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BULLETIN MATTERS

Regular DB readers will note changes in this issue. One is the
increased number of pages—thirty-two as opposed to our usual twenty-
four (twenty-eight in the last four issues). The other is a change to
copter from offset printing, with the result that the reduction is
marginally greater. This makes for smaller print, which is not good
for everybody; on the other hand, we can get more text per page. We
realize that there are almost certain to be other faults in this first
issue using this method. Perhaps some of these will be permanent.
2

Professional printers can do a much better job. But the cost is so much less that we have to make the sacrifice in quality, especially in the light of postage and other increases.

This big issue begins with a big article in which Jeff Stein weighs Ulli Diemer's articles, published in DBs 45 and 48, and finds them wanting. For people in the libertarian socialist political sector the 1917 Revolution will always be interesting. An article on two Manchurians by Larry Oomkhuza in DB38 prompted an article Cajo Brendel in the Dutch councilist journal Hand on Gedachte. We thank two Montreal comrades for the translation published here.

Bob Rossi writes on the wrangling—personal and philosophical—that occupies the pages of the DB. We agree that readers of the DB might well conclude that we have forsaken the world of active agitation for that of hair splitting. But since the DB exists precisely and only for political discussion, one shouldn't assume that its writers have no other activity. Next we have a short note from George Walford. Then Ron Girkens has concerns similar to those of Bob Rossi and some solutions, not all of them very practical, in my opinion, given the level of acrimony among us.

Kamunist Kranti sends us information not readily available in the U.S. on the prospects for revolution in India. Next come some mini-reviews of pamphlets on La Coordinadora, the need for a rank and file movement in Britain, and more if space permits. Then Frank Andersen, whose letter should have been with those of Bob Rossi and Ron Girkens, raises the question similar to theirs. Alan Sanderson responds to Sam Brandon's letter in DB45 taking issue with an earlier article by Sanderson on the Socialist Labor Party's centennial.

Laurens Otter sent us his thoughts on "class war," and Subversion sent us Wildcat's response to the article we reprinted from Echanges in DB48. Next we publish a document, sent to us by E.R. [see DB47], from the German left-communist opposition to Lenin's Third International. We end on page 32 with an advertisement for a new book. Ben Perry's and my history of the Socialist Labor Party grew out of articles we wrote for the DB. It distills into a 112 page book the information we gathered during decades of membership and, more recently, about a decade of research.

DB49 will have as many pages as your letters and articles warrant. Since we must conserve space, please use narrow margins—3/4 inch at most—and single space.

FINANCES: Good news. Despite the increased size and number of copies printed, we gained on the deficit.

Contributions: Jeff Stein $20; Bill Friesser $4.13; Tom Holzinger $10; Barry Carpenter $1; Bob Rossi $2; Anonymous $5; Frank Andersen $15; Ron Girkens $8; David Fraser $6; Scott Natvichuk $3; Ralph Preston $7. Total $82.13. Thank you, comrades.

BALANCE April 22, 1991 [deficit] $59.21

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Cost'd on p. 16
Frank Girard is sadly mistaken to believe that Ulli Diemer's article, "The Red and the Black" [DB 45-46] is "an example of the less combative and prejudiced literature of the [Marxism vs. anarchism] controversy." On the contrary, it is full of lies and distortions about anarchism, in particular the views of Bakunin. As I pointed out earlier, Diemer is not interested in discussing the relative merits of these two opposing socialist traditions, only in trying to discredit anarchism and exonerate marxism. In Part II, Diemer has focused on Bakunin, not to discuss his ideas (which Diemer is apparently unfamiliar with anyway), but to destroy his personal credibility, what Diemer calls "Bakunin's ambiguous heritage". In this way Diemer hopes to "call into question current anarchist pre-conceptions about Marxism and inaugurate a genuine debate." A debate which Diemer wants to base on character assassination and scandal-mongering.

