BULLETIN MATTERS

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2

ledged sameness of our basic political views. Instead we begin this issue with two voices from the past that relate to the articles by Ulli Diemer published in DBs 45 and 48. Next, in a brief note Adam Buick responds to the implication that the Socialist Standard did not publish an answer to its criticism of Capitalism and Its Revolutionary Destruction. Then Pat Murtagh discusses the matter of libertarians participating in elections.

The Indian group, Komunist Kranti, responds to a letter in DB45 and to a personal letter about its positions and program. The document on the situation in India that KK mentions will be published in an upcoming issue. Monroe Prussack comments on letters by Jeff Stein and Sam Brandon. George Walford, who seems to be devoting his life to combatting the SPGB, continues his crusade. Ed Stamm raises some questions about libertarian socialism’s basic assumptions. R. Sims, whose article should have been paired with Pat Murtagh’s letter, also speaks to the question of electoral participation. Larry Gambone writes deploiring the mutual bashing that seems endemic among us and provides a historical explanation for it, while Michael William calls for more. Last, E.R. points out my crimes in both substance and style in the discussion on asterisking, while I defend myself as best I can. The two documents that E.R. mentions will be published in an upcoming DB. Regrettably there is no room in this issue for the “Reviews of Periodicals” department—and hence no asterisking.

Once again, keep those letters and articles coming and, to conserve space, please single space and use narrow margins (a seven-inch typed line is best).

FINANCES: Between subs/sales and donations we more than held our own this time. The large amount for copies results from the need to make copies to satisfy requests for back issues. We have run out of some and have to copy at least some pages.

Contributions: Ron Sims $1; Frank Irwin $12; Frank Smith $5; Laurens Otter $18.67; Harry Wade $43; Anonymous $4; Wesley Lawimore $7; Ed Stamm $2; Jack Ceder $4; Frank Girard $25; Anne Nonymous $9. Total $ 120.87 Thank you, comrades.

BALANCE February 23, 1991 (per bank statement) [deficit] $65.40

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BALANCE April 21, 1991 [deficit] $58.21

Fraternally submitted, Frank Girard for the DB Committee.
When Socialism Was a Success

Success Then, Failure Now: Why?

Once there was a powerful socialist movement -- not long ago, as history measures time. It was strongest in Europe, but it reached every industrialized nation -- even the USA. It recruited millions of people into labor unions, political parties, co-operatives, and an amazing variety of other organizations. Millions of working people were seriously organizing to replace capitalism with a better system. Today this is almost forgotten. But at the time it had enormous impact.

It started from almost nothing around 1850. By 1900 it had grown into a movement of enormous efforts. This makes the rise of the socialist movement one of the most successful organizing efforts that has ever been. Karl Marx and his supporters did a lot to help make it successful.

Today socialism is irrelevant, and Marxism does not help anybody. Their failures are a sad and familiar story. Yet once they were a tremendous success. Why? They began with a situation much like our own. Around 1850, working people had many grievances, but no clear idea what to do about them. The political left was fragmented, demoralized, and corrupt. Labor unions were weak and shrinking. Socialism consisted of tiny, squabbling sects. Why all this weakness and fragmentation? Because an earlier revolutionary movement -- the movement which produced the American revolution of 1776 and the French revolution of 1789 -- had become part of the system.

The economic and social situation of that time was different in many ways from what we see today. But the historic parallels are striking. We, too, see weakness and fragmentation; powerless labor unions; corruption and decline of the political left. For us, too, the revolutionary movement of a previous generation has become part of the system.

Another significant parallel: the economy of that time was going through a unification process. Markets that had been limited to cities or regions were combining into nation-wide markets. (In Germany and Italy, this was accompanied by political unification.) A few employers were building nation-wide businesses, while many others were wiped out. Workers in one city found themselves competing with workers in other cities. Most of the labor unions of the time were limited to local areas -- and were wiped out.

One reason Marxists succeeded was that they knew this unification process could not be stopped. Instead of trying to stop it, they worked to build organizations that crossed regional boundaries. Eventually they helped to build a new set of unions, nationwide in scope, much stronger than the ones that had died.

Today a bigger unifying process is doing the same kinds of things. National markets are becoming international. A few businesses are taking advantage of the new markets, wiping out many others. Workers in one nation find themselves competing with workers in other nations. And today's labor unions are dealing just as badly with this as did the unions of 1850.

Today, those of us who want a better social system are faced with the problem of building a movement from almost nothing. We can learn something from people who
faced and solved the same kind of problems years ago.

**Marx's Organizing Methods: The Myths**

In order to learn from them, we need to unlearn a lot of things. Most people, including most Marxists, "know" a lot of things about Marx that are just not true. They "know:"

1. that Marx was a leader of a revolutionary party;

2. that Marx founded a movement;

3. that Marx's followers practiced "party discipline."

None of these three "facts" is true. Marx did not start the Communist League (the group that published the *Communist Manifesto*). He did not start the First International, nor the Social Democratic parties, which eventually carried his message around the world. He was never the leader of any political party.

What he actually did was to influence organizations, which other people built, to adopt his ideas. He did so through a network of supporters who worked within these other organizations, without ever having any organization that was "for Marxists only."

These supporters did not completely understand their mentor's theories. They clung to many beliefs that Marx rejected. They did many things he disapproved of. The way Marx reacted to this is instructive.

He made sarcastic remarks. He gave people insulting nicknames. He vented displeasure in sometimes really nasty words. Some people say this proves he was authoritarian. Maybe it does. But what he did not do is even more instructive.

He did not put those supporters who disagreed with him "under discipline." He did not make them do "criticism and self-criticism." Did not put them on trial. Did not expel them. Did not try to drive them out of the movement. He did not do any of those things that a modern "Marxist" leader does in the name of "party discipline."

He did try to do things like this to some of his opponents, notably to Bakunin. But he did not abuse his supporters in anything like the way modern "Marxists" do. The Marxists of Marx's day had no party discipline. The growth of their movement shows that they were better off without it.

This also calls into question another thing today's Marxists "know." They "know" that Marxism was successful because it was the correct ideology. Not true. I'm not saying that Marxism was not the correct ideology. Maybe it was. What I am saying is that its correctness or incorrectness had very little to do with its success.

This is proved by the fact that it was made successful by people who did not understand it very well. It is also proved by the fact that a very different ideology -- Spanish Anarchism -- attained the same kind of success, among the same kinds of people, even though it disagreed with Marxism on many articles of faith.

A few of the basic ideas contained in Marxist ideology did help the socialist movement to succeed. These were ideas which helped the organizers to set realistic goals for themselves. These included the ideas that:

- organization had to be based on the working class;
- organizations should be run democratically;
- labor unions were important organizations for defending working people's standard of living; and,
- revolution was not possible until conditions were ripe for it.

These were ideas that had a natural appeal to competent organizers. For that reason they were re-invented and/or borrowed by other ideologies that were also successful.
among working people.

Theoretical niceties, such as the distinction between labor and labor-power, or the elaborate apparatus of dialectical materialism, may be important for other purposes. But they do not help people to build organizations. Complicated theory usually gets in the way of organizing. It is hard to explain, and it gets people arguing about side-issues.

For this reason, Friedrich Engels played a critical role within the Marxist network. He had a gift for translating Marx's theories into ordinary language. Marx was not as good at this, but he understood the need to do it. Both Marx and Engels understood that they needed to emphasize just a few of the most important ideas, and to work hard at spreading them as widely as possible. This made it possible for the network to communicate these ideas to ordinary people.

Because of this, Marxism was able to help people understand economic and political issues. It helped them find workable solutions to the many practical problems that growing organizations ran into.

Marx and Engels were not organizers themselves. But they produced literature -- books, pamphlets, and articles -- that organizers could use. Also they had intelligence and common sense. When those people who actually were doing the organizing brought problems to them, they could give realistic advice.

No Disciplined Party

Where was the disciplined party that most of today's Marxists believe in? Nowhere. Marx's most widely-read statement of policy said that "The Communists [meaning Marx's supporters] do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement." (Communist Manifesto, Chapter II, paragraphs 2-4)

This was a real policy which was actually followed by the Marxists of Marx's day. I emphasize "actually followed," because the "Marxists" of today follow a policy which is the exact opposite of what these words say.

