprint of abolishing exchange value - this was based on the simple fact that what was offered within LETS was just a function of the new age. I also realised that LETS were a genuine attempt at a struggle away from the current way of doing things, a struggle that had in its distant sights a way of living based on free exchange against capitalism. This can also be viewed as a middle class struggle.

Part of our work at Communist Headache involves an understanding of class and class struggle, and this often falls in line with the traditional approach of emphasising the working class and our struggle. As we begin this work we realized the amount of simplification that this had involved in the past. At the heart of this was the drive to attach a class to a job by examining a job and how it fits in with the 'relationship to the means of production'. This totally breaks down, as people, fearing their inclusion in the dreaded middle class, only consider themselves and their occupation in this same economic perspective, which leads to at least 2 problems - firstly that struggle is seen from the same perspective (ie economic demands at the point of production) and secondly that how a job contributes to the ideological shaping of capitalist society is conveniently forgotten. From this standpoint we began to see the necessity in understanding the middle class and understanding how they struggle - particularly those middle class who involve themselves in jobs that 'shape' our society and maintain the illusions of false hope in the class society. To me this is a valid struggle, and this critique of LETS is only

a beginning in understanding this. We have sketched out brief framework for an analysis of middle class struggle and have indicated how this can correlate with our struggle. In this sourest of times our destruction and departure from capitalism proves ever more urgent - we need to maintain our commitment to class struggle whilst understanding how this is subsumed in the totality of our society.

That the middle class do struggle, and the forms that this struggle takes, is thus crucial in furthering our understanding of class. Even if it seems I am clutching at theoretical straws a couple of points do seem obvious:

(i) That we can understand how the middle class is hierarchically organised and how ones position in each hierarchy effects ones likelihood to (and form of) struggle.

(ii) That historically (and practically from their viewpoint) the middle class must depend on unity whilst it must ensure a disunity amongst our class in terms of class consciousness. When members of the middle class 'break ranks' the rest of this class has to simultaneously rebuild its unity and maintain our disunity. The susceptibility to ideology amongst the middle class is a case in point, and the fact that magazines like Here and Now have been accused of abandoning class struggle when they take up such an investigation is somewhat worrying.

(iii) Connected to these facts is a defining factor of the middle class - that is its ability to dominate and to filter its ideals down to our class. It is here where the class boundary may become fuzzy. The unity of the middle class is difficult to pin down (just ask Here and Now who have been looking for it for years!), it is not based on mutual aid in the good old anarchist tradition, more of a mutual agreement in worship of money, power, conspicuous consumption, hierarchy, snobbery, etc. As well as having power over our class (by definition) it is also arranged on a hierar-

chy based on power within itself. It may follow that those at the bottom of this hierarchy (ie those who enjoy some degree of power over our class but are also overpowered within their class) are both more likely to struggle against the system as a whole and more likely to consider themselves (or be considered as) working class. This is discussed in the next section.

How are these struggles reported in the media (a middle class ideological tool of oppression) compared to the media blackout of working class struggles such as strikes and riots? Well the recent outburst in animal rights activity has grabbed a deal of media attention. The coverage of this may well fall in with the pushing of the current line of the classless society. That this is a load of bollocks doesnt mean we shouldnt analyse how this line is applied by the middle class. It would seem that the upper elites of the middle class are exercising the power over their own class who in turn all peddle this bullshit line for the benefit of everyone concerned. So under the impression of a blanket 'unity' our class are still exploited with the added novelty that we are supposed to be both exploited and exploiter. While ever we are supposedly 'united' with the middle class it is obvious we are disunited as a class in active struggle... and so the unity/disunity pattern is maintained.

Whether this new strategy is an act of desperation is difficult to tell, and whether such struggles as the current animals rights rumpus will continue to be at the fore is again worth considering. A delicate balancing act has to occur in both promoting such a struggle as a shining example of our democratic and classless society and not letting a general cross class disgust at the current state of affairs begin to turn into active class struggle. As I said, the middle class opinion and action is the dominant one, and it would seem that struggle (well,

protest) is back in fashion. It is our task to both attack the system that promotes this struggle as a function of classless society and to force the agenda onto the class question. This may seem a contradiction as we have to both discredit and promote at the same time.

## 2. Preamble on Class.

As is stated in numerous articles, Communist Headache is addressing the ideas of class and class struggle as a separate and ongoing project. This has come about from questioning what we take for granted instead of waiting for reality to prove us all right. It is well known that it always appears impossible to remain invariant when the background is moving at such a high speed. The article on LETS that follows was ghosted with a need to understand middle classness. And so this has to be done. To begin to understand this enables us to understand how our class functions and struggles, and also how and why the middle class may struggle. The preamble before this posed some of the questions, this section will try to understand class without getting into major details. It is designed to provoke a response so please do that if you feel ideologically insulted.

The academics and the ideological apparatus of capitalism tell us that class is dead. I briefly touched upon the possible whys of such a strategy and also its possible problems to capitalism. But for this part I want to concentrate on class and class divisions. Whether we need to define class and to develop a class struggle perspective when considering all activity is another point of contention. Certainly defining class has become a full-time occupation for many revolutionaries, and many feel that the latter action cannot be taken until we have these class definitions in rigid place.

The concept of economic exploitation is as good a place as any to start, but it needs to be developed. The 'classic' definition of the working class is through its relationship to the means of production, whereby production is commonly meant to mean commodity production and not, say, ideological production. Those who are dispossessed of the means of production and have this dispossession 'compensated' with a wage are the

working class. But this then opens up the game of assigning a job to a class and then assigning a person to a class via their job. This obviously has problems when took literally, but a good place to start would be the consideration of peoples lives and jobs.

How much is class hereditary? Most people spend about 10 years learning to survive in this society, another 10 years involved in education where they have a limited choice, and the rest of their years in a job (sorry, career). There is no doubt that the majority of working class kids are restricted to working class jobs if we consider class as defined by exploitation through not owning the means of production: ie they cant start owning the means of production just like that. But class isnt just about economic exploitation - it is equally about domination - as will be explained in a minute. Thus a working class kid can develop a ruthless atti



## THE FALLING RATE OF PROFIT

tude and become a bully or complete bastard, and so gain some useful skills in domination. For this person a range of middle class jobs can open up. Normally such behaviour is counteracted by the fabric that holds our class together - that is the working class have a strength of character gained through their survival as a dominated and exploited class and are unlikely to tolerate trouble in their own ranks. Whether such a strength of character is now just a notion of the romantics and the truth of the matter is that it is being eroded away will provide important discussions (see our article on anti-social criminal behaviour).

A middle class person has access to

a different system of education and is brought up to respect domination from the dominators point of view (a working class kid is still educated to respect domination albeit from a dominated position). Middle class school leavers have access and credentials for middle class careers though they may choose to turn their back on the system and take up working class jobs. The 'extreme' of refusing a career is another kettle of fish. Working class kids are subject to unemployment which often means they prepare themselves in advance and in the process start to see through the crap of modern society and eventually choose to have no career. Middle class kids are always capable of taking a sabbatical from life and plumping for the appearance of a life on the dole. The difference between the categories is obvious.

So you affirm your class when you get a job. If we continue with our relationship to the means of production (economic exploitation) definition then almost any job on the theoretical 'borderline' can be pulled into the working class. I mention this because this has become a site of some conflict amongst revolutionaries, the first stones being thrown by Class War when they put forward their 3 class theory rigidly defined by careers, with teachers in the middle class along with social workers. As there are many revolutionary teachers this caused some problem - and the solution for these people was to somehow prove teaching to be a working class profession rather than argue their own activities - the implications of this I will discuss later. Basically, most jobs can be proved to be on the working class side of economic exploitation, whether by the fact that they are paid a wage or that they contribute to the overall process of production (in the widest possible sense) from a position of not owning the means of production. So this is fine for teachers, but it is also fine for social workers, coppers, and a number of other scurrilous types. So what next?

If we consider domination as well as exploitation then things become a little more coherent. For a start, for a class system to be based solely on exploitation would require an outright oppressive regime, secondly, for this system to progress economically

would require more repression on top of this. The alternative is the principle of domination whereby one class dominates the other class through its ideological apparatus. This amounts to our programming as consumers and our bedazzlement at hierarchy and bureaucracy. Here alienation moves from being a symptom of our proletarianisation to being a method for the continuation of capitalism. As the middle class becomes confident in this tried and tested system it can introduce things like the classless society. The principles of domination and exploitation are interlinked, such that a dominated class is easily exploited and an exploited class is better dominated. This points towards an identity of 2 classes, our class (the working class) who are dominated and exploited, and the middle class who are do the dominating and/or exploiting. This then further shifts the emphasis on understanding the structure of the middle class.

It would be sensible to consider that this class is hierarchically structured, but dangerous to simplify this to a single hierarchy. Those who are involved in the business of exploitation are by necessity also up to their elbows in domination although those whose job involves domination (such as teachers, social workers, benefits clerks, restat officers) are quite often in the category exploited. **And while we are considering class as indicated by job we must consider those whose job it is to dominate or perpetuate domination as the class enemy regardless of economic situation.** The key to class struggle involves moving away from this mode of thinking; but for now it is important to discuss some of the possible hierarchies within the middle class and to determine how hierarchical position relates to likelihood of form of middle class struggle.

Taking our economic considerations first there is the hierarchy based on the wages you earn. Certainly teachers come at the bottom of this hierarchy though there arent many teachers I know who dont have a mortgage, car, etc. There is a big difference between attaining a realisation that the quality of life is poor and being too poor to even appreciate that modern life is shit, even though those grouped in the former like to line themselves up with those grouped in

the latter. The fact that many working class people can earn a packet more than say teachers is by the by - they have to do this by working excessive hours on mind numbing and body breaking jobs... and it is the teachers who teach us the importance of keeping the status quo and accepting discipline and the dignity of hard labour!

The hierarchy based on domination between the classes is less simple. The existence of such domination is a function of the class as a whole by definition, though it is people like teachers, restat officers, coppers, credit finance clerks who are in the frontline of this domination. I would be less inclined to call this a hierarchy as it is often those teachers and social workers stuck on the frontline that have the most will to challenge this domination. They thus are unwillingly represented as the nice side of the system while their colleagues who develop an attitude of spite and



## DIALECTICS

contempt for our class and a feeling of power from their domination are moved up the system. By moving up the system they in effect become less directly dominant over our class, and become dominant within their own class.

This is the third hierarchy which is worth considering - the hierarchy based on domination within the class. A discussion of this is given in the preamble. For instance the average teacher has control over a class of kids and a contract to teach them obedience, respect and a host of other direct skills they can equip themselves with to take their part in the work machine, however a headmaster has

control over teachers and a brief to weed out possible subversives, while a school governor has control over heads to decide upon the methods and criteria used for weeding, etc.

So who is likely to struggle? Certainly those out of pocket - but we cant expect this struggle to be a radical one as much as we cant expect our economic struggle to bring the crisis of capitalism. For instance, middle class people may struggle to gain the recognition they think they deserve for the difficult and somewhat 'uncomfortable' task of dominating us! However, they may well struggle against the system of domination and the poor quality of life it presents for all. Often this struggle takes the form of guilt, or a general disgust that is primed to erupt on issues like animal rights etc. How this struggle then moves on is the crucial issue - quite often it can result in nervous breakdown which can mean the end of it for all concerned. A comrade once remarked that his job must be working class because 2 colleagues were suffering from nervous breakdowns - this is middle class bollocks, if a job is too much pressure on your brain or your conscience you can always pack it in and sod the mortgage and the car, perhaps even experiencing the proletarian nervous breakdown brought on through poverty.

Finally, and most importantly, it is necessary to attempt to move from the mode of thinking that makes job define class. What is important is the communist class consciousness developed and developing within class struggle. How this can be applied in jobs such as teaching will be dealt with at length in a forthcoming CH article - what is of note is the room for radical manoeuvre being constricted with the application of the national curriculum etc. Whether this will just mean more nervous breakdowns or teachers joining in with students in the revolt against education as it stands is up to us.

There seems to be a standing room only mentality within the working class whereby people are pushed out at one end by people trying to get in at the other end. Thus we see the notion of the underclass rearing its head, but the truth of the matter may be disconcerting: the underclass who are desparately denied as existing by

those such as radical teachers and social workers would rather disassociate themselves from the latter. The anti-sociological approach attempts to understand the dynamics of the class becoming for itself. This is the process whereby the class-in-itself becomes the class-for-itself and the communist class consciousness is developed. From this it is necessary to develop the crucial distinction between examining the current state of society for the sake of defining a static sociological class in itself and trying to examine this same society to enable us to understand the barriers preventing the dynamic class becoming for itself. However, to do the latter means, in part, examining our jobs under capitalism - not to fix some tag of 'class' on them but to see how they play a part in preventing the individual concerned and the rest of our class from taking effective action. Many jobs fall outside of the production of tangible commodities, and these jobs go towards the shaping of our society, a society which in turn shapes the availability of certain jobs to certain people. I get sick of hearing all the hot air about us building our new society in the shell of the old, and then seeing no more discussion on workplace struggle beyond a general strike or the formation of one big union. Hopefully this goes some way towards answering the question I posed at the beginning of this article, in that what we could consider as middle class struggle is in fact this dynamic of class becoming for itself and not two pre-defined classes-in-themselves attempting to unite. In this respect it is important to analyse such a struggle in terms of how those concerned relate to the shaping of society and use this to our advantage instead of using it as some kind of radical stereotyping. Class unity won't come about by benefits swindlers uniting with restart officers on strike for more pay, or teachers uniting with truant schoolkids. God bless em all.