Before wading into the morass of Diemer's accusations, I want to make it clear that we anarchists do not see Bakunin as an infallible "father"-figure to our movement. After all, we do not call our movement "Bakuninist", even though we recognize the important contributions Bakunin made. Most anarchists, even his biggest admirers, acknowledge Bakunin's faults, particularly his fascination with revolutionary conspiracy, combined with (ironically) his administrative incompetence, and a tendency to overlook the personal faults of other revolutionaries (both those of Nitchiev and Marx) until matters reached a crisis. My concern in defending Bakunin is to show that the anarchist/marxist conflict is not the result of some personal vendetta waged by him against Marx, but real political differences.

Anti-Semitism and Other Red Herrings

"The sword of Damocles which has been threatening so long has at last fallen on our heads. It is not, properly speaking, a sword but Mr. Marx's usual weapon, a heap of filth." ---Michael Bakunin, in response to Marx's pamphlet "The Alleged Splits in the International", issued in the name of the General Council of the International.

Diemer accuses Bakunin as being prejudiced against Marx, due to Marx being Jewish and German. Supposedly Bakunin had no real cause for calling Marx an "authoritarian", other than based upon his ancestry. While it is true that Bakunin had some prejudices in this regard, Diemer ignores the fact that Bakunin had been on good terms with Marx for a number of years, prior to the conflict in the International. If Bakunin had been a bigot, their earlier association would never have been possible. Diemer also ignores the fact that his hero, Marx, also held certain ethnic prejudices against the French and the Slavs. When the Franco-Prussian War broke out, Marx wrote to Engels, "The French need a drubbing. If the Prussians are victorious then the centralization of the State power will be favorable to the centralization of the working class. German preponderance will shift the center of the working-class movement in Western Europe from France to Germany, and one has only to compare the movement of 1848 in both countries to see that the German working class is theoretically and organizationally superior to the French. The superiority of the Germans over the French in the world arena would mean at the same time the superiority of our theory over Proudhon..." (quoted in Mehring, p.463).

Marx edited the "NEU RHEINISHE ZEITUNG" (Feb.19, 1849), for which Engels wrote, "no Slavic people has a future for the simple reason that they lack the indispensable political and industrial conditions for independence...the stubborn Czechs and the Slovaks [under Austrian rule at the time] should be grateful to the Germans who have taken the trouble to civilize them..." Yet Marx was prepared to ignore his prejudices against both Slavs and the French, whenever one of them agreed with his views. The same can be said of Bakunin.
However, if Bakunin's arguments must be treated "with the greatest of caution", on the grounds of these prejudices, then Diemer should practice what he preaches and take the same attitude towards Marx.

Another red herring used by Diemer is that Bakunin, when criticizing the marxist position, did not use proper quotations or footnotes. Therefore, Diemer concludes when Bakunin attributes to Marx such terms as "Peoples' State", he fabricated Marx's position on the state since Marx never used this term. While it is true that Bakunin did not use footnotes, this does not mean he misrepresented Marx's position. The term "Peoples' State" was coined by Ferdinand Lassalle, the leading German socialist of the day, and was very much in vogue by German followers of Marx. This explains Engels' letter to Bebel quoted by Diemer.

Whether or not Marx and Engels used the term themselves is beside the point. It is the concept of a State truly under popular control, which Marx thought was possible and Bakunin did not. Diemer is playing semantical games, similar to those Engels loved to play, in order to confuse the issue and deflect criticism. For example on the subject of statelessness Engels had this to say, "The abolition of the state in bourgeois countries means the reduction of state power to the North American level...Abolition of the state in the feudal countries means the abolition of feudalism and the establishment of a conventional bourgeois state." (ANARCHISM AND ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM p.27)

So for Engels the "abolition of the state" is synonymous with "the establishment of a state"! Question: When is a state not a "state"? Answer: When it's a workers' state. (Or should we say "Gemeinwesen", a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word 'commune'? ---Engels, quoted by Diemer.) Change the name of a thing and you change its nature. Change the class in power and you change the nature of the state. This may be good enough for Diemer and Engels, but it is not good enough for us, nor was it good enough for Bakunin who saw through such euphemisms.