Marxism rose to power within the Socialist movement, and helped to make that movement into a world-shaking force, without ever having a party line. Without democratic centralism. Without assigning people to "colonize" industries. Without organizing factions. Without ever doing any of those things that a modern vanguard party thinks of as truly "Marxist".

Marx's Organizing Methods: The Reality

The methods that Marx's supporters actually used consisted of networking, local organizing, and education. Here I am giving modern names to methods which they used but had no names for. By networking I mean that they kept in touch with each other informally, mostly through letters and visits. They had none of the elaborate central structures typical of modern vanguard groups. History shows they were better off without them.

By local organizing I mean that they built organizations, in whatever place they happened to be, which met the needs of people who lived in those places. They did not limit themselves to local issues. Nor did they limit the organizations to local size. On the contrary, they did everything possible to make them grow across local boundaries. But they started local, and waited to form national organizations until there was strong local support. Also they kept a large measure of local autonomy -- despite the fact that, as their organizations grew to national size, they started to preach "party discipline". (This appearance of "party discipline" was a sign of decay beginning in their movement. They had been better off without it.)

By education, I mean that they spent a lot of time teaching and discussing social questions. They did not avoid discussing controversial issues. They did not limit themselves to "transitional demands." Nor did they limit
themselves to social questions. On the contrary, they taught all kinds of subjects, from Darwinism to stenography. Working people of that time mostly had an elementary school education or less, and were hungry for knowledge.

They built several different kinds of organization, depending on local conditions. In Germany, where they were the most successful, they started with educational associations, then built a political party, then organized co-operatives, labor unions, and an amazing variety of social clubs. These organizations grew because they met actual needs of real people. The result, by 1890 or so, was a working class community filled with organizations and saturated with Marxist beliefs.

This was less successful outside Germany. But by 1900 the Socialist labor movement, by then almost totally dominated by Marxist ideas, had at least a toe-hold in every industrialized nation.

Marxism vs. Conspiracy

Alongside Marxism within the Socialist movement were other, rival schools of thought. Some of the rivals did have discipline and party lines. This kind of group, which today would be called a vanguard party, was generally referred to as a conspiracy.

The conspiracies of 1850 didn't operate in exactly the same way as today's vanguard parties. But they did have the same attitude: "My group, right or wrong". Disciplined political groups had been around for a long time. They were very strong around 1850 for two reasons.

First, the need to operate underground made many people believe they were necessary. Remember that this was a time when most nations did not allow democratic rights. Every opposition group, including all the labor unions, faced the same kind of problems that dissidents in Russia face today.

Second, the traditions of the French revolution -- which reached its peak under a disciplined group called the Jacobins -- made many people think they were desirable. For people who thought of revolution in terms of Napoleon and the guillotine, conspiracy seemed to be the "correct" "revolutionary" way to do things. But Marx was fiercely and bitterly against it.

An instructive example of this is given by the death of the Communist League. You will recall that this was the organization that published the Communist Manifesto. It was the first organization in history to adopt Marx's ideas. Its members took part in the revolutions that swept Europe in 1848, and were driven into exile when these revolutions failed. When in exile, some of its members came to believe in conspiracy. This put them into fundamental disagreement with Marx.

Modern "Marxist" groups have a standard operating procedure for dealing with this kind of situation. They split and/or expel the people that disagree. Those who disagree go off and form their own organization. The resulting groups spend enormous amounts of time and energy fighting each other. This procedure is based on the assumption that the most important thing you can possibly do is to keep your organization alive and your ideology pure.

Marx did something different. He arranged to divide the Communist League into two parts, one for his supporters and one for his opponents. This was not a split, because the two parts still belonged to the same organization. Then his supporters let their part die, and his opponents did the same.

He did not split, he did not keep his organization alive, and he did not keep its ideology pure. Obviously, he did not share the assumption that these are important things to do. What he did instead was to go on with his networking activities.

The Case of Anarchism

Another instructive example is the conflict between Marxism and Anarchism. Anarchists remember this as a battle of
authoritarianism vs. democracy, with Marx on the authoritarian side. (As usual in faction fights, the different sides see things differently.) And it is certainly true that Marx used authoritarian tactics. (As usual in faction fights, there is some truth on both sides.) But for the Marxists the issue was conspiracy.

The leading anarchist spokesman of that time, Mikhail Bakunin, was a strong believer in conspiracy. He involved himself endlessly in underground organizations which had long, long names and tiny, tiny memberships. He rubbed shoulders with terrorists and psychopaths. At the same time, he had other supporters who were starting to build serious organizations. But the Marxists saw the Bakuninists as all one group. To them it looked like a conspiracy that somehow was getting a mass following.

The details of this faction fight are sordid. Marx and his supporters engaged in some very dishonest, very undemocratic maneuvers. They effectively killed a very promising organization, the First International. They were so strongly opposed to this one particular opponent that they willing violated their own principles in attacking him. Why? Their justification was that Bakunin’s supporters were organized in a narrow group which operated with a hidden agenda. In other words, they accused them of acting like “Marxists” do today. They were so bitterly opposed to this way of doing things that they were willing to risk destroying their movement to get rid of it.

This battle did not destroy the movement, but did split it in two. In most of the world, the Marxists won. There the movement came to center around top-heavy political parties, which were eventually co-opted by the capitalist state. There, in the words of the Anarchist historian Daniel Guerin, the Anarchists “reached a dead end ... cut off from the world of the workers which had become the monopoly of the social democrats. They snuggled into little sects, barricading themselves into ivory towers where they polished up increasingly unrealistic dogmas; or else they performed and applauded acts of individual terrorism, and let themselves be caught in a net of repression and reprisal.”

He might have been writing about the “Marxists” of today. The historical record shows that the Marxists of Marx’s day were willing to do almost anything to keep from falling into this trap.

In a few places, the anarchists won. The most important place was Spain. There the movement came to center around labor unions and village communities. They resisted co-optation more effectively than the Marxist political parties. Eventually (in 1936, a time when most of the political left had made peace with liberalism) they carried out a magnificent social revolution. (This revolution was joined by many non-Communist Marxists, a fact which proves once again that ideology is less important than actions.) Among the surviving remnants of Spanish anarchism you can still find, in groups like Coordinadora, examples of effective democratic organization.

Spanish anarchism grew into a mass movement which today we can still see as a model of how to change the world. But it did not achieve this through conspiracy. Those anarchists who tried the conspiracy method suffered the same fate as the other sects. Those who built the mass movement did it the same way the Marxists did: through networking, local organizing, and education.

Conclusion

The movements built in this way turned out to have serious weaknesses. Ultimately, both the Marxists and the anarchists failed to produce the better social system that the world still desperately needs. Their failures are the historical reason why we are faced with having to start over, almost from nothing, hoping to regain ground that socialism won more than a hundred years ago. It can be argued that the looseness of their organizing methods contributed to these failures.

Nonetheless, I think this is the only way that
TWO LETTERS

[The following letters are taken from the now-defunct councilist journal, Boot & Branch, number 8, around 1979. Jim Bumpas, whose letter leads off, was a part of the then flourishing Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation (SRAF).]

On Ulli Diemer’s “Anarchism vs. Marxism”

Some Marxists in recent years have expended a lot of energy telling us how much they have been influenced by anarchism. They tell us the “True Marx” is not at all what his present followers say he is. They call themselves “Libertarian Marxists” (which I’ll abbreviate with “L-M”). L-Ms purport to feel there are many points of unity with anarchists, which should lead us to join together in organization. Of course, only “good” anarchists need apply. To define the anarchist they want, they dig up the dusty old polemic between Marx and Bakunin. Somehow, they feel this debate is of central importance to present-day relations between Marxists and anarchists.

To start with, most “libertarian” Marxists reject nearly all in Marxism since Marx: Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, and all the present-day Marxism which is practiced upon nearly two-thirds of the world’s population. But they do not reject Marx; they “transcend” him, yet follow him at the same time. If that concept sounds a bit too mystical for you, wait, there’s more. Like calvinists against the Pope, L-Ms try to reinterpret the “ancient texts” to show how Marx himself (?) was really a libertarian. Ulli Diemer (in Root & Branch ?) has baldly asserted: “Marx is without dispute (?) the central figure in the development of libertarianism.” L-Ms dismiss as irrelevant the fact that Marxism is today one of the most authoritarian dogmas ever to inflict humanity. I have yet to see anything attributed to Marx which justifies his importance to anarchists.