### 3. Local Exchange Trading Schemes - A Communist Critique.

When I talk to revolutionaries about LETS the most common response is that they are just an invention and pas-time of the middle class. The adoption of this viewpoint though is a reversed definition. It is quite obvious that LETS are not an attack on the exchange value as outlined by

communists such as Barrôt & Martin (1) and that the services they offer have a certain middle-class-ness about them. Therefore it follows that they are an invention developed and carried out by the middle class. This perspective closes the case somewhat prematurely and doesn't allow us to ask further questions, such as who are the middle class, why do they develop LETS, and is there the possibility of intervening with a communist critique?

There are now many LETS in operation, and that they are allowed to flourish and to promote themselves suggests that they are in no danger of toppling capitalism (2). Indeed, the opposite can be argued in that they perform valuable market research for new areas of life open to conquering by capitalism (in as much as the avant garde in art is just the testing ground for mainstream art and every good situationist knows what mainstream art is....).



## MY RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY

Our discussion on the possible structuring of a 2 class system, and of the further structure of this exploiting and dominating middle class is presented in the preamble. It is necessary to develop such an approach to tackle the critique of LETS if we are to move beyond a simple dismissal based on the fact that it mimics a simplified capitalism based on a creaming off of surplus value. Without repeating my previous suggestions it is easy to see whole new industries springing up through the linking of exploitation and domination : advertising and spectacle, media, the general fetishization of bureaucracy leading to dispersed fordism and the whole information sector.

The first 2 characteristics of middle-class-ness we need to consider are a relatively (to our class) good wage and relatively large amount of spare time. Yes, we can have good salaries if we work hard or riskily, and yes we can have large amounts of spare time if we limit ourselves to living off baked beans (8p at Netto comrades). The 3rd characteristic is middle class guilt, and this is what propels them towards struggle in the form of LETS etc. Again, guilt is discussed in our introduction to class, but its source is probably from the domination that the middle class exercise. The struggle against domination should thus be considered in the light of our class struggling (3) and of the lower hierarchies of the middle class struggling. I will reemphasize some of the points made in the introduction : It is unlikely that those middle class involved in owning the means of production will be pulled into revolutionary struggle by the strings of guilt - partly because those at the bottom of this hierarchy are hypnotised by the systems of domination designed to hypnotise us (eg advertisers saying we need this, the media saying everyone is happy) and thus feel they are only doing their job. When we seize the means of production they will be presented with a stark choice.. It is those at the lower levels of the hierarchy in the domination industry that are most likely to feel the pangs of guilt - particularly those who have constant, direct contact with those they are dominating (eg our aforementioned teachers and social workers), and guilty feelings need to be exorcised (4).

So what we have now are people with money to satisfy their every day needs (and a bit more like the odd camcorder or in car CD player), a certain amount of time (5) on their hands, and a huge burden of guilt (6). Add in a degree of confidence and lust for instant gratification and we have the perfect candidate for involvement with a LETS scheme. LETS have fostered a certain degree of radicalness, and an aura of refusing to play the game by taking a little bit of your everyday life back. This is rubbish. The 'needs' that are satisfied are the little extras that are so abundant in the new agery that the middle class wallow in (aromatherapy, herbal guidance, intuitive massage,...). The mid-

de class engage in these type of activities because they have time on their hands and have their basic needs stitched up. The new age hobbyist is ideal for LETS, one justifies the other.

The ability to be in control of our desires and in control of the satisfying of these desires is indeed a radical state of affairs. Involvement in LETS is not this in the slightest. The desires that are satisfied are a fringe activity and almost always things that they enjoy doing. Satisfying our desires involves a certain degree of hard work and effort, involvement in LETS does not. LETS fetishizes the need to be in control of defining and satisfying our desires to such a degree that the fact that it does not address what is taken for granted can be conveniently ignored, thus its tolerance in the wider scheme of capitalism.

That LETS involve a convoluted method of exchange is the reason why radicals tend to dismiss the whole thing and define it as middle class. I hope to have shown that the system has its roots in the middle class and that it uses a substitute for monetary exchange is nothing to do with it being anti-communist or whatever, but more to do with self publicity and the demand for instant gratification. That it chooses to have a daft name for its version of money (1 stone or whatever) is because it needs to promote itself as a novelty. This is an expression of the self righteousness of those involved, and of their confidence to organise a function of their 'educated' upbringing and positions held in society, and a beacon to any other guilt ridden middle class people. If LETS had indeed abolished exchange within its ranks then would all communists rush to join it? LETS could just have easily have been developed without an exchange medium, it would just have to find another angle to promote itself from. Fostering mutual aid and abstaining from the commodity system of capitalism is pretty easy when all of your basic needs are taken for granted and everything 'new age' makes you come over all dizzy (pass the herbal smelling salts dear).

So what are the revolutionary aspects of LETS for the class struggle? I have considered them as an important part of middle class struggle which in itself needs further development if we

are to take this on to the terrain of working class struggle. What about the direct lessons that can be learnt within our class? To a large extent the working class operate LETS, only they dont go around publishing it in the Guardian etc. When an impending electricity bill or a new pair of shoes for the kids presents you with a problem then a network of people you can trust to help you out is an invaluable resource. This is commonly known as mutual aid and it is a lifeforce in the revolutionary struggle of our class. The mutual aid takes many forms all existing separately. Playcentres organised by parents enable us to share the clothes and toys that children grow so quickly from. They also allow us to take turns in looking after each others kids and giving ourselves a breather. Stolen goods are cheaply handed out amongst close friends, and the reason to steal from work is increased as there is a generally someone who needs the stuff you can get your

# I ♥ CRISIS THEORY

hands on - be it stationary, access to technology or other hardware (only a week ago from writing this - which is done on stolen time stolen back - my friend helped put up the greenhouse for a neighbour with a dodgy heart to be 'rewarded' with a load of liberated aluminium sheeting which he then uses to build a windbreak to enable him to grow glorious chrysanthemums which he then gives out on the estate...).

There are a few things to draw from this - firstly how this behaviour is interpreted by the media - secondly how we can learn from the middle class and their LETS - and finally what implications this has for our struggle. Firstly I will consider how this behav-

our is interpreted. Whereas LETS are praised to the hilt because of their radicalness or whatever, the media is less upfront with working class initiatives. As the media is at the front end of the domination industry then it is important that it translates our behaviour into something for its own agenda. We are offered obscure views of 'social' behaviour where we are atomised and split into individual consumers and then encouraged to come together in neighbourhood watch schemes to protect our community - which is nothing more than the community of accumulated commodities. Anyone caught stealing from work or from the shops is made into a horrendous criminal and an anti-social bastard. In fact the anti-socialness of our communities is a line that we are constantly pushed to the extent that all behaviour either social (eg looting shops, resisting evictions, fiddling the léccy) or anti-social (burglary, joyriding, violence) is depicted as part of the inevitable whirlpool of violence that we are told we are descending into. And inevitably this enforces elements of us to increase the amount of actual anti-social behaviour because we are convinced that it wont make any difference either (7). It is not that we need to look for recognition of our mutual aid in the local media, it is that this mutual aid is either distorted or discouraged through a general veneer of a constructed anti-socialness in our communities.

It is also worth noting when the systems of domination decide to intervene in our own Local Exchange Trading Schemes - a particular example of this is the legal status of the car boot sale which serves a number of purposes. It forces us into the roles of little capitalists (which we originally reject through our mutual aid) by making us barter what we would normally give away and so also lose that spirit of genuine community, it enables itself to keep its eye on who is partaking in anti-capitalist crime by pushing goods nicked from work, and it also increases the anti-socialness in our communities (For instance because of the chance it offers us to make a bit of money we begin to see greed corrupting people and an increase in burglaries such as every shed on a local allotment being broken into etc - and further to this we dont mind the cops raiding car boot

sales because they can convince us they are after the anti-social bastards when in fact they also want the people nicking from work, looting shops, etc).

Moving onto the second point, that is what can we learn from the middle class and LETS. What is radical about LETS is supposedly being in control of defining and satisfying our own desires (a glimpse of the collapsing of the barrier between workplace and community struggle no less) though established LETS satisfy desires that are somehow surplus to our everyday needs manifested under capitalism (the electricity bill, clothes for the kids,...) and in the end satisfy the illusion of being in control. It is part of our gaining class consciousness that enables us to forge the critique of exchange relations and begin the process of deciding what we need to live and how to satisfy these needs (8). Also the ability to have confidence in ourselves, enabling us to organise effectively, is a useful criteria. Confidence is confidence, there is nothing middle class about it, it is just that middle class people are confident and so they are confident in expressing their middle class views and opinions and so acting in a shitty manner and looking like a bunch of (confident) dickheads!

The final point really follows on from the previous two points - that is the implications for class struggle. What is most important to me is the way in which considering LETS (or their working class equivalents) help unravel the tendency to place an emphasis on the struggle at the point of production. Whilst we produce the commodities that keep us grovelling around on our knees in the workplace, we consume these commodities generally outside of work in our communities, and we generally affirm capitalist relationships every minute of our lives (this is the capitalist ideal). How many proletarians produce 'solid' commodities is an interesting question (not worth our concerns) especially in our age of dispersed fordism. Our needs are created by the advertising industry so we go to work to get the money to satisfy these needs (an extreme view but how true is it?). By beginning to satisfy our own needs in our own communities we not only remove ourselves from the arena of capitalism but we begin to de-mys-

tify the production process and strip away all the barriers that capitalism has built to prevent us from understanding our creativity. A revolutionary process would involve us forging the links between satisfying our needs within our own communities and linking this to the struggle at the point of production. Perhaps this would go towards a renewed energy to seize the means of production instead of just satisfying ourselves with improving our conditions at the point of production and awaiting the inevitable crisis that the orthodox marxists say will occur through these struggles (9). If we do not wish to be guilty of productionism then we must consider this approach, which includes the necessary discussion of the primitivist communist tendency. That such a tendency appears to be considered by LETS as they are is an illusion created by the fact that LETS operates in such a middle class manner searching for the frivolous new age under the pretence of going back to nature etc.

The move away from a sociological class analysis is the wider subject of this article, and I havent attempted to resolve these problems. I have highlighted the middle class struggle and tried to link it to the idea of the dynamic class becoming for itself. This suggests serious discussion on our ideas of class and class struggle. If we use the maxim of those who have least to gain and most to loose then we can fall into the trap of measuring this 'quality of life' economically, whereby what we need to do is forge a union between those who argue that the quality of life is poor and those who are too poor to even appreciate this argument. Communism cannot just be something that lies at the end of our struggle, it must inform and influence our practice throughout struggle.

### Notes

(1) See 'Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement' or 'What is Communism'.

(2) See 'Working Brief' #69 'LETS & State Benefits' which discusses the rather ironic move by the state to class LETS 'activity' as working time and thus an infringement to claiming benefits!

(3) The struggle against domination is the difficult process, and its complicity should

encourage us to reconsider any convenient methodologies for the struggle against commodity production. I am talking about the insistence on emphasising the struggle of the workers at the point of production in the destruction of this system. Whereas it is obvious that commodities are produced here, it is across the whole working class where commodities are consumed and so, most importantly, the commodity system is affirmed and the ability for us to be in control of choosing and satisfying our desired is denied. If there is anything radical about LETS then it is the challenging of this denial, though this challenge is effectively denied through the middle class nature of LETS - see later.

(4) And LETS is one way, but there are others, not least radical activity such as joining the SWP. With the national curriculum performing the task of making teachers shape up or ship out then we can expect their ranks to be swelled, particularly as the SWP is big on the side issues of education such as pay claims, closures, anti SATS, etc.

(5) Free time does not just equate to the big holidays that teachers have, but to a freedom from an oppressive regime of

work where a headache from either boredom or interference follows you home and to bed (and in many cases to the grave with industrial illnesses etc).