Bakunin was criticizing the concept of an all-powerful centralized state which is clearly found in Marx's writings. For example "The Communist Manifesto" calls for:

"Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of ... an exclusive monopoly...Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state...Equal obligation of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture."

In his "Address to the Communist League" of 1850, Marx goes on to add:

"The workers must strive... for a clear-cut centralization of power in the hands of the state authority. They must not let themselves be led astray by democratic talk of communal liberties, self-government, and the like."

Is there any wonder why Bakunin and others have accused Marx of being hypocritical when he embraced the Paris Commune (with its clear federalist tendencies) as a vindication of his theories? The fact that Diemer claims that "The Civil War in France" is Marx's major work on the state" and is somehow consistent with all Marx's other work, only proves he is just as hypocritical as Marx and Engels.

Guilt by Association: The Nechaev Affair

There is no doubt that Bakunin's dealings with Nechaev represent the biggest political blunder of his life. Nechaev, for those unfamiliar with the episode, was a young Russian revolutionary, who believed in terrorism and conspiracy as a means to overthrow the Czar. For Nechaev any act, regardless of how despicable was justified as long as it helped to topple the Russian autocracy. Nechaev even went so far as to use it as a justification for that act and murder of other revolutionaries (of which he was guilty on both counts).
Bakunin became involved with Nechaev in 1869, when he met Bakunin in Switzerland, claiming to have recently escaped from the prison of the Peter-and-Paul Fortress. Nechaev told Bakunin he was part of a vast underground committee of Russian youth preparing the overthrow of the Czar, and recruited him for help in this work. As it later turned out, Nechaev had lied to Bakunin from the start, never having been in prison, nor able to recruit more than a handful of co-conspirators. Nechaev's only interest in Bakunin was to use the latter's fame and reputation to help get funds and win followers. Aside from a common desire to see the Czar overthrown, Nechaev had no interest in Bakunin's anarchist theories of social revolution. Eventually this became clear to Bakunin and he broke all ties with Nechaev in 1870.

The question for historians, as well as both Bakunin's critics and sympathizers has been, "what did he know and when did he know it?" For those out to destroy Bakunin's reputation, the Nechaev affair is a scandal too juicy to pass up. As they would have it, Bakunin knew about Nechaev's Machiavellian approach towards revolution all along, approved of it, and only broke with Nechaev when he got a taste of his own medicine.

Dieper doesn't come right out and put it this way, since he doesn't wish to give away his intentions by overplaying his hand. He first tries to give the appearance of objectivity and fairness by saying Bakunin "did repudiate Nechaev when he realized the true nature of his activities" and "the authorship of some of the [pro-terrorist and pro-Machiavellian] pieces in question is under dispute". But after this lip service he goes on to write, "But the fact remains that Bakunin did enter into partnership with Nechaev, and under his influence wrote a number of tracts that displayed a despotic, Machiavellian approach to revolution...but the relevant point is surely that Bakunin allowed his name to be put to even those pamphlets he did not write, and he actively worked to have them distributed knowing they bore his name."

Thus while admitting there might be reasonable doubt about Bakunin's authorship or support for Nechaev's Machiavellian approach, the fact that they were once associated proves Bakunin's complicity! Dieper even goes so far as to quote an horrible article, which he (and Marx) alleges Bakunin wrote with Nechaev and which Marx justly described as "barrack-room communism". Yet there is no proof that Bakunin ever wrote it, or distributed it, or even saw it. The article in question according to a footnote No.70 in ANARCHISM AND ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM "was written by Nechaev and published in Izdaniya obschestva 'Narodnoi raspravoy No.2" "Narodnoi raspravoy" (People's Vengeance) was the underground journal which Nechaev distributed in Russia, while Bakunin remained in exile.