L-Ms plaintively complain that anarchists are unfair in that the Marxism we attack has little to do with Marx. Even if we admit this, why should our criticism of Marxism have anything more to do with Marx than Marxism has to do with Marx? If we analyze society as it is today, then we must criticize Marxism as it is today. Marxism today is a part of contemporary culture everywhere in the world, as much as is freudianism and capitalism. So any analysis of society or discussion of strategy must develop with the possibility that Marxism will be criticized. But Marx himself need never be mentioned.

L-Ms, as much as they’d like to, can’t have it both ways: they can’t complain anarchism has no valid historical alternative to show
The historical record shows that Karl Marx

believed in a strict situation, they do nothing but

instruct. Everyone to see a movement started,

that are existing to get a movement started,

drive people away from the small groups

over. The main thing they do then is to

beginning there is nothing for them to take

movement needs to be built from the

movement. Other people have built. When a

the answers may be able to take over a

their little groups that think they have all

groups that think they have all the answers

must be accomplished by their little

organizing and education. I very clearly has

growth always happens by working local

and movement has grown from small
and then complain of descriptions and analyses of the experience of the Spanish Revolution (among other experiences). They are bored by such things, presumably preferring to contemplate the “New Man” and how the millennium (read “The Capitalist Crisis”) is at hand. Christians have been waiting for 2000 years. I hope L-Ms won’t match that record! They have “Found It” in Marx, and through Him, they will be reborn in New Men. Good luck!

L-Ms are correct, though, in their assertion that we anarchists often criticize marxism, leninism, stalinism, and maoism as though they were identical. In fact, I wouldn’t stop there: many of those elements we criticize are also contained in other governing doctrines. The identity we see rests precisely upon those elements in those tendencies which are identical or similar.

Let’s deal specifically with the Bakunin-Marx debate which so fascinates L-Ms. The extreme pyramiding of power, the ideological monolithism, the separation between ruler and ruled, the destruction of the most basic freedoms and rights all combine to give Bakunin’s warnings to his polemic with Marx a prophetic character. Marxists, failing to take into account Bakunin’s warnings, have everywhere created the opposite of the paradise predicted by Marx. L-Ms complain that Bakunin deliberately fabricated the accusation that Marx proposed a “People’s State.” Is it only accidental that 99 percent of all marxists in the world have taken their cue from Bakunin’s “fabrication” rather than from the “True Marx” himself, as they build their marxist states? L-Ms must admit Marx called upon the proletariat to use the state apparatus. Squirm as you might, “state apparatus” has always meant “state” in marxist practice. The anarchist analysis of power, based upon the written evidence of thousands of years, shows few instances of “state apparatus” being put aside once assumed. Show me a marxist revolution which has even the most tentative of plans to put aside the state apparatus, much less ever having done so!

L-Ms try to pretty up “dictatorship of the proletariat” with three paragraphs by Rosa Luxemburg tortuously trying to show how a “dictatorship” is really some form of “pure democracy” (more mysticism here). Why call it a “dictatorship”? What is the significance of the use of the term? Perhaps sloppy thinking on Marx’s part? Did “dictatorship” mean something other than dictatorship in those bygone days? Is marxist analytical power so mystically great that they see something in dictatorship the rest of us miss? Or do their thought-convolutions on this issue show confusion of thought on the part of marxists? Again, we need to deal with the historical reality and not with the L-Ms’ ideal of perfection.

L-Ms excuse the confused and sloppy thinking of Marx by asserting (usually by a quote from Engels, and not Marx at all) that Marx
did not mean "economic determinism" when he spoke of the produc-
tion of daily life as the determining element in history. No quote from
Marx can be found to explain why his followers should not have full
justification for their "crude materialism." I guess it's only another
accident that most marxists are economic determinists.

L-Ms mention Bakunin's secret organization as the justification
for the expulsion of all anarchists (not just Bakunin and the circle of
which he was a part) from the First International. They usually fail to
mention the anarchists complied with every demand made upon the
International Alliance, indeed even reducing it to open, individual
sections of the International. After the anarchists complied with every
Marxian demand and Marx still could not provoke the anarchists to
walk out, Marx convened the next meeting in Belgium (1872) rather
than in Switzerland. He knew Belgium had closed its borders to most
latin revolutionaries. Switzerland was the usual location for such
meetings because of its more central location and because it was more
open to radicals of all types. Even so, the Belgian meeting did not
reach the decision to expel anarchists easily. Marx was so unsure of
the lasting effects of his "victory" that he sent the headquarters of the
International to the United States, where it died a quiet death. Marx
later objected to every attempt to revive an international workers'
organization.

As a partianish shot, I pose the question: Why do marxists, even
L-Ms, describe themselves as the followers of a particular human
being? A dead one at that. How does this differ from those who call
themselves christians, jesuits, leninists, maosists, stalinists, etc.? Why
is it one almost never finds anarchists calling themselves bakuninists
or kropotkinists?

In conclusion, most of Marx's ideas aren't worth the trouble of
reclaiming from the present-day corruption of most of his followers.
There's just enough ambiguity in Marx to justify most of the positions
held by those "corrupt" marxists. Even if this were not the case, the
L-M project to reclaim Marx from his "impure" followers has little or
no relevance in today's social revolutionary context. Today, to be a
marxist means one is a Third World Nationalist, opposed to imperial-
ism; it means one is a member of a centralized political party ruled by
a central committee, which is in turn ruled by a chairman, first citizen,
maximum leader, etc.; in other words, a dictator. No room for anar-
chists there!

Jim Bumpas
c/o SRAF.
Root & Branch replies:

The bulk of Jim Bumpas's letter merely repeats the charges which Diemer's articles examined—that Marx's theoretical work stands or falls, and in fact falls, with the activities and regimes of those who call themselves Marxists; and that Bakunin was therefore correct in portraying Marx as a totalitarian. (Readers may be interested in the critique by Sam Dolgeff, similar but fleshed out with more evidence and argument, published with a reply by Diemer in the Winter 1979 issue of The Red Menace.)

As our introduction to Diemer's articles stated, we feel that Diemer is on the wrong track in downplaying Marx's materialism. Marx's insistence that social movements arise from people's experience of their conditions of life rather than from the ideas of theoreticians or inspired souls is part of his importance for libertarians. To find Marx important or even fundamental as a starting-point for radical thinking does not mean that we are "followers of a particular human being." (This is why we are not so excited about the question whether Marx was or was not personally authoritarian.) Our journal carries the label "Marxist" as a reference to Marx but to the practical and theoretical orientation to capitalism that he worked out. We find it striking that in his letter Jim Bumpas never once deals with Marx's ideas and writings on the nature of capitalism—the main focus of his intellectual energies. We suspect the reason few anarchists call themselves Bakuninists or Kropotkinists is not an abhorrence of hero worship (the reverence of many anarchists for the holy trinity of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin makes that clear) but the fact that there is no coherent body of ideas to which such terms might refer.

Finally, with respect to the question of joint activity between libertarian Marxists and anarchists, we obviously recognize that people who condemn some people who call themselves "Marxists" because of the actions of other people who use this label will not be open to cooperative effort. We are not so sectarian, however, and see no reason to reject all anarchists because some of their number don't see us as comrades.
Fully aware that anyone criticized in the Socialist Standard has always
who draws this conclusion in DB 46 should have known better as he is
criticized in DB 46 and then refused to publish their reply. Robert Cox
for thinking, after reading DB 44, that the SPGB had published
Readers could therefore have been forgiven

Same ground as the first, from Wilson and that this was published.
Socialist Standard had received a second response, covering much the
until the next issue (DB 45) that readers would have realized that the
statement which later was not published by the SPGB. It was not
the editors chose not to publish and so part two ended with the
members in response to that letter. This happened to be the one that
Socialist Standard plus one of the two letters sent by Wilson
published, together with a reply of JL Stone to the above column in the
The debate was published in three parts. The

Dear Discussion Bulletin,
Dear Comrades,

I have received my first issue of your Discussion Bulletin, and I would like to make some comments regarding one issue discussed in its pages, one that I am sure has received a lot of previous airing. I speak of electoral participation. Anti-electoralists seem to generally stand upon a principle while pro-electoralists advocate arguments of expediency. In my mind both ways miss the point. I generally, with only theoretical exceptions that are hardly ever valid in reality, an anti-electoralist. Yet I base this stand upon what I consider pragmatic rather than first-principle reason. Why?