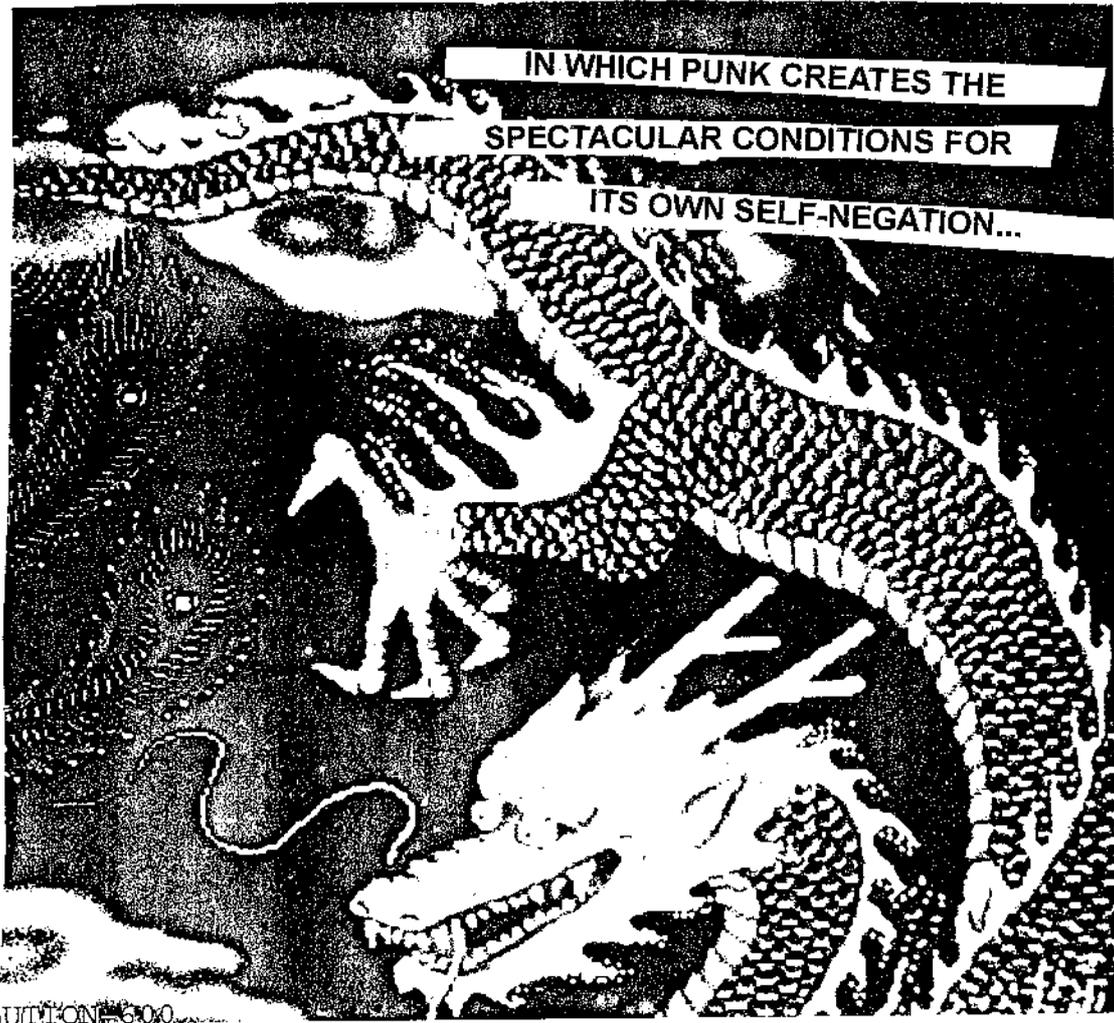
(6) And, yes, I am including middle class students and dropouts, who have the time, the confidence, and the money from mummy and daddy (and so all the guilt that this brings).

(7) This is discussed in another article discussing violence and non-violence, and also our article on anti-social criminal behaviour in relation to what exactly excites us.

(8) Another ongoing concern at Communist Headache. This means that we take the idea of primitive communism very seriously by recognising, as Barrot argues, that our social and material conditions have developed under the separation, atomisation and mystification of capitalism. Though we dont agree in the necessity of this process, if only to see it "creating the necessary basis for its own destruction" - this is like getting on a bus to an unknown destination which turns out to be particularly unpleasant but drawing a favourable conclusion in that you know you wont get on that bus again. Communist Headache dont like mystery bus tours.

(9) See our separate publication on community and workplace struggle.

## White Punks on Bordiga.



Organise #35 contains an article on anarchism and pop culture, which gives a potted (uncritical) history of punk, the article actually addressing a letter from a reader who chose to discuss an article in an earlier edition of Organise that discussed anarchism and music but didn't mention punk. Punk is also a subject close to the hearts of those involved in Class War, and their paper regularly reviews new punk records and has close links to the punk community - however their letters page has recently seen some disagreement on the subject, particularly with anarchist punk flagwavers Chumbawamba and their new set-up of major label status and major expensive gig costs. The relationship between punk and class struggle (particularly anarchism) is in need of some critical assessment. The regular arguments that occur when a 'right-on' band signs to a 'major' label (eg Blaggers and EMI) do not suffice as critical engagement, what is needed is an answer to the following questions:

- Is there a tradition of protest music that has culminated in punk rock?
- Can this protest music protest against the music industry and music as a spectacular commodity?
- What are the different ideas emerging from music today, and how can we assess them in the class struggle?

This writer also has a vested interest in the interplay with punk and the class struggle, as I was involved in the early punk scene (as a spectator) and was introduced to class struggle anarchism through an attitude that was developed through punk. The dangers of wallowing in nostalgia are apparent and there are various things I have considered before tackling this essay: that the music industry is now a much tighter unit allowing diversity under strict control, that it is easy to look back with romantic feelings and fail to be critical of punk or oneself, and that it is equally easy to be cynical from an elevated position of having somehow 'moved on'.

## Form vs Content

There is no doubt that protest music existed before punk arrived, and that it is said these other forms of protest music still flourish often, it is important to note, outside of the music industry. Chumbawamba, acting out their role as intelligent anarchist punks, were keen to mention the tradition of folk music and rebel songs. Though whether they could consider themselves to be able to attach themselves to this tradition when their popularity was due to them being primarily a punk band is a point of contention. What we need to be clear about is that protest music in the form of folk music protested through its lyrical content (though its adapting of a form that was simple and catchy is obviously a point to be considered).

The content in punk songs is a different matter, and opinion is very much divided here - hopefully some of the arguments presented here will give us some clues to these problems. The crux of the argument is thus : can we consider the contents (the lyrics) of punk songs to be the medium whereby we offer our protests and propaganda. Put simply, do people listen to (and react to) the words in punk songs?

The answer isn't a simple yes or no, but we need to have an indication of if this propaganda system actually works on the majority of the people involved in the punk milieu, and the consequences if it doesn't. It is clear that anarchist organisations like the ACF and Class War credit the potential listeners of punk records with the desire to listen to educating lyrical content, indicated by the fact that when punk records are reviewed they are primarily discussed in terms of song titles and lyrics. However, I would guess that the readership of Organise would hold it a priority to analyse lyrical content of records they bought or borrowed, whereas the larger punk milieu (and potentially interested people on the fringe) would buy the records (eg Rage Against the Machine, and Sensesless reviewd in Organise #35) and give their lyrics little attention. This larger milieu would also buy all the punk novelties, like Rage Against the Machine tee-shirts which aren't reviewed in Organise! If this were not the case then the tradition started by Crass of packaging each release with a number of contact organisations would still be continued and the anarchist organisations such as the ACF would be swelling in numbers. It must also be noted that the ACF (via Organise) do not tie themselves to punk as the sole method of cultural propaganda and so must be credited with holding some critical engagement with punk (though this hasn't been aired yet). The issue of Organise in discussion contains articles on poetry and advertising which, to me, should be considered in parallel to the article on punk as the connections are obviously important (Poetry is a verbal form of propaganda - punk is supposed to be - advertising is the product of a consumer society - the record industry, which loves punk, is a part of this system). Magazines do exist that believe punk and politics are inseparable - eg Profane Existence with its motto 'making punk a threat again'. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of punk 'content' is worth considering.

It was the form of punk music that attracted me to the punk milieu, and in all respects it was the record industry and the media that gave punk music its initial far reaching circumference of influence. It could be argued that form actually represented content and eventually replaced content : this is convenient for the record companies as form sells records because it creates a new genre.

How can content be dissolved into form? Well, punk, to me and many people, expressed anger, boredom, restlessness and a sickness of society and conformity - the clever trick is that the music is also characterised by its angry, restless, and non-conformist 'form'. Lyrical content was either blasted out of existence by screaming rants, crashing drums, and thrashing guitars or twisted to poetic extremes as a protest against the stale lyrics of 1970's love ballads and disco trash tunes (eg Buzzcocks and their cynical anti-love songs, or Joy Division and their gloomy soul dredging excursions). But punk was mainly angry, and anger characterised its form - this tradition continues to date, and for the record companies it is often the case of the angrier the better. The harsher the subject that forms the kernel of the lyrics (fascism, smack, prisons, state control, environmental rape) the more angry the lyrics, the more angry the accompanying form, the more the record becomes a 'punk' record, the more it sells to the punk market, the happier the record company.

The truth that you hold in the above statement may depend upon your cynicism, but (on the side of punk music) it is important to note the subtle differences in the music industry. When punk emerged it was a new sub-culture and the record companies were less wise to the dangers of a full frontal all-out promotional push. Gigs were cheap and free and people were encouraged to travel around and start their own bands (the DIY aspect is critically assessed later). People were introduced to new ways of living - hitching or organising vans to gigs, shoplifting instead of buying, refusing to buy instead of buying, squatting instead of renting, producing a fanzine instead of reading NME, cooperating instead of competing. The music industry promoted this (as it meant the rise of punk which was primarily a

musical, and so record selling, culture) for a short while, and eventually allowed an opening for groups like Crass to emerge and shape the next stage of punk... its 'proper' politicisation.

But we need to ask whether Crass and the new generation were critical enough of the music business and if they were aware of where they came from musically. The attitude of the music industry changed after Crass had arrived on the scene and although the punk music being produced by the major labels didn't change, the facets of the punk culture beyond the music were played down to the extent of the current period where Chumbawamba regularly charge £7 for the pleasure of seeing them perform (at their gig in Sheffield some comrades ran an anarchist bookstall and attracted no interest while the band tee-shirts were selling like hot cakes). Thus the punk community was physically shattered and removed of its broad critical nucleus.

Some of us may still hold out that content in punk songs is an important aspect to the listener, in that case then there maybe is something missing between an active punk record buying (and tee-shirt wearing) public and a burgeoning class struggle movement, and it is up to us to bridge that gap. It would be interesting to see the commercial aftermath of the images of the frontline of a future riot being flashed across the tv screens and tabloids - youths with balaclavas and Rage Against the Machine tee-shirts hurling molotovs and spraying Blaggers ITA on burning buildings.

### **Crass and their followers.**

In terms of anarchism, and the anarchist tradition, the individuals that formed the band / collective Crass knew where they were coming from. They envisaged punk as a useful vehicle for propaganda (taking the already established music form and adding visual and soundbytes), the propaganda being the broadening of an understanding and appreciation of anarchism. Crass carried on the punk tradition of anger and honed the lyrics down to sharp comments and questions on everyday life and the class struggle - at first assuming that listeners to punk music paid attention to the lyrics. Crass also made new ground in pulling together the elements that were being fostered - thus we saw the rise of cheap benefit gigs with no private organisers, the building of anarchist centres and prisoner support. They also began to consider the packaging of their records, using fold out sheets of montage, statements, essays and essential contact listings.

Many bands joined Crass and their crusade - some from the anarchist scene, others from the music scene and Crass's commitment to DIY (via the setting up of their own record label and the release of the 3 Bullshit Detector records), and others converted politically from Crass records (being both converted to a belief in anarchism and a belief in punk rock as an effective propaganda system for this anarchism). The niche that Crass had moved into and put to good use was now being overshadowed by the music industry, and a strong independent punk scene existed alongside a strong major label punk scene. The music industry (ie the major labels) could manufacture a band to anticipate a new sub-genre of punk as easily as they could buy off established bands in the independent sector. The laughable rise of 'positive punk' and its flowering into the laughable 'gothic punk' is just one example. The independent labels often existed under the illusion of being in contention with the big labels, however if we step back and take a critical look we can see this was not the case.

Consider this, Crass were primarily a punk band when it came to the business of releasing records. Even though they used records to get the message across, they used records because they were established as a band, a punk band, and so could influence a pre-existing sub-culture called punk that was maybe open to the persuasions of anarchism. This sub-culture also bought records from other punk bands that were tied to other (major) labels (such as the dreaded EMI) and so the independents and the majors needed each other to help a sub-culture grow. The majors certainly needed the independents, not least of all to sign their bands or get new ideas for their own 'manufactured' bands and so prevent punk from going too stale as a commodity. The independents also needed the majors because major labels could produce and package and promote fine punk (form) records which would then induce (via NME, John Peel, or whatever) more record buyers to punk, of which a few of these will be interested in the form of punk to such an extent that they will buy the less polished independent records. By opening up such an audience to punk, it is assumed that a smaller fraction of these newly created disciples would become interested in punk (content) and so, via bands like Crass, become devoted to the anarchist cause. So, in theory, independent producers, musicians and propagandisers such as Crass depended on major labels (to some extent) for a musical credibility and also (to a lesser extent since it is a fraction of the above) for anarchist propaganda credibility.