Dieper may certainly choose to believe that this article represents Bakunin's views if he wants, inspite of a lack of evidence he had anything to do with writing it. (In the same way, Dieper has a right to believe that "The Civil War in France" represents Marx's real views about the state, inspite of all the evidence of the opposite.) But the very fact that we anarchists dispute the argument that Bakunin could have written these articles or condoned a Machiavellian approach to revolution, proves that there is no "dark thread; an infatuation with violence; with destruction for the sake of destruction; action for the sake of action; distrust of logic, intellect and knowledge; a love for conspiratorial and tightly controlled organization" which Bakunin could have bequeathed to anarchism. (By suggesting that all anarchists somehow share the views of Nechaev, Dieper shows when he does a smear job, he doesn't neglect to use a broad brush.)

On the contrary when we anarchists dispute the authorship of the works of Nechaev, where there is no direct evidence proving Bakunin's innocence (as in the case of the notorious "Catechism"), we point out Bakunin's many writings which contradict Nechaev. In his "Letter from Marseilles" Bakunin denounces indiscriminate violence:

"It is not necessary to kill these people. The guillotine does not kill reaction. It only makes it revive. Besides, as the immense majority of the
bourgeois are reactionary, where would you stop? When one is carrying out the revolution for the liberation of humanity, one should respect the life and liberty of men..."

In "The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution", Bakunin writes:

"The Revolution is neither vindictive nor bloodthirsty. It does not demand the death, nor even the transportation in mass, or even individually of all this Bonapartist rabble. The Revolution, since it has assumed a Socialist character, has ceased to be bloodthirsty and cruel."

In a letter written about the time he broke with Nechaev, Bakunin sums up his attitude towards what he referred to as Nechaev's "Jesuitical" system:

"Seeing himself unmasked, this poor Nechaev is still so naive, so childish, inspired by his systematic perversity, that he had believed it possible to convert me --- he even went so far as to beg me to agree to help develop his theory in a Russian paper which he proposed to me to establish. He has betrayed the confidence of us all, he has stolen our letters, he has horribly compromised us, in a word, he has behaved like a scoundrel." (Letter to Talandier)

Bakunin's doctrine of revolutionary conspiracy was not identical to that of Nechaev. For Bakunin the only reason for using conspiratorial methods was to overthrow the State, and thus remove this obstacle from the path of the social revolution which could only be completed by the workers and peasants themselves. Bakunin had no intentions of dominating or "tightly controlling" anyone. An example of his conspiratorial methods in action are not the various mea-sseeds of Nechaev, but the unsuccessful attempt to foment an armed uprising in Lyons a few months prior to the Paris Commune (thus anticipating what was to happen there). Michael Confino has pointed out, "...for Bakunin, although often described as a chief formulator and organizer of [Nechaev's] system, it appears he deserved on that score neither the merit nor the shame. He makes his position clear, and while admitting that 'external use' of these means 'is frequently necessary...in the fight against organized despotism', he rejects using them 'WITHIN the organization'. This position was one of principle and not a belated insight acquired after discovering that he himself was a victim of Nechaev's system." (DAUGHTER OF A REVOLUTIONARY, p.32)

Diemer's Dubious History of the International

Diemer repeats verbatim the marxist version of the break-up of the First International: Bakunin and his tiny band of co-conspirators entered the International Workingmen's Association in order to take it over and use it for their own purposes, and when they could not win the workers to their theories, caused dissension with false accusations against the General Council and split the International. Supposedly, it was his disruptive activities and secret manipulating that resulted in Bakunin's expulsion from the International at the Hague Congress in 1872. On the contrary, while Marx did succeed in having Bakunin expelled from the International, the historical details aren't as favorable to Marx as Diemer would have us believe.

To begin, while it was true that Bakunin and his various international contacts did not agree with the need for political action as written in the statutes of the IWMA, it must be mentioned that the person largely responsible for drawing up those statutes was Marx. Marx did not found the IWMA, which was founded primarily by French Proudhonists and British trade unionists, neither of whom shared Marx's position that political action was necessary for working class emancipation. The IWMA was founded as a non-sectarian international labor body leaving such questions open to the various national affiliates. Marx was elected to the General Council by the first congress (as a representative of German workers) and proceeded to push through a number of statutes for the
organization, including the controversial one about political action. This was much to the chagrin of the French Proudhonists, who tried on a number of occasions to have it overturned. If Bakunin was wrong to join the International because he did not agree with Marx, then Marx was just as wrong to foist his views on the sections of the International, which did not agree with him.