Let us suppose for a moment that there existed a relatively effective libertarian organization, one that was somewhat important in a given society. There is no such thing in the world today, unfortunately, though the Spanish movement makes the closest approach. Such an organization would have to operate in the real world of a majority who either disagreed with or were ignorant of its goals. Suppose that there were elections in such a society. What would be the attitude of such an organization to elections?

Believe it or not the answer would be a refusal of running for election while at the same time using such elections to make whatever gains were possible under the circumstances. The reasons for refusing to run candidates are pragmatic. One of the few advantages such a libertarian organization would hold would be a public perception of being "incorruptible." All the flashy revolutionary rhetoric in the world could not make up for the spectacle of such an organization lining up for a possible share of the spoils of power. People rightfully distrust politicians. Running for (paid) office would be willfully throwing away one of the most attractive aspects of a libertarian organization in the eyes of the general, non-convinced, public.

It is also a simple fact that the ability of a libertarian organization to win elections would inevitably grow slowly. Between the time, such as now, of minor isolated sects and disorganized individuals and the time when the majority are either convinced libertarians, or are at least sympathetic, lies a long grinding march. What happens during this transition period if you have members of various legislatures? The answer is contained in the history of every successful populist movement the world over, and the latest replay in the case of the German Greens has merely reconfirmed the inevitable. Elected members automatically become sought-after spokesmen or spokeswomen. Their views, whether they coincide with those of their organization or not, become the publicly perceived "official" views of their organization. The elected representatives almost automatically develop an exaggerated view of the importance of their activities. Such is human nature, and there is little or nothing that can be done to guard against such a process. What is more the elected representatives have at their hands resources that other members do not possess. They have the motive, and they have the means to influence the organization from which they come in ways much more profound than those that can be mustered by ordinary members.
The end result is a diversion of the organization from both its original goals and from new directions that might be in conflict with the aim of "winning elections."

As for the benefits of electoral participation these can all be achieved by other means without the sacrifices of running for office. Minor reforms or the prevention of a truly undesirable office holder coming to power can all be done by non-libertarian politicians who are under pressure from outside or who have libertarian support that is less than total. Nowadays the best way for the average libertarian to help a desirable politician would be to support his opponent, such is the perception of the average person. In the potential situation, however, where libertarian politics of whatever variety are a plus rather than a minus in the public's mind there are numerous alternatives available.

At various times a libertarian organization could emphasize or neglect its pronouncements against voting. This could have either a beneficial or punishing effect on a given politician if the libertarian organization had sufficient public standing. Similarly during elections an admired libertarian organization could be very engaged in campaigning against a given politician while essentially neglecting his opponent. Such an organization could also use election campaigns to promote reforms that one candidate would be more sympathetic to. The possibilities are endless. They do not depend upon formal "alliances;" rather they can be communicated to implicit allies with a simple "word to the wise," a tacit understanding. Such "conveniences" leave the libertarian organization unsullied by the failures of its bedfellows of the moment and free to pursue its own goals.

I could go on, but I think that I have made my point. What I have said may seem cynical to people active in and happy with ineffectual sectarian or sub-cultural islands of purity. To that I say "good." We need cynicism if we are ever to be anything more than a mutual admiration society.

In solidarity,
Par Murtagh

Dear DB:

Would any readers having any documents, pamphlets, etc. on the Italian revolutionary left (Autonomia) willing to part with either originals or zeroxes please contact us? We are especially looking for a pamphlet put out by Red Notes called "Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis". Payment can be worked out. Write to: NEW SPACES
P.O.Box 22962
Balto., MD., 21203
To

Discussion Bulletin

Dear Frank,

We received DB 45 and your letter of 10.1.91 on time. The delay in reply is due to some troubles that we have had here. We are receiving the People. Please consider the sale proceeds of our abridged version of Rosa's Accumulation as our contribution to DB.

1. Rourkela in Orissa state is a steel city in the mining and heavy industry Bihar-Bengal-Orissa region. Our audience there in May 90 was by and large constituted by members of state-capitalist tendencies and liberals shaken by events in state-capitalist bastions. Thus the audience for our re-statement was different in background and thinking from the readers of DB but still we thought (and continue to think) that the text is relevant for DB readers also. While appreciating the criticism regarding what it does not say, we certainly look forward to comments on what it does say more so from DB readers amongst whom quite a lot of uninformed criticism/support of marxist communism is evident to us.

2. We consider ourselves marxist communists. We do not call ourselves Left Communists. Moreover, while the German-Dutch Left was anti-Leninist, the Italian Left was Leninist. A trend in the German-Dutch Left reached the conclusion that party/organisation as such is bourgeois whereas a trend in the Italian Left concluded that without the PARTY the working class does not exist......

In our opinion, German-Dutch Left and Italian Left have both made important contributions to marxist communist movement. Similarly, the Second International and the Bolsheviki have played significant roles. But, in our opinion, German-Dutch Left-Italian Left-Bolsheviki-Second International did not grapple with the fundamental problems posed by the emergence of joint-stock companies/state-enterprises as dominant organisations of material production. For revolutionary abrogation of capitalism, marxist communist movement's theoretical and practical activity needs to be focused on the "faceless" capital that we face today....

3. In your letter of 10.1.91 you write: "Given the Leninist derivation of both KK and the LCs (Left Communists), one can assume that the new society will be statist under the domination of a Marxist party. Am I correct in this assumption?" Frank, you will be glad to know that you are wrong in your assumption.

A little information that we have given above should suffice for the present with regard to Left Communists on this issue. We will try to briefly state our position here.

In our opinion, communist revolution is a series of defeats till final victory. There is no THE STATE to be smashed. Capitalist system consists of a number of STATES constituted on the basis of
countries/nations. Due to a variety of reasons, the probabilities are tilted in the direction of a non-simultaneity of uprisings as well as of differences in their levels. Given this scenario, Paris Commune/Soviet Russia situations are distinct possibilities: DEFEAT OR DEGENERATION may once again be the only choices before us. In our opinion, the revolutionary lesson to be drawn from the experience of Paris Commune and Soviet Russia is that CHOOSING DEFEAT in such situations facilitates revolutionary development in the future. SEMI-STATE is the transitional form between capitalism and communism and we must fight against all attempts at constitution of new state structures. ABOLITION OF STANDING ARMY AND POLICE AND UNIVERSAL ARMING OF WORKING CLASS IS WHAT MARXIST COMMUNISTS MUST STICK TO. We are for @kommunist dictatorship of the proletariat but for us it consists of universally armed workers exercising direct power till classes wither away.

Without the material means/organs to dominate, any/every party can only explain and convince (e.g. Bolsheviks practice especially between Feb.-Oct. 1917). Except mentioning in passing that the fixation of existing level of marxist theory with private property played a significant role, we will not go into the reasons here as to why the author of "The State And Revolution" actively participated in the formation of a standing army together with Trotsky. Marxist communist movement in particular and working class movement in general have had to pay a very heavy price for the military-bureaucratic apparatus built by marxist communists in Russia. Marxist communists in Russia and those who stuck with them by and large degenerated into new representatives of capital — the lesson we draw from this is that under no circumstances whatsoever should standing army and police be tolerated/accepted by revolutionaries. Defeat must be preferred to degeneration — the deepening crisis of the capitalist system will give rise to higher revolutionary waves (degeneration sabotages these and channels the mounting discontent into capitalist war and/or obscurantist bloodletting).