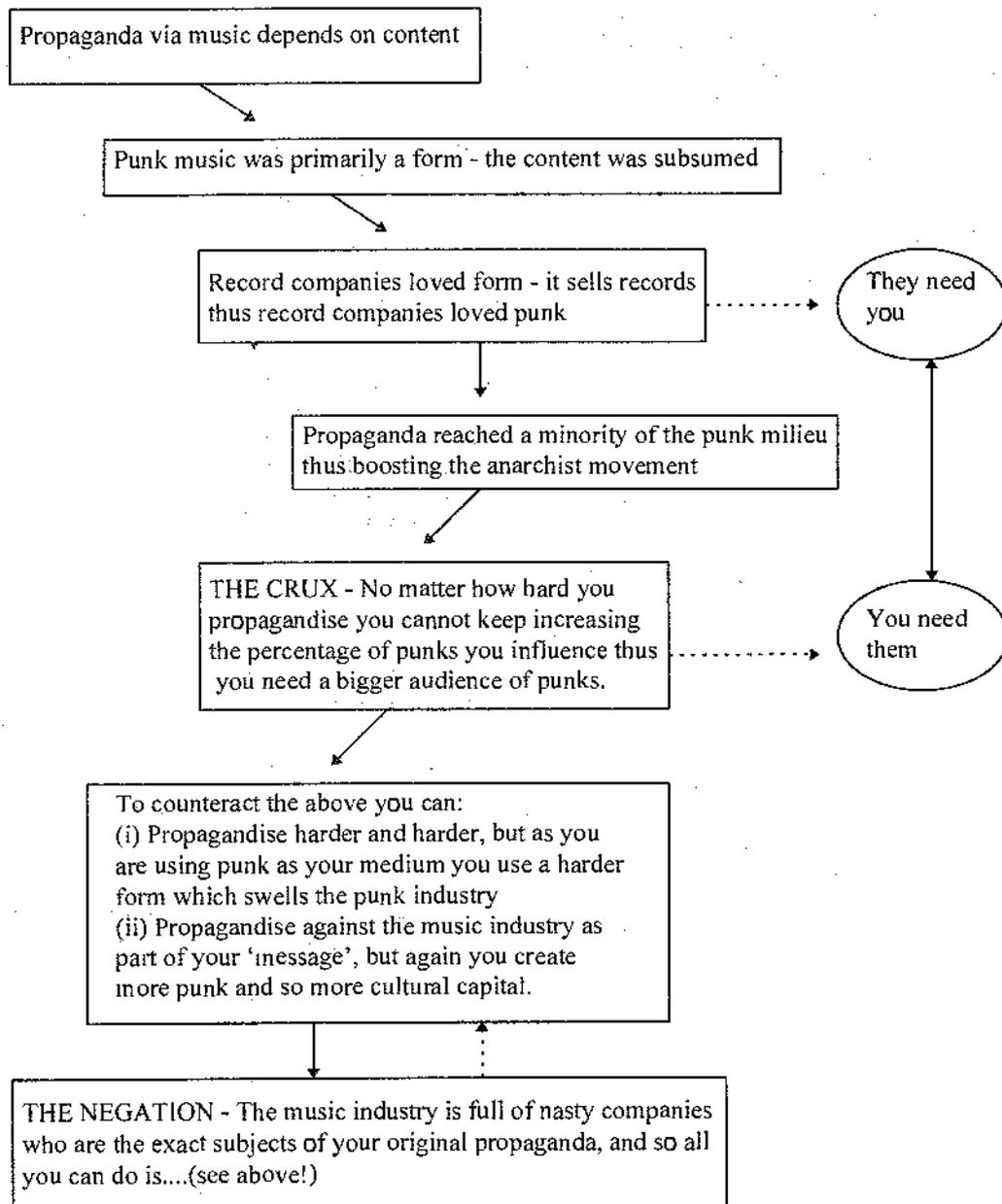
A contradictory situation was eventually highlighted when the 'trend' in anarchism became an awareness of the horrors of multinational companies, and an all out war was declared on companies such as Unilever. This partly arose from a shifting perspective to animal rights, spurred on by the fact that most companies indulged in it. Suddenly people became aware of the fact that the corporations

that gave us our daily existence and in the process inflicted terrible harms on the animal population, also had plenty of money invested in the record industry (the extreme view taken was that records were physically made from animal produce!). The result was more of a frantic cleansing process than of a critical look back at the history of punk. Bands initially didn't change the music industry but called into question the 'politics' of some of the bands signed to identified major labels, making the naive assumption that to be punk meant some kind of deal to be politicised in favour of anarchism. Conflict were the most hilarious, simultaneously holding down the title of raw and raucous anarchist punk heroes while crusading against EMI - particularly memorable was their hostile battle with major label 'cult' punk band New Model Army who had switched to EMI at the first chance. EMI guaranteed New Model Army chart success and New Model Army didn't break the punk tradition of appearing on Top of the Pops without being as angry, daring and dangerous as possible - their singer sported an official New Model Army 'Only stupid bastards use heroin' tee-shirt, only to be bettered by the official Conflict 'Only stupid bastards use EMI' tee-shirt. EMI are still the ultimate sore point to the politicised punk movement, and the 'selling out' of recent punk, anti-fascist heroes Blaggers ITA is still a fervent topic of discussion.

Crass, and other bands, knew that the critical questioning needed to go much further, and different bands went further and further with their analysis. The question of whether or not to sell out was soon transcended by the questioning of how come the circumstances existed to sell out. Chumbawamba took the effective questioning of the major label (in record format) to its limit, with their LP 'Pictures of Starving Children Sell Records'. Though it is significant that they now operate as a major band and use pictures of fascist violence and homophobia to sell their records. Chumbawamba have always had a firm belief in the myth that people pay fullest attention to lyrics, justifying their hypocritical position of using records to protest against the record industry (though 'Pictures...' was also a protest against the charity industry and its links to the music industry) and their hypocritical position of being part of the major labels now. Chumbawamba also performed a coup de grace with their paintbombing of the Clash. In fact many people put the Clash at the forefront of the political mess that punk has developed. Original punk was seen as emerging from the art schools and was politicised by the pomp and scandal of a watered down and de-politicised Situationism. The Clash were credited with being as the angry working class youth band who had a passion in their lyrics and a fire in their bellies that lifted them from a pub rock status. Of course they made it big and were crucified by their mistakes - the next wave of anarcho-punks were keen to point out the irony of 'I'm so Bored with the USA' when most of the band were pushing themselves into new punk niches in the USA market. When the Clash returned to tour the UK they decided on some 'impromptu' busking sessions to get back to their 'roots', to do it for the kids etc etc. When they busked in Leeds they were sprayed with paint by Chumbawamba as part of some statement regarding their involvement with the music industry and the fact that they had betrayed punk and were in it for the money. While Chumbawamba saw this back to our roots busking as a cynical marketing ploy from a band with a flagging credibility, the actual action of the paint bombing turned out to enhance the punk credibility of Chumbawamba, gaining coverage in NME etc. But hey, these things happen!

Crass and Flux of Pink Indians went way beyond Chumbawamba in their degree of analysis and began to question the existence of punk as a subversive form and the plausibility of using entertainment as propaganda. Had the culture industry set-up punk to such an extent that it was just another brand in the entertainment supermarket with nothing more to offer than the 'defiant pose'. Both Crass and Flux entered into a no-win situation when they knew they had to question their own relevance and existence (ie the effectiveness of propaganda and the tradition of punk music). That they chose to bow out with an album of recorded music to emphasize their arguments was poetic in a sad sense : Crass's 'Yes Sir, I Will' and particularly Flux's 'The Fucking Cunts Treat Us Like Pricks' are intense pieces of music and propaganda, and it is no coincidence that many punks find these albums 'difficult'. One cannot argue that bands like Crass, Flux, D and V, Dirt, Conflict, etc did a great deal to UK anarchism. The movement received a shot in the arm from these genuine bands, and the formation of a punk influenced hardcore ALF proves that some people do take lyrical content seriously enough to act upon it. The questions that I have raised, and I do not doubt that Crass themselves raised the same questions can be considered as follows (see diagram):

Thus, by increasing the numbers interested in anarchism, via punk music, you are increasing the numbers interested in punk as a spectacular commodity at a GREATER RATE. It is only the minority that will question the major labels, the rest will support them because it provides pristinely packaged and produced punk music. If this minority influenced politically by punk are influenced to the propagandising potential of punk then the cycle is thus continued. This is the false illusion that punk must exist under.



## Why Music

Crass ended their musical career with a couple of albums of poetry and love songs and a half tongue in cheek compilation album (which included the looped byte saying "we only did it for a laugh"), having finally resigned themselves to the internal contradictions of anarcho-punk. Many bands still hold out hope that there will be some day in the future when no punk band will sell out and cross to the dreaded majors, and so continue making music and/or protests regardless.

I have argued that you cant use a form of music held dear to the music industry to protest about the status quo, especillly when your protestations about the status quo include the music industry. This applies to all music, the fact that punk gave protest its most obvious form (loud, harsh, and angry) is just the ironic cream on the cake.

The next question is whether a form of music can exist outside the music industry and so fulfil (if it wishes to) a successful role in protesting. Is there still a radical tradition of folk music or has it been destroyed by the record industry? Could it have existed in spite of punk, or has the record industry been so total in its search for profit and its role as cultural dominator that it has obliterated anything it cannot recuperate? (cue the Levellers)

It would seem wise that music existing outside the music industry should also be against it, how would such a music show itself? Reading these notes it may appear that I despise all music and ban it from entering my head... this is certainly not the case. I buy records regularly and constantly listen to the pirate radio stations playing new music or incorporating new mixes. In a similar way to an awareness that you can't beat consumer capitalism by buying green (or buying symbolically anti-capitalist), I have this awareness that protest and music are not a solution. Music is a form of entertainment, and entertainment is the slipperiest commodity. However, if we reconder our ideas we can use music as part of the class struggle.

First of all we have to be clear that it is difficult to prioritise changes in the move towards communism. In a moneyless society of freely associating producers the people must make it part of their lives to determine their own needs. Beyond food, warmth and shelter we enter into the idea of luxuries and culture would seem to fall into this process. Music is a big part of popular culture and it would be safe to say that music and entertainment would have a key role in a communist society. This is one reason why we can consider an analysis of the music industry, the other reason is even more important... music as it exists today is part of the wider net of popular culture that plays a major part in our social conditioning, that is in the prevention of communism.

Let us get 'back to basics' and consider the plight of the musician. To what extent we can eliminate specialisms in a communist society is debateable, what we need is free access and cooperation for anyone who wishes to learn a certain skill. Not everyone will want to learn every skill (nobody would be able to learn every skill, but this is not an excuse for specialisms) but in a free society it could be assumed that the diversity of interests of individuals and the commitment to mutual aid would assume a healthy and active community. Creating music is one such skill that could be chosen to be followed, but it must be clear that a musician in this context would have an interest in experimenting and developing in their field of work, and sharing the results and methods with whoever is interested. In this situation if you feel you would be interested in a certain form of music, but this form was not readily available, then the emphasis would be to develop it yourself.

If we consider how musicians justify their roles today we can see many answers - most of them unsatisfactory - some are interested in making money for themselves and the music industry, some feel they can propagandise with words of songs, others believe they are satisfying a need (albeit manufactured) and so exist as entertainers putting themselves on the stage, while others are just convinced they are a special case of 'artistic talent' and so must be heard. Some musicians exist to encourage others to play music - and promote the DIY ethic - and this is perhaps the only praiseworthy motive, however such efforts can struggle under the same illusions as the protest bands. Other musicians exist to further ideas in particular musical forms (from Sonic Youths experiments in modified guitars, Glen Brancas symphonic massing of the same instrument, Einsturzende Neubatens use of industrial montage, Nurse with Wounds collages of sound founds, etc). Much of this is done without the illusion that it can shatter the music industry and so liberate entertainment, and so for this reason alone it can be worth considering as valid work. Punk dug its own grave by both believing it could challenge the record industry by creating a music called punk, and then by effectively reaching the limits of the punk form and refusing to acknowledge this. That we can consider the musical work of innovators and experimentors as valid while they don't challenge the music industry is based on the assumption that music in a communist society would not be just as entertainment but also as empowerment and personal adventure - the assault on the music industry is a separate issue that has equal importance, and this is considered later.

### **Music as an Ideological Mirror.**

Before we do that it is necessary to draw attention to a problematical situation facing anarchist / communist revolutionaries, a problem that seems to have developed discussion only in the anti-civilization milieu. Simply put, the problem of escaping from modern society is initially two fold in its complicity. For many of our class not active in fighting back in the class struggle then modern society is nothing more than a prison either keeping you in misery by crushing your spirit or convincing you otherwise. Choosing to struggle cannot immediately relate to shaking off the totality of this society, though in effect this is what the class struggle will finally reveal. Until then it is inevitable that certain systems will be left unquestioned and so our vision is obscured through the powerful ideological apparatus of the society we are trying to leave behind.. Recent debates around technology serve to

illustrate the poverty of our arguments when you consider the development of the division of totally pro or totally anti technology.

There are two worthwhile considerations if we try to adopt this more critical approach to our arguments about music. The first is the variety of styles of music that exist, and from this we have to make some decisions on taste. The diversity in musical forms is the result of the appliance of technology available to musicians and the relentless powering on of the music commodity industry. Many new styles appear fleetingly as the work of a select few individuals before the term 'movement' can be attached, often the movement is suddenly born complete with bands and records. It is not just the mainstream styles that the music industry plays with (eg the obsession with altering the gender / sexuality balances in a band), but often the styles that seem worthy of attention (the ambient scene in dance music which thrives on the somewhat ironic message of relax, the anti-musician tendency in punk / guitar bands and the likes of Shimmy Disc in the USA). There is no doubt that people are doing exciting things with music, and that the variety and diversity of modern music is something that can be continued in the modern society, even though this variety and diversity of music is something either promoted or manufactured by the record industry (even though the odd dog will appear like positive punk and new romantic in the 80's!).

The second consideration brought about by the mediating factor of the totality of capitalism is the categories of entertainer and audience. Earlier I presented an argument that music would be about experimenting, developing, and sharing within its field. Would this mean that if someone enjoyed listening to music then they would be obliged to experiment and make their own music. Obviously not, such a tendency could quite simply be considered as that infectious leftist ideology called 'productionism'. But we need to understand the relentless drive that this society places on us to be 'the audience'. A critique of the performer / audience relationship is not attempted here, it is something we hope to come back to. Much work has been done in this area following on from earlier Situationist excursions, this culminated in the 1990 Art Strike which we will address in the next volume. Looking for clues in the field of music is very difficult, while we have the cult of Karioke raging through our pubs and clubs, we also have a huge DIY tendency active in the new dance movements. What is clear is that music is often tied to certain good experiences in a miserable life (eg the freedom and rebellion of youth) and so people are willing to be stirred into fond memories by a performer dredged up from the dead or mimicking a past history of music cultures.