Secondly, Marx was never able to prove his charge that Bakunin had operated a secret committee of "tightly controlled" agents within the International, since none existed. The charges committee at the Hague Congress had a difficult time delivering to Marx the verdict he spent so much effort trying to get from them. The best they could do with what amounted to almost of circumstantial evidence was to conclude "...that a secret alliance, whose statutes were completely opposed to those of the International [i.e. abstention from political action] HAD existed; and secondly that Bakunin ATTEMPTED to found, and PERHAPS succeeded in founding a society called the Alliance with statutes differing from those of the International. These conclusions were lame and impotent..." and "amounted to a verdict of not proven." (E.H.Carr, BAKUNIN, page 443 --my emphasis).

When Bakunin's organization, the "International Alliance for Socialist Democracy" entered the international, they were quite open about their views and their intent to move the International in what they believed to be a more revolutionary direction. Marx and the General Council turned down the application of the Alliance to join on the basis of some objections to some of the wording in the principles of the Alliance and the fact that since the Alliance was also an international body, its acceptance would create an international within the International. Instead the Alliance was advised to dissolve itself and for each of its national sections to join the International individually, which is what the Alliance did. As a consequence the International gained sections in several areas where it had been weak or nonexistent, such as Spain, Italy, and the Jura region of Switzerland. However, this did not put an end to communications between the former sections of the Alliance, nor attempts by Bakunin and his associates from trying to influence the International to adopt their views, with the 1869 Basel congress being an example of that growing anarchist influence.

In these efforts to win the International to anarchist views, constituted a "conspiracy" and sectarian "splitting" efforts, couldn't the same be said of Marx and his friends in the International? Of the eight Germans originally on the General Council, five had been members of the Communist League. Was this a conspiracy? Marx carried on an extensive private correspondence with various members of the International attacking Bakunin, and sent his son-in-law, Paul Lafargue to Spain to break Bakunin's influence there. Was this "intrigue"? All the evidence suggests that there is nothing Bakunin did within the International, that Marx did not do also. One would have to be a political neophyte" to mistake this sort of factional maneuvering for something conspiratorial. The main difference between Marx and Bakunin, was that Marx had all the resources and powers of the General Council on his side, which Marx was prepared to abuse.

Dierer tries to obscure this abuse of authority by Marx, with the lie that "the 'authoritarian' federal [actually centralist] structures that Bakunin protested vehemently...were introduced to the International...not on the initiative of the General Council of which Marx was a member, but on the motion of Bakunin's supporters, with Bakunin's active participation and support. It was only after he failed to gain control over the structures of the International that Bakunin suddenly discovered their 'authoritarianism'." Actually "the General Council PROPOSED that its own executive powers should be extended and that it should have the right to suspend from membership any section acting against the spirit of the International, pending the decision of the next congress." (Mehring, p.443, my emphasis).

Bakunin, unfortunately, did blunder and support Marx's proposal without realizing it was a loaded gun pointing at his own head. He did not support it,
however, because he wanted to take over the General Council, an accusation (made by Marx in confidential circular to Marx' supporters) which Bakunin himself denied. Whether or not one wishes to believe Bakunin, there are a couple reasons that make this accusation ridiculous. For one, Bakunin's poor administrative skills makes it unlikely he would have wanted all the burdens of maintaining the General Council. Perhaps even more convincing, however, is the realization that if Bakunin wanted to take over the General Council and use it against Marx, why did he not simply wait until he had taken over the General Council before increasing its powers? Does this sound like the act of a "Machiavellian" intriguer?

A more credible explanation for Bakunin's support for increasing the power of the General Council was that he simply trusted Marx not to use these powers against sincere revolutionaries (just as he trusted Netchev later). In a letter to Alexander Herzen, shortly after the Basel Congress, Bakunin explained his reluctance to confront Marx:

"Marx is unquestionably a useful man in the International. He has been hitherto one of the strongest, ablest, and most influential supporters of socialism in it, one of the most powerful obstacles to the infiltration into it of any kind of BOURGEOIS TENDENCIES OR IDEAS. I should never forgive myself if, from motives of personal revenge, I destroyed or diminished his undoubtedly beneficial influence."