4. In our opinion, organisation and hierarchy/bureaucracy are not synonymous. As we see it, in communist society the production of material means of social life will be organised on a global basis and it will be non-hierarchical/non-bureaucratic. So, it seems reasonable to us that marxist communists can organise their work, can form a world communist party that is non-hierarchical/non-bureaucratic. Experiences of First, Second and Third Internationals have lessons for us in this domain. But except for saying that world communist organisation will not be federal like the Second International and it will not be hierarchical like the Third (based on Bolshevist model), we do not know what it will be like. In fact, presently we are more concerned with the content of communist work and the difficulties therein. We are hopeful that development of marxist theory will constitute/provide the basis for non-hierarchical/non-bureaucratic/non-federal world communist party.

5. In our opinion, communist organisation is a programme based distinct entity. In capitalist society the probability of all/very
large number of wage-workers becoming consciously communists in the early periods of revolutionary transformation (the period we are in) even in periods of turmoil is not very high. We will not go into the whys of it here. As we said earlier, it is through a series of defeats and lessons drawn therefrom that larger and larger number of wage-workers acquire communist consciousness whereas marxism is a tool that has already been forged in its broad outlines. And it is possible to acquire this tool. Hence, a minority that becomes marxist can and must organise itself to contribute its mite. It is the relationship between this communist minority and wage-workers that we have tried to take-up in the text. "We do not think that our views are "typically vanguardist/leninist" in the bad sense. Frankly, do you mean to say that communists should not organise separately? Assuming that you are for organised activity by communist minorities, we want to ask you: what is/should be the relationship between communist organisations and wage-workers today?

6. We agree that "it isn't enough....just to reject state-capitalism". As to presenting a picture of the alternative, rosy picture of abundance based social formation has great propaganda value - quite a lot of the heavens that have been dreamed of can very well be shown to be in the reach of the vast masses today. We hope DB readers are in the know of pamphlets that serve this purpose - if copies could be sent to us, they will be of much use here.

7. As to the tactics that the working class must use to destroy capitalism, except for some very general views regarding reform or revolution, we do not think that much can be said at present. And with regard to the nature of socialism/communism, we know hardly of anything to add to Marx's views. In this context, in our opinion, the Socialist Industrial Unions of the Socialist Labor Party that call for organisation and control of production by workers on the basis of United States of America is a step backwards from first such sketches by early Industrial Workers of the World wherein production and control by workers was based on global basis. But then, a significant portion of present-day production will have no place in the future society....

In reply to an Echanges friend regarding the situation in India, we prepared a note for him. A copy is enclosed. Since the text is not confined to the particularities of India, in our opinion, it will be of some interest to DB readers. If you also think so, please find space for it in DB pages.

We are looking forward to mutually fruitful exchanges.

With greetings

for Kamunist Kranti

Address: Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T. Faridabad-121001(India).
Dear readers,

This is to briefly comment on a letter by Sam Brandon and one by Jeff Stein in U.B.46 and then to link them together. Both writers in common studied marxism and their current opinions are influenced by events of the past that do not apply to the present. In the case of Sam Brandon he lives by the labor conditions of the early part of this century when industrial labor was unionized or trying to be unionized. Today the union movement is shrinking and existing unions are openly collaborating with representatives of the capitalists for the survival and profitability of the business. Who can deny this is happening although we may not know all the reasons? Mr. Brandon bases his hopes for socialism upon activities of unionized workers industrially and then politically to culminate in worker's ownership, management and operation of the industrial complex. During the lifetime of Daniel De Leon it was much easier to comprehend union power intelligently applied than it is today for the reason I mentioned.

The letter by Jeff Stein equated marxism with leninism and rejected both in favor of anarchism. While it is true that Lenin was a marxist, his opinions were more influenced by the feudal conditions of czarist Russia than by capitalism of western Europe as Marx was. Most of Lenin's associates in the bolshevik party were Russian Jews who were obsessed by their hatred of unjust oppression upon themselves. Instead of supporting the government that followed the overthrow of the Czar as other marxists did, they did everything possible to destroy Russian military power and undermine the economy. When the communist party was in control it was a matter of survival for them and any original intention to build socialism became misinformed to deceive outsiders for the benefit of their new social system. In order for Mr. Stein to escape association with that diabolical and insidious social system he rejected marxism which was an anarchist. In the confusion of today he is not alone because capitalists are the chief exponents and practioners of anarchism as De Leon wrote in a pamphlet, "Socialism vs Anarchism." My hope is that Mr. Stein will reject anarchism for socialism which he realizes that the Soviet Union never had socialism although the communist party ruled for more than seventy years. His common sense saved
Dear Editors,

Recent correspondence, especially the discussion between the SPGB and the "Wildcat" group, shows that the Marxists have overlooked one of the biggest events in recent history: their revolution is over.

When Marx spoke in the Communist Manifesto of the capitalists exercising 'exclusive political sway' and in Capital of 'the tribute annually exacted from the working class by the capitalist class' he dealt with the realities of his time. If the workers were to liberate themselves they had to take control away from the capitalist class. This has now been done. It was done with explosive violence in Russia and China, more quietly elsewhere, but all over the advanced world the capitalists have been deprived of control. Nowhere has the change produced the expected results.

In the definition on which Marxist theory rests the working class includes all who live by the sale of their labour-power. You may be well dressed and highly educated, get a big salary instead of a small wage and think yourself middle-class; you may be in charge of a business or take part in government. None of this makes any difference. If you live by the sale of your labour-power then in Marxist terms you are a worker. And people who live in this way now operate and control manufacturing industry, service industry, financial industry, education, the media, the law courts, the police, the armed forces and the government.

The world Marx knew, with government and industry run by the owners, has gone. Most workers never see a capitalist; workers hire them, workers train them, workers pay them and workers fire them. Workers arrange and control the supply of materials, tools, machines, buildings, transport and finance. Workers take the product, sell it, collect the money and invest the profits. It is workers who now exact tribute from the working class, handing part of the proceeds to the capitalists. The SPGB describe what happens, although without grasping the full implications of what they are saying:

"The time has long since passed when members of the ruling class could themselves occupy any considerable number of the administrative posts and manage any appreciable part of their activities. From top to bottom all departments are filled by paid or elected officials, and only a very few of these are drawn from the capitalist class itself. Practically all the work of controlling the activities of society today is performed by people who depend for their livelihood upon their pay - members of the working class. The armed forces, including most of the officers, are also recruited from the ranks of the working class." (*Questions of the Day*, 1969, pages 20/21).

They tell us that this society is run not by capitalists but by workers, and although we are not bound to believe everything they say, here their assertions are confirmed by universal experience. All the social activities that matter can be explained and accounted for without bringing the capitalist class into it; the only social effect this class produces is the production and consumption of some trivial amount of luxury goods. There are individual capitalists who take part in the world's work but these are no more significant, when studying how society operates, than the workers who own shares.

The working class has taken control, but this hasn't made the difference expected; we still have war, oppression, exploitation, hierarchy, insecurity and all the rest. The working-class now runs society from top to bottom, but it no more demands peace, common ownership and full democracy than did the capitalist class. Ideological divisions cut across classes; among the workers, as among the capitalists, the majority favour strong government, powerful armaments, coercion of deviants and freedom to accumulate possessions.

The revolution is over. The capitalist class has been overthrown and we are managed, fed, governed, clothed, policed, educated, controlled and exploited by the working class. This class maintains a social system that enables five thousand million people to support themselves, most of them enjoying peace for most of their lives.
Dear DB Readers,

There's a joke from the East that goes "if Marx was such a great scientist, why didn't he try communism out on rats first?" I don't believe that libertarian socialism/anarchism will come about on a mass scale until we can demonstrate that it will work among believers. If we are bold enough to proclaim a new form of organization for an entire society or for humanity as a whole, why are we hesitant to adopt these economic and social relations among ourselves? If the "new world order" is to be voluntary, then we will have to win people over by one instead of through some kind of sweeping transformation. What better form of propaganda than to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation among ourselves? We should establish an employee-owned unit of production and produce something that could be exchanged with the rest of society (because we wouldn't be able to be self-sufficient at first). Would we be able to get along well enough to make it work? How would we deal with the Ernest Manns and Bob Blacks who choose to work only when in the mood, but who would expect equal access to what is produced regardless of how little labor they contribute? Could we reach solutions that everyone would be able to accept? This is how I see our ideas coming to life, not through a revolution whose disruption of life would make people less likely to gamble with their personal survival. Feudalism was not abolished in one sweeping wave, and still exists (unfortunately, of course) in some parts of the world. In countries like France, China, and Russia, where feudalism was quickly rolled back, new masters stepped in to tyrannize the people because the people were not prepared to assert themselves. I'm not arguing that a society has to go through a stage of capitalism to advance to anarchism, but I am arguing that the right consciousness has to be developed among the people for progress to take hold. You can't expect lasting advances to result from spontaneous outbursts of anger.