## **Outside and Against?**

The social conditioning carried out by the culture industry is all too apparent, and the huge role played by music within this area makes an obviously fertile ground for battle. We do not consider that music should be given up and the battle against the music industry be fought full tilt from the outside, however we recognise that making any form of music strengthens the very industry we are trying to destroy. In this argument it is possible to see the futility in the protesting punk movement, and we would warn against 'genuine' propagandists getting involved as they will fall prey to the 'Chumbawamba factor'. However, we need to consider a balance between the joys of making our music and experimenting in our fields, and the amount we strengthen the music industry. What we also demand is unmuddied thinking! Such a balance could be achieved by an obvious commitment to working 'outside' of the mainstream music industry (ie an independent network), the promotion of an awareness of how we (as musicians in an independent network) fuel the fires of the mainstream music industry and, most importantly, a well organised and highly tactical assault on the music (and culture) industry in directly non-musical (and non-recuperable) methods. The independent networks would then serve a dual purpose - firstly to bring together those with an interest in a certain form of music and encourage the empowerment of individuals and the development of that form (ie a musical purpose), and secondly to organise, discuss and report back on actions against the music industry as part of the general class struggle (ie an activist purpose). When Conflict took time out to stop preaching the evils of EMI they screamed out in a song (on the album 'Ungovernable Force') for punks to give up the game if all they were interested in was playing tight(er) and fast(er). I would argue that Conflict had the wrong end of the stick, and that 1990's Britain had such a powerful music industry that the only point in playing a music called 'punk' would be to take its musical elements to the limits - one of which would be playing incredibly fast and keeping tight (of note here is that fast and tight bands such as Pantera and Sepultura get shoved into the metal movement by the official punks).

Thus the critique applied to protest and music (particularly punk) can be left behind by the DIY movement. Yes, DIY encourages the music business to grow by either using DIY music and musicians to enforce the general swell of musicians, or by using new forms as its own avant garde (ie to scout out new terrain of cultural capital). But DIY is a direct appeal for people to get involved in either creating their own entertainment or creating their own experimentation. Where it exists in its truest form it breaks down the barriers of artist / audience and specialisms. Protest music uses music

as a vehicle to smash capitalism through a perceived short cut of severing the arteries of multinationals and so negates itself in entirety. DIY is a direct appeal to music 'outside' of capitalism but sees the movement 'against' capitalism as more than its sum parts.

### Well Its a One for the Money,...

What is positive about DIY attitudes is the social attitudes it creates. Beyond breaking down the barriers between artists / audience it also encourages networking, mutual aid, critical thinking, cooperation, etc. It is here where it coincides with what was radical about the original punk movement.. ie the practice of refusing and questioning everything. Of course, cultural capital will grab onto what is symbolic about something and stretch these icons as far as possible. This is what it did with punk - turning it into capital from style and merchandising. That it also encourages the more threatening elements to capitals existence (ie new social relationships) is a gamble it has to take. Though we dont want to pose this as some kind of cultural crisis theory we think there is a valid point of discussion here. The emergence of new movements in eastern europe and their connection with the punk movement (and their eventual nihilistic ghettoisation) is a practical starting point.

On the home front the DIY techno movement and social re-defining of the raving community represents the latest mainfestation of a possible revolutionary current. The new punk craze that we are being bombarded with (the new wave of the new wave) is nothing but a husk. On the outside it is images, poses, phrases, expressions, clothing, postures etc, on the inside it is nothing. It is about marketability. I also suspect it is about a reaction to the techno movement and its slippery position within the official music industry. Capital needs to be created and the kids need to be kept diverted. What is perhaps funiest about the whole new punk circus are the original punk bands dragging their members out of their dayjobs and day centres to take to the stage and rake in a bit of nostalgia cash... even the original marxist mentors the Gang of Four have reappeared.

I will leave this essay where it can best be continued. How can we develop our strategies against the music industry as part of our attack on capitalism. This would include attacking the artist / audience divide and attacking the strategies that music as commodity can be used for. This is where we can begin our next enquiry.



# Crime, Community and Capitalism.

The idea of anti-social crime, particularly on how to deal with it, is a hot potato amongst various revolutionaries today. To approach an answer it is better to analyse the forces at work from the wider perspective of community struggle as part of the class struggle. Thus this analysis ties in with our fuller analysis on workplace / community in Communist Headache #1. This longer document is based on the practice of switching between a workplace and a community approach whilst simultaneously failing to attempt to tie the two together. A fear of being accused of bending reality means we have to live off the scraps that the system throws us when it experiences a few 'glitches'?

## 1. The Left and Community

### (i) Class War...

Always being fashion conscious, Communist Headache is interested in the renewed vigour around community struggle. Class War broke some ground when they nailed their colours to the community based approach in their book 'Unfinished Business', this also meant they broke some 'rules' in the left / anarchist milieu. However, things have escalated and the latest scrap of revolutionary material we have been thrown is the debate around the Criminal Justice Bill (CJB), whilst Class War have found themselves in deep water being accused of sitting on the fence around issues such as joy-riding. These accusations coming part from Class War's approach of not only making a commitment to combat anti-social crimes but of maximising your visibility when doing so. I'm not out to prove that Class War have a poor theoretical foundation; that they have run onto difficult terrain with their community approach does not mean that the question of anti-social crime will 'go away' if we adopt another approach. I also don't want to overemphasise the issue of anti-social crime within the struggle for communism (see 'Who is the bigger crim?' in Proletarian Gob #4), but if it can be discussed with an aim to strengthen our fight for communism then this should be done. Whilst I agree with the general thrust of the arguments in Proletarian Gob (ie that capitalism is the crime of all crimes etc) there are a couple of points that need taking up. The argument about 'policing' a post-capitalist society cannot be dismissed as easily as the author does, and dismissing it will weaken our case for communism. As we will argue in the next part of the article the idea of criminal behaviour may well vanish but the existence of anti-social behaviour will not). Also the assumption that anti-social crime being carried out by 'the same sort of people who become stockbrokers, management consultants, bailiffs and police'- this ignores the spiral of violence and deterioration that our communities are descending into and also ignore how capitalism is brutalising us even more by taking away the last vestiges of an anti-capitalist bonding and replacing it with rampant consumerism, individualism or a state of despairing because you can't compete. Proletarian Gob put this view across later in their article when they point out that proletarians cannot get rid of anti-social behaviour under capitalism.

### (ii) The ravenous dogs of leftism.

The swing towards a community based attack on capitalism also had its repercussions within the left movement. The individual elements of this swing and the confusion it brought are discussed at length in our other article. The confusion continues, and the fascination of arguing whether we should be inside or outside, for or against, the unions can only be seen as a barrier to hide behind while ever we have such a stubbornness and fear of resolving wider disparities. To many revolutionaries what is most important is to debate our organisation within the workplace while turning a blind eye to how the workplaces organise us. Wildcat went partway to dismantling this barrier with their union pamphlet though many people read this solely as an attack on Dave Douglass. Some branches of the anarchist movement only muddy the waters by screaming fuck the right to work and then having a lack of a coherent understanding and even critique of exchange and production as it stands. That these voices are now striking a welcome chord with many of the young proletariat means that the emphasis did swing towards this community approach.

For the trots things are a lot more simple. They will go wherever they can to recruit bodies for their recruiting parties, and wear the relevant fancy dress to get them past the door staff. The Poll Tax and its resistance proved the watershed between adopting and refusing such an approach, as many groups felt they were missing out on a resistance that refused to take up root in the workplace (see Trotwatch's 'Carry on Recruiting' for a determined expose). This brought us up to date with 1994 and the current issue burning away in everybody's mind - the CJB. It is here where the interests of Class War and their emphasis on the community and anti-social crime, and the opportunism of groups such as the SWP and RCP, dovetail together.

I have not even inspected the literature being produced by the trotskyst sects fighting for recruits, having been accosted by members of both the RCP and SWP selling their mags and yelling about the

CJB at a recent community festival here in Sheffield. While the SWP now have a cosy relationship with the Anti-Nazi League they can call on their raver types and trendsetters to do the SWP recruitment work (eg their anti nazi publicity remarked that fascism equalled no soul or rave music), it seemed that the normally totally straight i'm a worker RCP members had hired a couple of staff from Dreads-R-U's to operate their stall to 'fight the criminal justice bill by joining the party'. What a strange sight to see these workerists talking about protecting ravers and travellers lifestyles - I can just see the advert in the wanted column of Living Marxism "Deadwood seeks fun guy for a parasitic relationship".

## **2. Desocialisation as a Necessity of the Class System**

### **(i) Some definitions**

We will recap some of the definitions from our previous work on community struggle. Community is normally associated with its physical characteristics, such as an estate with boundaries of roads, rivers or a type of architecture. However, it is the non-physical characteristics that we can consider from a revolutionary analysis (the physical characteristics do come into play in terms of proximity and practicality but can sometimes create a false sense of localism). This is how the community form themselves through their relationships and foster important principles such as solidarity, mutual aid, co-operation, respect, etc. We theorised that such characteristics would be crucial in the workplace struggle for the proletarian assault on the economy, though these ideas are open to critical engagement. We also have to realise that the physical characteristics of a community are imposed upon it, whereas the non-physical characteristics are left to struggle.

### **(ii) Shit Housing and all that...**

What our comrades at Subversion correctly identify is that it is dangerous to fetishize the areas of poor housing as the true working class community, but their reason for doing this can be problematic. They argue that by 'drawing a line around an area on a map and calling that the working class community, you are going to include local businesses and shops'. This actually dismisses the mental characteristics of the terrain based community (even though these characteristics may be subsumed under the general squalor and survival instincts) and it is here where the community can organise as an expression of class struggle.

The other approach, such as adopted by Class War, of romanticising the run-down communities is utterly pointless unless more substantial arguments and tactics are presented. Here goes... It is difficult to say what exactly a working class community is, and what factors attract a working class person to a working class community (other than enforced poverty). It is obvious that we cannot be proud to live in the shittiest, dirtiest, run-down areas of a city, though we could perhaps take some pride in the characteristics we exercise to survive in such a situation. We also know that the depravity we suffer is actually designed through cramming architecture, lack of green space, monotony and lack of architectural creativity, proximity to pollution (whether noise, chemical, etc). Sometimes I get the impression that revolutionaries are unable to move beyond this crass idea when championing the working class community. What we can then go on to develop from this is how much the physical deprivation of a community encourages the strong non-physical characteristics - for it is these that we are interested in.

Whilst it is both dangerous and impossible to define working class in a simple 'relationship to the means of production' definition it seems that if you don't earn a certain amount of money (which normally necessitates a certain level in the hierarchy of management) then you are restricted to these poor (= working class?) communities. If you earn a comfortable wage you can still choose to live in a working class (= poor?) community because you feel you are still working class and you want to contribute to and benefit from the non-physical characteristics of such a community. Whilst the physical characteristics of a middle class community might be obvious (and desirable) the non-physical characteristics are often unappealing. Thus clean air, creative and varied architecture, more space and greenery comes with snobbery, competitiveness and an obsession in security manifested in surveillance etc. Equally so, we cannot be romantic and assume that all those proletarians forced to live in deprived communities can compensate for this by counterbalancing the positive non-physical characteristics with the negative physical characteristics; some people would gladly plump for the riches of a nice house and peace and quiet, sacrificing the mutual aid for a packed wallet. Our housing need is not some expression of a warped consumerism, the phrase 'Everyone shall live in their own cathedrals' could now be used as advertising fodder by a mortgage company. This is the power of capitalism's ideological apparatus, and that when we start challenging the system of capitalism, capitalism itself will respond by exercising this power and dividing our class wherever and however possible. The anti-social problem should be posed in this light.

### **(iii) The community struggle**

The terrain based struggle is a prominent feature of class struggle, however it is dangerous to start making assumptions on links between the class and community struggles. We emphasised the point that working class community is often related to the physical characteristics of the community, and so in this mode of thinking any community struggle situated in the ghettos of our cities would automatically be a class struggle. This does nothing to enrich our ideas of the class struggle. We cannot assume the reverse of creating some acid test on 'working class-ness' and carrying this back into the community struggle... did we witness the situation where we demanded to know the vocation of every member of our local anti poll tax groups so we could exclude them from the struggle (even though they were members of the community).

We cant hold a blind faith in seeing the future of community struggle as being the force for change without equally turning our back on understanding class and economics of capitalism (see Burn's 'Poll Tax rebellion' for such a judgement). Whilst we recognise that the community struggle is a complex mechanism and on the whole is a working class feature (or the class becoming for itself), you only have to look at the support and faith given to the police who chose to stand up against the CJB because they dont like nicking ravers and pot-smokers. Community struggle is susceptible to democracy and all the baggage that it carries.

An important feature of the class becoming for itself is the way that the individuals in the class relate to each other and the attitudes they hold (ie these non-physical characteristics). This is part of the complex process of the working class re-uniting and fighting the divisions that capitalism hammers into us. This re-uniting of the class is the falling point of many revolutionaries, and to consider its dynamic means going to the heart of our rotten society. The simple fact that we are working class because we are on the wrong side of an economic system based on exploitation is always at the start of our analysis. However, capitalists need to keep us united as a class (to keep the economic system running) and divided as a class in terms of our appreciating of what this exploitation actually is. Many marxists saw the necessity of capitalism to both further the means of production and to bring together the class, and so increase the potential to seize these means of production. Capitalists ability to keep us divided has now took root in the 'development' of the means of production and the variety and proliferation of commodities. Marxists would be better spending their time in unravelling the processes of domination and alienation rather than estimating the economic crisis time as if it was a jackpot on the lottery.

The community struggle will have an economic dimension at the heart of its existence because capitalism puts all its emphasis on what we can achieve through consuming (it has the ideological muscle to try this), but by using the strong relationships and communication possibilities opened in such a struggle then this economic dimension can best be realised and suppressed : this will bring about new indicators for the 'wealth' of our material and social conditions. To take this argument back into the workplace, to look for 'real life' in the factories and offices, swallows up the arguments of unionism and dispels the leftist myth that we are just lap-dogs at the beck and call of an economic system. As we stressed, this is developed in our other work in volume 1.

Without wanting to overstretch a point and sound like a summariser for the revolution of everyday life, it is dangerous to consider the class struggle as the struggle between the haves and the have-nots. Such an approach would suggest a consumerism that existed before consumerism was promoted as the only way forward, and would also validate the situation of most people preferring to live in a middle class community for what it signified and not giving a shit about anyone else in the process.

### **3. Anti-Social Crime - capitalisms attempt to smooth over the cracks in the system?**

Having had difficulties in defining our communities and community struggles should we find anti-social crime easier to define? This is not the case. What we are concerned with for this purpose of this work is identifying and dealing with behaviour that threatens the functioning of our communities. We can be more precise than this and dismiss threats from the state (which is considered later) to focus only on behaviour perpetrated by people within our own communities. It is here that the anti-social criminal is identified as a concept, though this recognition is always mediated by the state recognising what it chooses to call the anti-social criminal. Class War seem unable to comprehend this when they go raging on about tackling anti-social crime. The anti-social criminal that is usually identified by Class War is someone that robs off their own - ie they are even more focussed in that they see the disrupter of the functioning of the working class community as being working class themselves. Again this is symptomatic of a poor class analysis - the criminal must be working class because they are poor

and/or live in a working class community. Stressing this point may seem futile (yes, the person is obviously working class) but what we are emphasising is the importance of understanding class and class consciousness as how we relate to each other and the ideas we hold, as well as the things that are defined for us (our relationship to the means of production etc). Similarly we cant assume that the anti-social criminal is a would-be-boss. Understanding anti-social crime (and consequently dealing with it) should be a function of how we see the working class (as a defined class), the class conscious working class (who understand the class system), and the communist class (who are committed to the overthrow of this system) and the dynamics between these groups.

Anti-social crime is a common occurrence and so it would seem sensible to use it as an axis to discuss community struggle, however it cannot be used as a 'lowest common denominator' type starting point. This is the mistake that Class War have made in the past, resulting in them pushing themselves as a vanguard in the community struggle - ie community struggle cant occur without us because we are the ones who are dealing with whats preventing struggle in the first place. Dealing with anti-social crime is only part of the wider process of understanding community as class struggle. Anti-social crime is only behaviour that is presented as both criminal and anti-social, but this statement provides some clues as to what we should be looking at.

We have outlined that capitalism and the class system leads to both a hierarchy of 'physical desirability' in terms of the terrain we live on, and it also creates ruptures within the the lower parts of this hierarchy. The current rise of the awareness of anti-social crime is not just something that has arisen from revolutionaries opting for a community based struggle - it has come from capitalism trying to address what is obviously a problem... the deterioration of capitalisms social conditions into something else. Capitalism interprets and rectifies this problem through the eyes of the media and the actions of the state. This is our point of departure between a simple remedying of a problem that is apparently antagonistic to capitalism and a revolutionary analysis towards communism.

This is based on a simple observation. By talking of anti-social crime capitalism implies some kind of social conditions, and so implies a degree of health and struggle for these social conditions. The social conditions that capitalism has created is for alienated, atomised individuals to gather commodities that symbolise things way beyond a simple use value. That discussion of anti-social crime usually involves cars to some degree is symptomatic of this. We chase images that suggest to others our lives involve a degree of excitement, spontaneity, or to suggest to ourselves that it is worth crawling out of bed at 7.00 and dragging ourselves to work. This is the social fabric of capitalism. Anti-social behaviour is thus behaviour that contravenes these codes of existence. This can be obvious behaviour like car theft and house breaking which often reaffirm the codes of behaviour (ie rampant consumerism and symbolism) but breaks the rules of the game (earn the money, buy the goods, feel the power). It can also be behaviour that simply refuses the codes... such as refusing individual consumerism, refusing symbolism, and taking chances in realising and fulfilling our needs. What capitalism paints as anti-social is effectively criminalised through the 'democracy of the dead' that it imposes on us. However, capitalism will criminalise officially what it sees as particularly threatening. This doesnt just include 'obvious' things like the direct reappropriation of wealth, but also the aspects of our activities that threaten to break the codes of this. The outlawing of the gathering of 3 or more people or the broadcasting of repetitive beats should be evidence of this.

## **4. Our Analysis.**

Our analysis will need to include the following directions of enquiry:

- (i) the interpretation of anti-social crime through the media, state, etc in terms of what capitalism is trying to achieve.
- (ii) Anti-social crime as a pure drive to leave behind a miserable life. This takes the form of 'by any means necessary' and includes those actions which attempt to justify what capitalism says we must live for by attempting to short circuit the means to attaining this mythical status. It also includes those actions which are a rejection of the capitalist ways and values which then gives us...
- (iii) The importance of uniting those struggling to leave behind a miserable life into the class struggle. This includes both those disillusioned with society and those too poor to appreciate what there is to be disillusioned about. These types may appear poles apart in both the class system and live poles apart in the hierarchy of desired living terrain - it is the dynamic of the class becoming for itself that is important here.
- (iv) The reclaiming of crime in the capitalist sense as part of our struggle, and the reclaiming of social behaviour as part of the society we want to live in. This would effectively see the arguments regarding anti-social behaviour move out of a terrain based community ghetto.

We have sketched over all of these points, albeit briefly, in our introduction to this article. We suggested that capitalism is concerned with rooting out something called anti-social behaviour and

placing it in the spotlight as an attempt to eliminate it and alleviate our failing lives under capitalism. The concept of criminalising this behaviour is reserved for those aspects that seem to be a more dangerous threat to capitalism (ie those that pose themselves as a contradiction rather than an unpleasantness). In the current climate we can see that capitalism is facing a hard time of it by introducing ridiculous measures like the CJB. Of course capitalism will criminalise the 'wilder' aspects of anti-social behaviour because it needs to keep up its appearances of providing a law and order system. But while ever it can get alienated, atomised proletarians to stand firm for their right to alienated, atomised lives, then it will do so. Thus we have capitalisms interests in this game as follows:

CRIMINALITY - defined for us as law and order

		Criminal	Non-criminal
SOCIAL FACTOR defined for us (by us) under capitalism (social democracy)	Social	2	3
	Anti-social	1	

So capitalism is here concerned with 1, which we have not split into categories criminal and non-criminal. If capitalism can root the idea of anti-social behaviour then criminalisation becomes a secondary factor (as described earlier). For the time being capitalism doesnt allow us to think of categories 2 and 3 as defined under the capitalist system. If we think too hard about what makes social behaviour then we are more liable to see through the whole system that glorifies our empty lives.

Our first task is to re-define what we mean by social and anti-social behaviour. At a glance it would seem easier to take the capitalist definition, turn it completely on its head, and then start straightening it out. Thus what is social behaviour in terms of perpetuating the capitalist system is most definitely anti-social behaviour, and what is anti-social behaviour in the capitalist system is in fact anti-anti-social behaviour! But obviously not all anti-anti-social behaviour is positive social behaviour in the communist sense. This is where Class War got dragged off the fence when they were forced to talk about joy-riding.

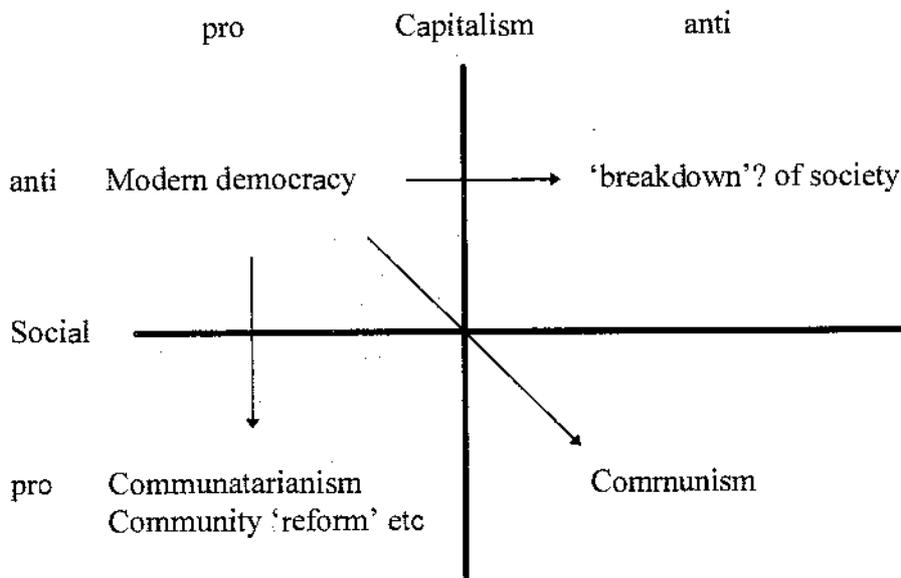
Whilst we can re-define ourselves what we mean by social behaviour, we are still in a system where criminality is defined for us. Indeed as we make our new distinctions between social and anti-social behaviour then we will find that nearly all our social behaviour becomes criminalised in the capitalist system (see the CJB). Also the state will use all its existing apparatus (schools, media, etc) to keep the definition of social and anti-social within its own terrain. Our new analysis could be shown as overleaf:

Initially our efforts would be to show the old system of class rule and capitalism as being anti-social, by actually highlighting the anti-social nature of our lives as alienated individuals. But the move towards this is already occurring as proletarians show the system wont work by either breaking the rules or refusing the whole charade. And so the problems then occur in showing the communist way to those who want to justify their lives in the capitalist spectacle but realise they will have to break the rules of capital to achieve this. The only alternative to this is, to use Proletarian Gob's words, to assume that these people are the same sort of people who become stockbrokers, management consultants, bailiffs, police, etc. This is the burning problem... in short dealing with the fuck-ups from the system.

Defined for us by the state

	Criminal	Non-Criminal
Defined by us		
<b>Social</b>	Raving and gathering Shoplifting / Reappropriating Squatting	Mutual aid / solidarity in the broadest sense
<b>Anti-Anti-Social</b>	Joy-riding Stealing off 'our own' Vandalism (in part)	not relevant
<b>Anti-Social</b>	not relevant	Everyday prejudice Crimewatch cult / snoops Competitive consuming Looking after No.1

We can now see the dynamic at work in anti-social behaviour and our fight within it:



This will take us to the next part of our analysis:

To understand the anti-capitalist nature of activities that break the rules of capitalism and turn these into activities that refuse capitalism

To understand the movement of communitarianism and its emphasis on re-affirming a reason for living in our consumerist times without breaking these afore mentioned rules.

To understand the spectacles drive to categorise every activity and realise that communist activity is by necessity social activity, whereas individual activity, which could be classed as unsocial activity, would be neither relevant nor harmful to our enquiry.

We will try to answer these problems in our next part of this work. We will include an analysis of the translated text 'For a World Without Morality', an analysis of Wildcats arguments around attacking the notion of justice, and a few tactics on how to reclaim 'crime' as social activity and move beyond the framework of the workplace. Contributions to this debate are always welcome.

# Information as Commodity and Strategies for Its Negation.



Abstract : This article was originally written for the members grouped around the US based Progressive Librarians Guild, with the possibility of it appearing in their journal Progressive Librarian. It addressed some of the issues that were arising from the tentatively provocative articles appearing in Progressive Librarian, though these issues were born out through a frustration of working in the library and information sector and so are relevant to other groups and journals. Whilst I felt that the arrival of Progressive Librarian was a welcome forum and voice for library workers, I also felt that it had remained stuck in various assumptions that would contradict any of its new ideas and developments. The bottom line was the acceptance and even excitement at the information age, and a triumphalism at our final recognition as true professionals - a kind of 'our time has come' celebration without critically examining what all this implied. Thus, adopting terminology such as 'progressive' and 'democratic' within this context only made our discomforts more uncomfortable - a bit like the rearranging of the deckchairs on the Titanic.

I felt that various articles in *Progressive Librarian* had unknowingly highlighted this impasse, and that it was time to examine what the information society actually meant in the wider scale of capitalist development - particularly as to whether we wished to proclaim ourselves information professionals.

I have also added on some other brief ideas that get pushed aside in our information centred thoughts. After we demolish the monster of information society we are still left with the 'form' of the library having debated its actual 'content'. It is here where we can see a rebirth in the capabilities of libraries to effect change. Two examples include the 'strip the experts' commitment of much library work, and taking this further the promotion of new models of sharing and a direct assault on the society based on exchange, materialism and fetishism. However, these are matters that need discussing first hand, decisions to be made that are at the basis of our impact to create change - this represents an attempt to move forward in such a direction.

### **Introduction :**

The three lead articles in *Progressive Librarian* 6/7 provided a good grounding in some of the problems facing activist library workers striving for answers and change in our current system. However, they also highlighted some of the unclear definitions we have of the construct 'information society', and the contradictions we are likely to face if we are vague about where we have come from and where we think we are going. In this short article I will attempt to find some threads to the ideas conveyed in previous reports and essays in *Progressive Librarian*, and in doing so throw open just as many new questions and puzzlements for us to face.

At the heart of our concern is the sudden and overwhelming dominance of the information society, and our coming to terms with how it functions and how we, as library workers, are expected to play our part to satisfy some external or 'alien' rules. The diversity of opinions and analysis reflects the fact that we are exploring new terrain from within our positions as library workers, thus we do not have a wealth of procedure and history to fall back upon. In some respects this can be considered a good thing, as the complexity and diversity of the dominant systems are expanding at a frenzied rate, and a fresh approach is always welcome. That said, as library workers we are ideally placed to co-opt a wealth of information for our theories, and are equipped with the skills to cut back the official undergrowth that denies access to that elusive category 'subversive information'. Indeed, part of our attempting to understand what we need to know helps us to develop this same understanding, such that the information about why and how the flow of information is controlled and restricted falls into the category of restricted information, and so finding this information is a practical answer to the 'how' of our original formulation. Put simply, the theory is the practice.