I can't find it now, but someone in DB46 mentioned that participating in traditional labor unions is a waste of time. How so? At least employees get organized into a group that is somewhat conscious of its shared interests and collective power. As "the idea" catches on, the reformist leadership will either be voted out or else will have to start dancing to a new tune. I'm just beginning to get active in the AFL-CIO union (FSE/AFT) that marginally exists where I work. Am I really wasting my time? These are the only mass organizations in the U.S. that give people any sense of class consciousness, any sense that they have interests that do not coincide with those of their employers. You can get mad and quit a job, or get mad and stay and fight. If you stay and fight, at least you can make some gains in the right direction. (If any of you are in an FSE/AFT affiliated union, let's start a progressive faction.)

Ed Stamm (moderate anarchist), P.O. Box 1402, Lawrence, KS 66044
A Reply To Adam Buick's Letter And Additional Comments

by R. Sims

In the DB, #45 (Jan-Feb 1991), Adam Buick writes of the late English socialist/pacifist Guy Aldred. Says Adam Buick: "Guy Aldred, the self-styled 'anti-parliamentary communist', not only believed in contesting parliamentary elections but actually did so on a number of [occasion]. (He interpreted 'anti-parliamentary' as meaning opposition only to participating in parliament: revolutionaries should contest parliamentary elections but should not take their seats in parliament if elected -- which is a point of view worth considering)." One should ask Buick why must socialists consider such a ridiculous view!

Why, would socialists participate in capitalist dominated elections? I sense that Aldred, and by inference Buick, believe socialists can use elections as a political platform from which we can reach the working class. But can not the same be said of socialists who assume office in a capitalist parliament? If the elections are a platform, and here in America they are not much of a platform because of complete capitalist control of the newsmedia, then why is not parliament or our American congress not an even better platform for our views? In deed, one may ask, why run for an office you will not assume if elected? But the larger question here is if a socialist can be elected, is not a parliament, congress, Bundestag, Knesset, etc. a national podium for a socialist who is erudite and eloquent? In both the U.S. and Great Britain, their sessions are televised. I have even seen your parliament on American TV. What a platform TV can be for socialists!

I may upset my [Daniel] De Leonist comrades in America, but I am all in favor of the independent ("socialist") congressman Bernie Sanders who was elected to the House from Vermont in 1990. Even though I do not agree with some statements he has made regarding "Swedish socialism", the possibility of "funding human needs" under a capitalist regime, etc., I am at least willing to give him a chance. It seems to me very ridiculous for the Socialist Labor Party of America to criticize Mr. Sanders for doing what the SLP advocates but will not do. The SLP program has always called for the election of socialists to office as a step toward abolishing the capitalist state but the SLP makes excuses and does not run any candidates for office. Now Sanders has done what the SLP can only shoot off its big mouth about doing. I will thus reserve my final judgment on Sanders and hope he may yet use his opportunities to educate the American working class in socialist politics. I hope he will have many more hits than misses! But if Sanders fails to properly use his position, it will be because he is not a socialist; and not because he was elected and chose to serve.

02/27/1991
Dear DB,

I am afraid that I don't agree with Neal Keating - "all the ugly sectarian cat fights are necessary", in fact, I think about 90% of it is totally unnecessary. Much of this conflict is rooted in the psychology of the sectarian. The sectarians I have had the misfortune of knowing seem to fall into these following categories:
a) the immature, young know-it-all b) the loser - who needs an ideology to prop up his weak ego and explain away his failure in life by blaming other groups, systems or individuals, c) the egomania - someone who creates his own ideology, markets it to the world and relates its success to his own, d) the authoritarian whose absolutist and puritanical mentality broaches no opinions but his own, e) obsessives of all kinds, f) stupid people whose tiny minds cannot contain more than one idea at a time.

But psychology can't explain all of sectarian practice - there are a lot of fundamentally decent sorts who come on very doctrinaire out of a necessity to defend the groups to which they belong. And lets face it folks, the groups in our corner ARE sects. But how did this come about? Our socialist/anarchist tradition goes back to the late 19th and early 20th Century - these are our roots. A vast counter-revolutionary wave hit our milieu shortly after WWI. Thereafter socialism became equated with social democracy or Stalinism and anarchism with "primitivism" or mindless violence. The few groups or individuals remaining survived more or less as fossils until the '60's. Since then there has been a limited revival of libertarian socialist thinking. The problem is, the counter-revolution and fossilization worked against the possibility of any theoretical development and most of the remnants and their offspring remain firmly rooted in the past.

Granted, not all of the ideas of the past are incorrect, but one mind-set inherited from the old movements does as much as anything to encourage sectarianism. This is absolutist thinking, which takes the form of positivism, reductionism, scientism and dualism. - A couple of examples of what I mean - There is a view prevalent on the left that everything can be worked out in great detail in the form of programs and analyses, which, of course, are THE TRUTH. As we know today, science is not based upon such absolutism, but sees the world in terms of PROBABILITY. There is also the idea that there is only one path to follow, rooted in Nineteenth Century science's reductionism, which claimed that only one underlying factor gave rise to culture, social systems etc. Dualism sees everything in terms of "either/or" choices, giving rise to innumerable unnecessary splits and quarrels.

Absolutist thinking is a relic of religious thought which still had influence upon the minds of the socialists and anarchists of 100 years ago, Twentieth century thinkers (as well as the best of the 19th, such as Hegel, Marx or Proudhon) show the weaknesses of absolutism. We now realize that all theories are tentative, partial explanations of what we see, trouble is, so much of the past has not caught up with this modern, scientific viewpoint. We no longer have "scientific socialism", but religious socialism.

If we are attempting to become balanced, healthy individuals, if we are attempting to understand the world in light of modern
thinking and not religious faith, we should also be able to discuss and debate in a calm, rational and friendly manner. For who among us, indeed, really knows THE TRUTH? Where do we get the right to be so arrogant as to be able to dump on others? What we do know "for sure" is the choices we have made based upon our observations. We wish to ultimately eliminate the state and capitalism as they are inimical to the further development of human freedom and the biosphere. We also know that change occurs via the great mass of the population and not through vanguards (the latter being a danger, a roadblock to the changes we desire) and that no "socialist states" exist. If we have all this in common, as I assume that DB readers do, what's the beef? Anything beyond this is going to verge into the realm of probability and debate, so why not admit it, and strive for a broad, multi-faceted movement, something which does not stand apart like some religious sect forever bellowing about God's Truth.

One more thing, I don't find name calling or swearing at people in these letters "interesting", rather I think it silly and childish. Furthermore, people get caught up more in the form of the argument rather than its content and creates a lot of counter-productive unpleasantness.

Yours, in Solidarity, Larry Gambone

WORLD SOCIALIST CATALOGUE

The World Socialist Party (US), Box 405, Boston, MA 02272, has just issued a new catalog of pamphlets, books, audio tapes, and--something new in our political sector--video tapes. Besides such recent SPGB pamphlets as Ecology and Socialism and William Morris's How We Live and How We Might Live, readers can obtain Marx/Engels classics and, most interestingly, videos of Steve Coleman in debate and two two-hour tapes on Marxian economics for a mere $12.50 each. Write for the catalogue.

CATALOGUE

Left Bank Distribution, 4142 Brooklyn NE, Seattle, WA 98105, has just issued a spring update of its catalog with many new titles including Joseph Lane and Robert Heinlein: The Man Who Sold America--Black.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Perry Sanders, 3836 N Bosworth, Chicago IL 60613, announces a self-published "monthly economic newsletter of between 4-8 pages, at least 10 times a year, entitled "Greatest" Depression Era Newsletter, beginning May, 1981. Write for details.
Dear Discussion Bulletin Readers,

In the January-February Discussion Bulletin, Frank Girard asked for suggestions about a "better way of handling" the ongoing Discussion Bulletin censorship problem. Here's my opinion.