Before I begin my analysis of information society it is important to consider this 'privileged position' that I have indicated in the previous paragraph. I personally do not see library work as the specialism that it is now regarded to be, and if we wish to be considered specialists then let us consider ourselves as the specialists in anti-specialism. Belief in the information professional goes hand in hand with the acceptance of our information society. The 'form' of the library is an important example of the solidarity and mutual aid that can build a true community, and here any specialisms are to be held both proudly and openly, not as some secret professional domain. As I said earlier, we are exploring new terrain from within, and are equipped with the tools and techniques to do this. The understanding, and overthrowing, of the information society is an important component of our greater struggles, and just as we add our numbers to other struggles, then so do others contribute to the struggle against information society. Thus in rejecting the professionalism in library work, it follows that I reject the idea of equating a privileged position within the struggle as the reason to consider myself beyond criticism and superior to those with less key knowledge. Instead, our privileged position should be used to share our ideas and experiences from within the system with other activists, and to enable us to expand the tools we can use to increase the effectiveness of the techniques that we apply.

### **Beyond a self interest**

I will begin by summarising the lead articles in *Progressive Librarian* 6/7 and by extending the genealogy of the proponents in the mass culture debate to our current times. I will then use this to offer a new analysis

of the information society as it is relevant to the library worker, and to discuss the idea of 'information as commodity' which is now one of the buzzwords in both the mainstream and oppositional radical milieu of post-industrial society. A re-thinking of this idea 'information as commodity' and a consideration of the definition of the term 'progress' should hopefully place us in a position to turn a defensive into an offensive. Instead of trying to preserve some degree of respectability and interest in our jobs (when everything else is turning to shit around us?) we need to equip ourselves with the knowledge and experience to see through the new guises of attack on our lives.

Both Theodore Roszak and John Buschmann express concerns about the current state of the information society, in terms of what's happening now and where we could be heading. Roszak (1993) uses his ironic style to alert us to the dangers of accepting information technology without assessing its merits or hidden agendas. He assumes the scenario of 'information as commodity' and debates the nature of the profession of the librarian from within this structure. Buschmann (1993) is concerned directly with the current power structures of the library and information world, a concern that is aimed at the actual nature of the work we will be expected to do, and the conditions we will be expected to do it in. In short, one can adopt the terms used by Douglas Coupland in his scything novel "Generation X"; our jobs as information handlers will just be another 'McJob' and we will work in the totally enclosed and heavily surveilled (by camera AND key-stroke) 'veal-fattening-pens' that now forms part of the corporate landscape of the USA.

Both of these articles, and work in earlier editions of *Progressive Librarian*, assume a blanket covering of 'information as commodity' and in doing so can only talk about how we can live within these uncomfortable parameters. In short, what we see is either a weeping list of farewells to a long lost 'proper' career, or a ten point plan to steer a reasonable course through the outlying wreckage of an unreliable future. The crux of this argument is simple: you cannot assess where you are going, where you want to go, and how to get there, without understanding where you are, where you have come from, and the forces that have brought you here. Thus we all have different reasons for saying that we live in an information society, and that information is the new commodity, but it is of little use to try and rationalise this and to salvage the ideals of 'the library' either for the good of the general public or for our own well-being within our jobs. What is needed is a critical look at the history of information society and the interplay of libraries with the other forces at work within this movement. This is a wideranging subject, but should be the underpinning to any of our words and thoughts expressing where we are now and where we want to go.

### **The end of history?**

Henry Blanke seems to have this task in mind when writing in *Progressive Librarian*, and I will discuss two of his articles. Blanke (1990) gives a short, and very pointed, history on the idea of post-industrial society. He traces a line from the period after World War II that has its roots in a combination of an increasing amount of scientific and technical information, an explosion in information and communications technology, and the growth of private corporations into multi-nationals. However, unlike many other fashionable theorists of the end of history doodling away in the towers of their academic castles, he firmly states that "the fundamental features of capitalism (commercial production for profit, wage labour, elite control of economic surplus, market relations) have remained firmly in place and will continue so for the foreseeable future". Academics in search of something new have a vested interest in overlooking the obvious, however, it is with this 'obvious' supplied by Blanke that we must begin our discussions i.e. that capitalism persists. The continuation of the features of capitalism is our keystone to understand information society: with this we can examine the emergence of information as commodity and understand that this strictly serves capitalist development. We cannot take an opposite stance... if libraries adopt the ideology of 'information as commodity' and go on to embrace all technologies in the fight for their slice of the action then it can clearly be seen that the type of information we will be providing will be information strictly of use to corporate capitalism, and we will be tying ourselves into this system in a number of ways. It follows that we cannot situate ourselves within this set-up and expect to make changes from within, we need to understand what information as commodity actually means and to reject it completely.

However, there is much more to information society than the developing strand of information as commodity. Blanke recognises this in the closing statements of his article, making references to the commodification of information as being only part of the "corporate colonization of increasingly large portions of cultural and social life", and to the reduction of images, ideas and information to the "flat uni-dimensional plane dominated by commercial values and ideological conformity". Again, this is linking up with those who step

out of the post-history reference frame to recognise that capitalism doesn't just grow extensively but also intensively - by carving up social existence into ever smaller pieces, using information as both the scalpel and the projector screen.

He also assumes that, until recently, the public library "existed outside of the all encompassing web of market relations". There is an urgency to develop an understanding of this tendency towards "corporate colonization" and to place the library within this context, for it seems to me that for libraries to freely embrace the information as commodity ideal can only suggest that they weren't exempt from all accusations of them adhering to this ideology of "corporate colonization".

## The Assault on Culture

Fortunately there is a rich vein of theory documenting the development of corporate colonization, and Blanke addresses some of this in his next article (Blanke (1993)). I will comment and expand on this article, before trying to build a more coherent picture of the rise of information society that pulls together these individual threads.

In his article, Blanke details some of the history of the cataloguing and opposition to the mass culture industry, and touched upon the situation of libraries within this contested terrain. His analysis begins with the important body of theory introduced by the Frankfurt School in the 1950's (a period that saw the category information come into a life of its own). This work saw the mass culture industry as total social domination, and had its roots in a marxism cross-pollinated with a study of magazines, radio, cinema, sound recording, advertising and television. It was quickly agreed that the target of all this high-tech consumer information gloss was the bored and exploited worker, particularly the person at the end of their tether ready to try anything to instigate change. Blanke vividly and accurately illustrates the Frankfurt school's disillusionment and disgust on the role of the culture industry, and provides the link to Marcuse's later work around the rise of administration and efficiency into this system. Thankfully Blanke also recognises the extreme elitism present in these high priests of cultural critique, an elitism that still exists.

Blanke then proceeds to detail some of the arguments around the possibility of turning the culture industry in on itself, a case of hijacking some of the forms and using them for our own ends (that is, the destruction of the dominant forms). Blanke chooses the American New Left as a focal point, and discusses the body of work that these produced - a reaction to the Frankfurt School coming from the heart of the evil new culture itself. Whereas the New Left never got beyond the stage of more discussion and more writing (eventually to be dragged back into the academic postmodern swamp) a bunch of radicals from (initially) Europe began to put these ideas into practice. It could be argued that the Situationist International formed the basis of the next stage of the assault on culture (although the notion of a progressive germination is somewhat misleading), certainly they were willing to take up arms and move onto the streets with the struggle. With this in mind it is necessary to document their brief history to both complete Blanke's account of the resistance to corporate colonization and to look for clues as to how this resistance shows itself today.

The S.I. have recently regained something of a cult status, having the ironic honour of a travelling art exhibition detailing their practices (in the form of sacred-ised texts stored under glass in galleries of their anti-art). Whilst their ideas are always under debate in the pages of marginal political magazines and ranting broadsheets, the upturn in the interest of their art has given rise to every man and his dog clamouring to write an official history of the group, its actions, and its influences. Most of these histories are worth avoiding though 2 are of interest : Home (1988) traces a utopian current from the embers of dadaism through to various political / artistic groups of the 70's and 80's (Fluxus, punk rock, etc) - at the centre of this is a fairly caustic review of the rise and fall of the Situationists, whereas Plant (1992) uses the vitality of the 60's to search for clues in the postmodern 90's. The main body of theory from the group itself was crystallised in Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" and Vanneigms "Revolution of Everyday Life". Their ideas came from a variety of sources and had at their centre a critique of the culture industry and all its apologists, and an enquiry into the categories work and play within their subjective marxism. As well as being prolific in the amounts of texts they produced, they were also elitist in the extreme, ventering acidic attacks on all and sundry in the 'official left', even attacking their own members at the slightest ideological blip (see Berman (1990) for a perspective on this). Their role in the 1968 uprising is another often disputed fact, and their link with Cardans 'Socialism ou Barbarie' is also contentious. An American section of the

S.I. had a brief official existence publishing a single 1969 volume of work that maintained the trend of relentless criticism (the targets being Marcuse, McLuhan, Bookchin, Sweezy). Following this the American scene went mad with the arrival of Morea's 'Motherfuckers', 'White Panthers' and 'International Werewolf Conspiracy'.

The Situationists had plenty to say about culture, particularly about how radical tendencies were disarmed and then used within the armoury of the official culture (recuperation), and about the use of subversion in the cultural domain (detournement). However, their attempt to fuse a class struggle approach with an attack on the culture industry is a key factor in the usefulness of their work, and as much as they took further steps than many of their predecessors, it is difficult to assess how much of a role they played in the degeneration of critical thinking to the current state of affairs.

### Looking for clues.

Today we have academics and cultural critics luxuriating in the theories around postmodernism, spouting out empty phrases around the end of history, non-participation, nihilism, and the relevance of Baudrillardian black holes. We are presented with an ever growing pile of academic books deconstructing everything from MTV and motorway manslaughters to Mickey Mouse and Madonna. A plague of textual determinism now ensures that each book produces another book about itself and another book about how it relates to an even previouser one. It is important to find voices that are still giving fresh ideas on how the culture industry operates, and not on how pointless it is in trying to fight it. From this mess, in the spirit of Blanke's short history of the need for the mass culture debate, it is encouraging to find Chomsky and his precise analysis - here the link to the present date can be established.

Chomsky has written prolifically from within the field of linguistics, and his exposing of the lies, rhetoric and double meaning within the world of politics puts much of this into practice. His recent work has shifted more towards exposing the real motivators of the power states, and within this he has concentrated on the 'Manufacture of Consent'. It is these ideas that are highly relevant to our examination of the rise of information society in terms of 'corporate colonisation'. The recent titles "Necessary Illusions" and "Manufacturing Consent" contain vast notes backing up all his ideas and observations, however you can obtain a sharp idea of these theories in his short pamphlet "Media Control: the spectacular achievements of propaganda" (Chomsky (1991)). In this Chomsky gives a history of propaganda from the first world war into the take up of the propaganda method by the liberal democrats. This then forms the basis for his idea on the nature of democracy in our current society: that people are encouraged to make choices to 'control' their lives so long as the choices are controlled by the ruling elite. This controlling of the choices is the function of propaganda, the 'manufacture of consent', and it comes from the assumption that the mass of the public is just too stupid to be able to manage their own affairs. However, the controlling elite do not assume the mass of the public to be that stupid, hence the complexity and intensity of the propaganda system. To quote Chomsky "Propaganda is to democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state". Importantly, Chomsky singles out the use of developing media systems in the Mohawk Valley Steel Strike 1936. Here, for the first time, the tactic was adopted of using subtle and effective propaganda to turn the public against the strikers. From this point in time the same method was applied over and over again enabling the state to whip up hysterical support for wars and to falsify history as and when required.

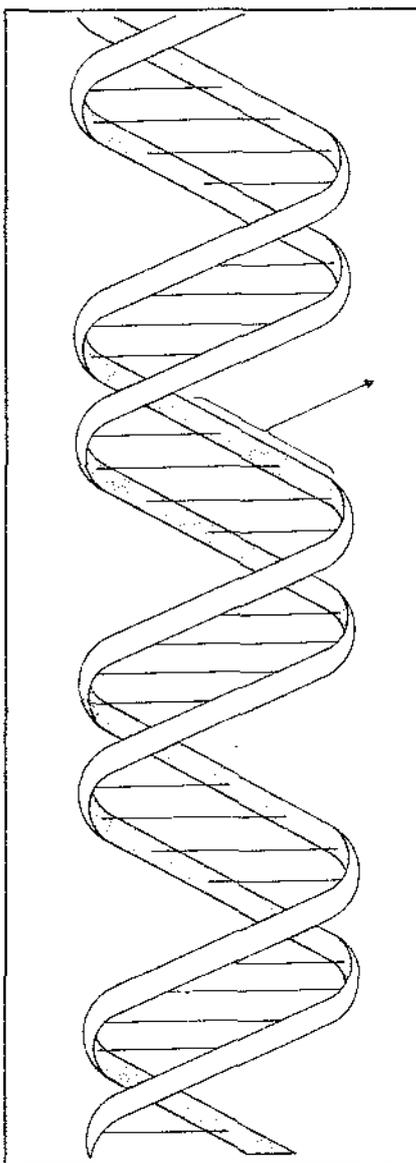
This short but effective analysis of the propaganda system within a democracy would be enough to bring Blanke's study of the culture industry up to the present date. 'So what?' you may ask - propaganda has flourished and is still at large. But, by studying Chomsky we can propose at least 2 things. Firstly that the glut of works on the end of history can be effectively dismissed (ie that there is a fight to be won and there are tactics to discuss), and secondly that maybe libraries haven't remained untouched by this plague of propaganda. Concluding his article, Blanke turns his attention back to libraries and assumes that "the library has somewhat escaped the process of cultural commodification", though now, through the prominence of information as commodity, we are "witnessing the annexation of the library by the culture industry". By not applying the valid points of this critique of mass culture and propaganda to the rise of information society Blanke manages to paint a picture of a pure untainted library environment that is now under attack from an alien development of information society, that is the rise of information as commodity. We must use this body of text discussed by Blanke (and extended here) to re-examine the rise of information society, and to track the paths of both information as commodity and information as control (propaganda). This re-examination must take us up to the work of Chomsky and his critique of democracy. Within this re-

examination we can also understand what is meant by information technology and from this argue against the neutrality of technology. This will form the basis of where libraries are coming from and why certain things are happening today, and it will also provide us with some of the questions we should be asking.

## Information Society

For an information based system (in this case propaganda) to mobilise a mass of citizens to war and bloodshed, and for this same system to mark off sections of the working class to fight against one another is a show of its ideological muscle. However, such a system has as its concern the maintenance of necessary values, beliefs and read propaganda but the system a certain construct and call it itself from this categorisation). ganda spirals in with the rise (which then goes on to include and the development of attending out of the picture for one nologies : technology nowadays ter technology, which is itself nification technologies. These in the development of informothers as development inthe computer metaphor and, information society, draws pre-empts the common argunology - that is that computand are put to evil uses by computers is a result of the Berman shows that the world computer long before the comelenges the notion that technolnal logic of discovery (though crises and reflect the values Babbage began this process bour, instrumental rationality, the growth of capitalism based and rapid iteration remade the then the seemingly uncontrolbureaucracy was the crisis appearance". Into this equaganda as explained below.

The point must be emphasised consumption is the mainstay still the case. So the term value in encouraging people to been re-organised, but has no in denying the possibility of this era is about to pass. And we can be sure that 'informational' does not equal 'post-industrial'. With this in mind it is possible to draw illuminating ideas from the recent history of capitalism.



illusions (for this we should also tem is subtle enough to categorize propaganda, obviously excluding The rise of information as propaof information in the workplace information as 'pure' commodity) ant technologies. It is worth stepminute and considering these techis usually associated with compu a hybrid of information and commu2 technologies play the key roles tion society, each re-defining the creases. Berman (1989) addresses while not concerned uniquely with some very similar conclusions. He ment around computers and techers develop from a playful endeavour capitalism, or that the 'evil'-ness of system they are developed in. was remade in the image of the puter actually existed, and chalogy develops according to an interthe development is skewed to solve of particular interest groups). with his vision of a division of laand bureaucratic organisation... "If on hierarchy, controlled sequence, world in the image of the computer, lable growth of corporate and state that was averted by the computers tion neatly fits the rise of propa-

that commodity production and in capitalist economics, and this is 'post-industrial' may have some think about how this production has value (apart from its negative value class struggle) in suggesting that

Which particular instances in the progress of capitalism were instrumental in developing information society are open to question, as is the importance of these individual instances ; there are many ideas on this, but the introduction of Taylorist method in the workplace must be considered as the key. As I have already indicated, Taylorism represented the realising of creating the world in the image of the yet to be invented computer... hierarchy, controlled sequence and rapid iteration. Two things can be considered, firstly that the computer wasnt invented yet and secondly how Taylorism affected the worker... it was the final twist of the knife blade of alienation, attacking the mindset by reducing work to a repetitive meaningless activity under the watchful eye of the boss and clockholder. It is now that we can consider information as propa-

ganda and its crucial role - to propagandise this enforced way of life as an acceptable way of life. To counter increased boredom, disempowerment and disorientation we had an immediate system of ideologies that part blackmailed and part hypnotised the working class into submission. In the period following the introduction of Taylorist methods we saw the commodity spring into a life of its own through the media, advertising and the advent of 'lifestyle' to compensate the need for a genuine life and sense of community. It is here where we see the technology of communication shaping the eventual future of itself through its interplay with information. The latest in communication technologies were print methods and broadcasting, these printed and broadcasted an information that eventually dictated the terms of technology, as information technology became the ability to capture, compress, organise and disseminate information, and communication technology became dependent on this, thus redefining itself in the condensed sphere of communication of compressed information (eg fibre optics, satellite transmission, and now the net).

The campaign of information bombardment was intense, its aim to keep us from breaking up or breaking out. But amongst the propaganda of lifestyleism and conspicuous consumption we also had the increase in the credit system to keep people 'surfing the wave'. This economicisation of everyday life creates yet another need for information based work in the fields of finance. In our original Taylorist factories we had a process that demanded tight control and monitoring for a smooth efficient flow of commodity production. As I already emphasised, the computer shaped this system and so arrived to solve the crisis that it had temporarily created. As technology now concentrates on communication technology (speed, accuracy, encodability, networkability) so the production process moves on to a system of dispersed fordism and the administration and monitoring runs onto the global terrain able to get the best 'deals' for our labour power. Administration forms huge parts of companies, and it is in these areas that the forcing ground for new technologies arise ; it makes little difference if we library workers call them tools or not, we need to understand the climate that these technologies grew in ( databases didnt evolve to help library users browse a catalogue, they evolved to store customer details, process records and facilitate 'just-in-time techniques' thus they have such a hierarchical structure).

With the increased facilities to communicate large amounts of information within such a developing network as the one described above we saw the birth of information as commodity. Strictly speaking this can be considered as the development of businesses set up to specifically gather, collate and 'broke' information for those wishing to invest surplus value. This is capitalism in its ultimate parasitic form.

### **The Library Adrift.**

Personally, I do not see the library having to fulfil this role at all, and do not share in the urgency in competing with information brokers to feed capitalism. What are we after, our rightful place in capitalism? If we wish to consider our place in the 'information as commodity' system then we need to reassess what we think is progressive about this system.. I do not see the development of information as commodity as the necessity for a true democratic information sphere, unless we wish to get excited about the democracy of the internet. If for one minute we see this as something other than progress then we can whole heartedly reject the information as commodity ideology and concentrate on breaking it down as part of the commodity system that needs to be destroyed. Otherwise the information that exists to question a commodity system has no value in such a system and so has no place in the library system that competes in the information as commodity system.

This is one dilemma facing library workers (especially those voicing their concerns in Progressive Librarian), though to me the answer is plain enough : it is important to understand the origin of 'information as commodity' and to recognise that such a concept has no place in the library. However, suitable tactics for the battle against information as commodity are in need of discussion.

### **Democracy Versus ... ?**

Turning to our other strand of development in information society, that is the culture debate, or the manufacture of consent, we are faced with more problems. First it is impentive to stress that as information as commodity began its rise to notoriety, then so did the concept 'information as control' accomodate itself in the consensus opinion that is broadcast in the manufacture of consent : thus in the current debate the 2 terms may be distinguishable but are inseparable, forming a double helix in the rise of information society.

Blanke's realisation that the library is now being annexed by the culture industry, and this annexation is being propelled by the prominence of information as commodity, suggests that the library is openly embracing the new concept information as commodity, which in turn suggests that the library has been committed to the manufacture of consent. It is convenient to see Chomsky's analysis as being directed at the media institutions, but we need to direct them against our own libraries.

It is here where we need to rethink the term 'democracy' in our striving for 'democratic' libraries of the future. Propaganda, mass culture, manufacture of consent, or whatever we choose to call it, is basically information for control : information that tells us what to do, how to dress, what to say, who and what to aspire to, it is information that denies us what we could be and what we are becoming. If our libraries are to be democratic then is there to be a moral obligation to fill our bookshelves with this type of information, to hold a deliberate mixture of falsifications and perfectly formed popularisers of dominant mythologies alongside an information that struggles to negate these lies and empower the communist movement. This scenario is little better than its opposite (the current situation in many libraries) where some of us feel we have an obligation to stock our shelves with these opposing viewpoints, and hope that this information somehow shines out amidst the propaganda.

Until the industries of cultural control are brought to a standstill then we are fighting in isolation, there will be a time when we can link our struggles effectively, but until then we must acknowledge that mass culture and propaganda will be ingrained into peoples consciousness, and so the concept of 'democratic' representation in our libraries is ludicrous. This is the democracy of a de-socialised world where 2 neighbours can find stimulation in sharing spectacular banalities on the internet. We must also be careful of posing a single category of 'truth' information in opposition to our general category of propaganda... over the past few years it has been deemed necessary by progressive librarians to support information about such organisations like the ANC because they struggle in African politics, similarly they support Shining Path or Castro's Cuba.

Last year I saw a good example of undemocratic library work... the community libraries in Sheffield had got together to coordinate an information provision questioning the glorification of Columbus and his conquests. I had the good fortune to witness a reader requesting a book on the history of Columbus only to be pointed in the direction of the 'nothing to celebrate' display. Democratic? No. Effective? Yes!

Once again we need to consider what we mean by cultural democracy. Is this to include the dominant capitalist culture as well as representing opposite views and 'ethnic' cultures? What is needed is information on class culture, and the necessity of developing a culture of active struggle. We could also represent our hopes and visions for a communist society within this 'culture'. If we take a critical look at these concepts of information as commodity / control then we can increase the class struggle directly through our libraries. We already have the opportunity to develop our spaces as a meeting place and idea-shop for a dynamic community, and the 'form' of the library is traditionally an anti-commodity approach that values sharing for use when needed instead of possession.. That there is an active discouragement of people using libraries should be enough to alert us to the radical potential of libraries, It should not, however, be used as an excuse to consider libraries as exempt from corporate colonisation. As we begin to provide the opportunities and information that directly attacks the mass media then we shall begin to see they type of struggle that we are likely to face and the tactics we will need to develop.

## **References**

- Berman (1989) "The Computer Metaphor" *Science As Culture* (7) 7-40.
- Berman (1990) "Society of the Spectacle 20 years later : A Discussion" *Telos* (86)
- Blanke (1990) "Libraries and the Commercialisation of Information" *Progressive Librarian* (2)
- Blanke (1993) "The Mass Culture Debate : Left Perspectives" *Progressive Librarian* (6/7)
- Buschmann (1993) "Information Technology, Power Structures and the Fate of Librarianship" *Progressive Librarian* (6/7)
- Chomsky (1991) "The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda / Media Control" *Open Pamphlets*
- Home (1988) "The Assault on Culture" *Unpopular Books*
- Plant (1992) "The Most Radical Gesture" *Routledge*
- Roszak (1993) "Politics of Information and the Fate of the Earth" *Progressive Librarian* (6/7)

These three volumes were put together in the five weeks running up to the Anarchist bookfair. They were produced as three volumes to ensure that at least something was available for the bookfair. As it turned our full output was prepared. The first volume represented our most theoretical works, albeit very open ended. The long article on workplace / community was commenced last year and completed only recently. Thus there is a changing viewpoint to detect, and we make no apologies for this. The second volume had existed in some form or other as separate pamphlets under the Communist Headache name - much of this writing had come about through our debate and discussion with Sheffield Anarchist Group. This third volume represents new material and articles destined but unpublished for other places.

Our writing over the summer ceased, mainly due to other concerns. We compiled a spoof marxist climbing fanzine which is still available. In terms of reading I was struggling with Negri's "Marx Beyond Marx" in search of ideas. This work, along with Camatte's difficult writing, will be discussed in the near future.

We found the articles on primitive communism in Wildcat 17 most influential. However, we appreciate that much work is needed. It is easy to point such material in the direction of another indicator of our sour times - ie the "One Dimensional Man" tradition. But Wildcat believe in class struggle and are interested in how the primitivist approach can inform this struggle. Unlike other anarchist groups who ask how can the class struggle inform the primitivist approach (and normally decide "not much").

The crux of the primitivist argument for us is the extra effort it places on how we can construct a vision of the society we want and the process to take us there. We are not trying to justify it in a marxist framework, nor are we trying to bury Marx because of some slip of the tongue he made.

One of the first replies to Wildcat 17 appeared in Aufheben 4. This journal is normally excellent, but its savaging of the primitivist ideas was out of character. We are currently part way through the large volume

"The Incomplete Marx" written by an Aufheben collaborator. It would appear from our reading up to now that the book tries to tease out a subjectivity of capitalism while sticking to the economic machinations. It is a bit like putting a reading of Negri and the Situationists side by side... there are some similarities.

For us it would appear that Marx, incomplete or not, strives to pin down the rules of fair play for capitalist economics and set out standards to be followed. But before our subjectivity broke these rules for the sham that they are the capitalists decided to break them first. This is the ironic twist to the theory of capital responding to our demands.

This also accounts for Aufhebens savaging of Baudrillard's early works "Mirror of Production" and "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign". If we suddenly discovered that within the notebooks for Capital was a cryptographically disguised manual for advanced masturbation techniques then we wouldnt abstain from sexual activity.

Similarly we dont need to justify our miserable social conditions in a new reading of Marx. Marx tells us about the system of exchange and about how it leads to capitalism. We of course take this on board to both guide us to communist society and to critique the capitalist society we live in. But we cant assume that the complex intertwining of our current social and material conditions can be easily understood. The process of self-discovery and of becoming-a-free-spirit can now be bought mail order from the back pages of the Observer.

Our next volume will conclude our work on anti-social crime and consist of responses to these three volumes. We will also give a short summation of anti-cultural activity and include a review of a number of books we have obtained that boast an analysis of our current times - these include Poster's "Second Media Age", "Virtual Geography", Dery's "Flame Wars", Vancigem's "Movement of the Free Spirit" and DeLanda's "War in the Age of Intelligent Machines". If you have comments on these, or other recommendations to add, then please write.