The heart of the DB, for me, is the letters -- as the name implies, it is principally a bulletin for discussion (though not one that is overly used, I must say, considering the number of people or projects receiving it, but since this is my first contribution, I suppose I'm not in much of a position to complain).

To communicate, we do not require an editor or mediator. We do need someone to gather together letters received, photoreduce them, and paste them down. This aspect is purely mechanical, not editorial.

If space remains, documents for discussion need to be chosen. This does contain an editorial aspect in the sense of deciding which are to be used. Girard has been doing this up to now, and I suppose I could squawk about some of his choices, but I have no objection to his continuing to carry out this part.

Referring to Bob Black's being bleeped, Neil Keating asks, "How many others have experienced the same?" Concerning this, in a recent letter I received from Girard about the censorship problem, he states, "The solution is not to publish any more of Kolhoff's, Bekken's, and Black's personal letters. They can mail them directly to each other." However, these letters are clearly addressed to us, the DB readership; I highly doubt that these folks are the least bit interested in communicating with each other directly.

Some may consider Black, Bekken, and Kolhoff cantankerous characters. I've received nasty missives from all of them myself. However, I want to hear what is being said. After his call to bleep Black, Kolhoff's being bleeped in turn by Girard in a recent DB points out the burlesque nature of the present situation. The censor censored! And who is supposed to bleep Girard?

Like most of the techo-junk littering the landscape, Girard's bleeper is only getting in the way and ought to be scrapped.

Michael William

DEMOLITION DERBY
C.P. 1554, SUCC. "B"
MONTREAL, P.Q.
CANADA H3B 3L2

"Let It Bleep" urges pro-military censorship demonstrator
Dear comrades,

The purpose of this letter is to reply to Frank Girard's response in DB 43 to my text "In Defence of the Communist Left" (which appeared in DB 41). First of all, I hope that all readers will note and find unacceptable the approach or method utilized by Frank in his response, even if they are not sympathetic to the communist left. This approach is exemplified by Frank's responses to various points being based on not "...recall/ing... that Lenin...", his "...own perceptions derived from...", and his not being able to "...put my finger on an ICC statement that...it is difficult to believe that it would...". If non-leninist revolutionary socialists are to engage in serious, fraternal discussion, this method of debate must be decisively rejected. At best, it is based on intellectual laziness (i.e., an unwillingness to present an actual argument, rather than a vague "perception"). As long as discussion remains at this level, progress (i.e., clarification) will never be made.

Now, to reply to the points Frank makes. He says he doesn't recall that Lenin reproached the German left communists in 'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder for not advocating the dictatorship of the party. Well Frank, I suggest you find a copy of Lenin's book and carefully read chapter V, entitled "Left-Wing' Communism in Germany: Leaders--Party--Class--Masses". In this chapter Lenin quotes some passages from a document by a German left communist group which says that:

"...Politically, the transition period (between capitalism and socialism) is the period of the proletarian dictatorship....")

Who should be the vehicle of this dictatorship: the Communist Party or the proletarian class?...
Should we on principle strive for the dictatorship of the Communist Party, or for the dictatorship of the proletarian class?"

This text then goes on to argue -- not very coherently, which is probably why Lenin chose to ignore it -- for the latter of these two alternatives, summing itself up as follows: "...There /i.e., the KPD, the German section of the Third International/, the dictatorship of the leaders; here /i.e., the left communists, whom had been expelled from the KPD in October 1919, and went on to form the KAPD in April 1920/, the dictatorship of the masses! That is our slogan." (p.28) Lenin then goes on to argue that these ideas are "ridiculous" and "childish". So much for Frank's "recall" argument.

Next, Frank says he is "...less than certain that the ICC can claim a very close ideological descent from the leftwing communists like Gorter, Pannekoek, and the KAPD." How is one supposed to reply to this? It is another manifestation of the method of "argumentation" referred to above. Surely this must be denounced as alien to the manner in which proletarian revolutionaries discuss their differences. If a claim is not, or can not, be substantiated, what's the point of making it? What else can one call it but a cheap shot? As I did in my text in DB 41, I can only appeal to Frank to substantiate this serious charge. In fact, I think discussion of this question in the pages of DB would be a very positive development, and since the KAPD's "Theses on the Party" is a fairly short text, possessing profound historical importance, I suggest it be published in an upcoming issue
of DB. (And if anyone wants to obtain photocopies of texts on the role of revolutionaries by the left communist groups Frank has singled out as semi-'Leninist', write to me at the address listed below.)

The next point addressed in Frank's reply concerns the question of the organizational distinction between revolutionaries and the working class as a whole, or between the party and the class. Frank argues that such a distinction is "elitist" and that "...everyone in the DB's libertarian socialist sector would reject as a Leninist perversion..." such a distinction. Rather than do it here, I will address these questions in a separate text which I hope will be published in an upcoming issue of DB. However, if we set aside the controversial term "party", and speak instead of a general organization of revolutionaries which will "point out the general line of march" to the proletarian revolution, how many groups in the DB's "sector" reject this? Unless one detects some underlying militaristic or Stalinist content to this expression taken from the Communist Manifesto, then all "pointing out the general line of march" really means is systematically arguing for the general practical orientation the working class will have to adopt if the revolution is to be successful. Surely all the DeLeonist organizations, all the anarchist syndicalist organizations, the SPGB and its fraternal parties in other countries, the council communist groups, as well as the left communist groups, "point out the general line of march" today and will continue to do so as long as they can or as long as they see it as being necessary, as revolutionary organizations distinct from the class as a whole. So are all these groups unconsciously carrying the deadly "Leninist virus"? If Frank is to be consistent, he would have to say YES.

Next, Frank raises the question of whether or not the ICC would disband, or not "...continue to provide guidance to the workers..." "after the revolution". He isn't certain, but he is afraid the ICC wouldn't liquidate itself. What must be asked here is what is meant by "after the revolution"? For marxists, the proletarian revolution is a social revolution which begins with the expropriation of the political power of the bourgeoisie and ends with the dissolution of all classes and all political and economic power in the unified world community. Thus, after the revolution there will be no need for and no material basis for any political organization or party, and so there will be no need for anyone to worry about some group seizing or usurping power. Apparently, though, by "after the revolution" Frank means after the dispossession of the bourgeoisie's political power. And apparently he agrees with the DeLeonists that after the capitalist state has been eliminated there will no longer be a need for parties or political organizations. But to believe this is to buy into the syndicalist dogma that once the state is gone, the elimination of capitalism will automatically follow.

With the elimination of the capitalist state, the proletariat will be faced with an enormous mass of peasants and dispossessed 'sub-bourgeoisians' (together constituting more than half of world's population), which won't possess the proletariat's socialist and internationalist consciousness, and with a privileged petty bourgeoisie, all of whom will be at least suspicious of and in many cases hostile (possibly violently so) towards the working class's project
of eliminating all privilege, all property, all nations, and all classes. To pretend that this period of transition to communism will spell "...the end of politics..." is not just utopian, not just grossly ignorant, it is potentially very dangerous, since it could lead to the working class being lulled into passivity under the illusion that "everything will take care of itself". Further, with the capitalist state eliminated but the capitalist economy still essentially intact, the marxist understanding of the nature of capitalism and what is required to definitively eliminate it will be more needed than ever. While the syndicalists and DeLeonists may be content with self-managed capitalism, marxists -- still organized in distinct 'political' groups or parties -- will continue to argue for the need to completely eradicate capitalism and all aspects of bourgeois society from every corner of the world. Thus, after the elimination of the capitalist state the need for revolutionary marxist organizations to "point out the general line of march" towards the definitive overthrow of bourgeois society and the creation of the world human community will be greater than at any other time.

Frank says that "...one can infer from the fact that it /i.e., the IOC/ envisions the working class as seizing the state and exercising its power instead of abolishing it that it would end up duplicating the course of the Bolsheviks in the USSR, regardless of the purity of its intentions." This claim can only be considered as intentionally dishonest and malicious. It is a kind of "polemic" which must be categorically denounced. Anyone not familiar with the press of the IOC (or other left communist groups), however, has no reason not to believe what Frank claims to be true. When the IOC says on all of its publications that "The role of the revolutionary organisation is not to 'organise the working class' nor to take power 'on behalf of the workers'...", Frank obviously thinks the IOC doesn't really believe this or else that it would abandon this basic position when the going gets tough. The following two basic positions are also listed on every IOC publication:

"--The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat must inevitably lead to a confrontation with the capitalist state. In destroying the capitalist state, the working class will have to set up the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale.

--The form of this dictatorship is the international power of the workers' councils."

This is not "seizing the state and exercising its power"; it is destroying the state. And these positions are shared not only by all left communist groups, but also by the "libertarian" council communists (e.g., Wildcat, Subversion). Any political organization whose theory and practice is to contribute to the working class organizing itself in workers' councils, for these workers' councils to themselves decide on and undertake the destruction of the capitalist state and then assert themselves as the organs of supreme political power everywhere they exist -- such a political organization is not bound to "...end up duplicating the course of the Bolsheviks in the USSR...", as Frank fatalistically believes. How much of a "guarantee" does one need? (More on this in my forthcoming text on the role of revolutionaries.)

A final couple of notes: (1) Frank's asterisking policy, and my response to it, concerns the publications of three different groups.
However, Frank justifies his policy by referring to the publications and correspondence of only one of these groups. Apparently he feels justified in doing this, since he considers the two groups other than the ICC (the Communist Bulletin Group and Internationalist Perspectives) to be more "derivative" or more "derivative of" than the Socialists Labor Party (SLP) derivatives, if you will) solely on the basis of the present day publications and correspondence of the SLP. (2) In DB 44, Frank writes: "in the interest of total accuracy DB, beginning with this issue, will characterize Internationalism and its relatives (sic) with the formulation 'unconsciously carries' the Leninist virus...instead of 'suffers from'." "Total accuracy"? Can anyone by this time have doubts about Frank's right to assume the role of impartial, "totally accurate" judge of the revolutionary credentials of political groups? Shades of Leninism, do I hear someone say?

--E.R. (P.O. Box 69804, Station K, Vancouver, B.C. V5K 4Y7 Canada)

Dear Comrades,

I think that Comrade E.R.'s criticism of my DB43 letter is justified in some respects. In defense I should point out again that my one-page reply to ER's three pages was written without access to the Lenin's *The Infantile Disease of Leftwing Communism* so that I couldn't check the text. Another problem arose from what was, frankly, a misconception about the KAPD (Communist Workers Party of Germany): that its program resembled that of the SLP, which was also mentioned in Lenin's pamphlet. This error resulted from comments about the KAPD in the report of the two SLP observers who attended the Third Congress (1921) and who described the KAPD as having a program like that of the SLP. After reading the KAPD's "Theses on the Party," which Comrade ER thoughtfully enclosed, I am aware that in many respects it did not; in fact, the KAPD appears to have been thoroughly "Bolshevized," i.e. it was committed to the ideas of socialist revolution by a minority of our class--the petitish, insurrectionist strategy of the Bolsheviks.

Although the KAPD is interesting from a historical perspective, it is not really relevant to the question at hand: the propriety of the DB's (actually, my) characterizing the periodicals of the ICC and its derivatives as Leninist and "asterisking" them. Relevant, though, is the paragraph in which Comrade ER rhetorically asks what the ICC means by "pointing out the general line of march." Marx and Engels used the term "line of march" in *The Communist Manifesto* as one of the factors that differentiated "communists" from the rest of our class: They understood the path our class must follow in order to emancipate itself. Certainly no one in our political sector will question the idea that workers who have that understanding will band together in parties or groups to propagate those ideas among their fellows.

I think my urge to "asterisk" arises from the ICC's addition of the words "pointing out" to the phrase. Does "pointing out the line of march" mean providing leadership to a desperate working class, as the Bolsheviks did for the Moscow and Petrograd proletariat in 1917? Or does it mean the rather slower process of education and creating, via
the printed word and the soap box, the class consciousness and socialist understanding in a majority of our class, who will then take over the means of production, destroy the state and, by doing so, accomplish the revolution?

Next, Comrade ER seems to doubt the propriety of my questioning the post-revolutionary plans of the ICC: whether at the moment of revolution it would disband and its members return to take part individually in building the new society. Here Comrade ER isn't very reassuring. Instead of answering the question, he asks another: "...what is meant by "after the revolution"?" In the next paragraph his talk about the enormous mass of "hostile (possibly violently so)" "sub-proletarians" and peasants and petty bourgeoisie makes it rather clear that he envisions the socialist revolution lasting an indeterminate period in which the proletariat, with who knows who "pointing out the line of march." will be struggling against the forces of reaction. The implication is that the revolutionary party will be around providing leadership for long time.

In this connection I want to point out that Comrade ER's misrepresentation of the DeLeonist program indicates his own need to do some homework. Comrade ER asserts that for DeLeonists the revolution is over when the state has been abolished. But he is wrong. For DeLeonists as well as "non-political" syndicalists, the revolutionary act consists of the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. How do they envision its being accomplished? By the class conscious working class taking physical possession of the factories, mines, etc. declaring them the common property of the people and proceeding to produce goods and services for use instead of profit. "The line of march" is obvious. No need for anyone to point it out. Prior to that action, the advanced portion of our class will have built the SIUs that will inoculate the socialist consciousness and provide the organization that can carry out this act. In such a program there is no need for a revolutionary party after the revolution.

Contrary to Comrade ER's assertion, the capitalist class will have been deprived of its wealth and hence its power. Some syndicalists, the "anarcho" variety, may question the need for the political act of abolishing the state. But this is obviously a question that will be settled by our class at the appropriate time, not by us now. In the light of Comrade ER's confusion about the SP's program, perhaps we should run the old SLP leaflet, now out of print, "Socialist Industrial Unionism." It may help dispel some of these misconceptions about DeLeonism.

I don't really think I have to defend myself against Comrade ER's accusation of malice and dishonesty in my questioning the ICC's assurances that it would never follow the course laid out by the Russian Bolsheviks. This is 1981, not 1917. We have only to open the history books to see what happens to the best intentions of a revolutionary party when it feels called upon to save the revolution from forces it believes will destroy it. I don't think for a moment that before the revolution Lenin envisaged the need for a Cheka some day. But it arose in response to the revolutionary party's perception that
it was needed to save the revolution. Is it any more unfair to question the ICC’s claims of political virtue than those of the CP, the RCP, and the SWP as I do (and I would guess Comrade ER does)? All of these are Bolshevik-style parties, with all that implies in terms of vanguardism, cadre organization, and an unyielding conviction about their own political wisdom and rectitude. Despite the ICC’s protestation that it is not “substitutionist,” it doesn’t see the most substitutionist of all actions by the Bolsheviks, the decision to stampede the Petrograd working class into the October insurrection, as falling into that category. All this is discussed in greater detail in my letter to Internationalism (DB 43, pp. 10-12).

The next question is why do I “asterisk” the periodicals of the ICCist groups and not those of the SLP and its derivatives and of the other left communists. The answer is that 1) disbanding on the day of the revolution is a DeLeonist article of faith, 2) with the abolition of the state, there is no political space in which they could operate, the SIUs being economic organizations, not political, and 3) they don’t carry the organizational and ideological genetic material bequeathed by the Bolsheviks to the left communists of the ICC persuasion. As to asterisking the other left communist groups, perhaps they and Comrade ER will enlighten me about the need to do so.

One final point. I want to repeat this statement from my DB44 response to Internationalism: “...in most respects I consider Internationalism and the ICC respectable members of the political spectrum of which DB serves as a forum. Like other groups, the ICC (at least as I understand it) opposes reform, and sees the need for social revolution now; recognizes the reformist role of social democratic and most Leninist political groups; sees the existing unions as a part of the capitalist apparatus; recognizes that the economic system [of] the USSR and its satellites is a species of capitalism; believes that when our class wishes to do so, it can abolish capitalism and institute socialism immediately worldwide.” However, after reading Comrade ER’s letter, I might question the last of these.

Frank Girard