(quoted Carr, p.385)

Clearly Bakunin figured Marx would use the expanded executive powers against any "bourgeois tendencies" trying to infiltrate the International. The incident that provoked the accusations of authoritarianism was the way Marx and the General Council handled a split in the Swiss section, a split provoked not by Bakunin or the anarchists, but by Nicholas Utin, an ally of Marx. The split occurred when a congress of the Swiss section, the "Federation Romande", disagreed over the admission of the Geneva section of the Alliance (inspite of the fact that the General Council had already accepted them into the International). Utin used the opportunity to denounce the Geneva section as the tools of Bakunin's "Intrigue". When a majority of the congress voted in favor of the Geneva anarchists, Utin and the minority refused to accept the decision and had the owner of the hall (another Marx ally) eject the majority. The majority then set up its own Federal Council and informed the General Council of what happened. Insipite of the outcome of the congress, however, Marx and the General Council refused to recognize the new Federal Council on the grounds that the congress had been "unrepresentative". The majority faction was told they could stay in the International only if they conceeded to the minority or set themselves up as a new section.

The struggle which then began between the anarchists and the General Council (Marx) had all the trappings of a rank-and-file revolt against a union bureaucracy. Just as with modern union democracy struggles, Marx in his role as union official, denounced the anarchist insurgents as "splitters", and stool-pigeons for the bosses. He issued an official union publication making exactly these sorts of arguments ("The Alleged Splits in the International")

When the revolt threatened to get out of control, Marx staged a special conference in London as a demonstration of support, and then finally the Hague Congress, where the main agenda items were the expulsion of the opposition leaders, Bakunin and James Guillaume, and a resolution making Marxist doctrine, that the working class must constitute itself as a political party, as official policy of the International. In order to make sure of a majority at the Congress, Marx not only made an alliance with the Blanquists (the classic revolutionary conspirators), but had the American section send him a dozen blank credentials to give to his personally hand-picked supporters:

"You and at least one or two others must come. Those sections which send no direct delegates may send credentials (delegates' credentials).

Ant.Arnould.

The Irish for MacDonell, who does very well; or, if they prefer, for one of the forenamed Germans or French." (Marx letter, June 12, 1872 quoted by Max Nettlau, "Marx and Engels and the International, 1872 to 1876", reprinted London 1976)

Marx himself carried three delegates' credentials (one from America and two from Germany) and Engels two (America and Germany).

As I mentioned earlier the charge that Bakunin had created a secret organization to destroy the International from within proved difficult to prove, inspite of the "evidence" Lafargue had obtained by infiltrating Bakunin's supporters in Spain. (In fact the Congress dropped the charges against the Spanish section, who were supposedly undisputed members of the "secret Alliance"). The charge which was used to expel Bakunin was that he had used fraudulent measures for the purpose of appropriating all or a part of another man's wealth - which constitutes fraud - and further, in order to avoid fulfilling his engagements, had by himself or through agents had recourse to menaces." (quoted Carr, p.469)

Marx had shown to the committee a letter threatening a Russian publisher to stop harassing Bakunin about an uncompleted Russian translation of Marx's "Capital", for which Bakunin had received an advance. As it turned out, the threatening letter had been written by Nechaev three years earlier. Bakunin had told Nechaev that the translation needed to be completed or the cash advance returned before Bakunin could devote any time or energy to helping build the Russian underground network allegedly begun by Nechaev. Nechaev offered to take care of the matter for Bakunin, by which Bakunin thought he meant the Russian committee would refund the cash advance to the publisher. Instead Nechaev wrote the threatening letter, which Marx managed to get hold of just prior to the Hague Congress "in case it was needed". When Bakunin had found out about the letter in 1870, it had been one of the reasons for the break with Nechaev. Nevertheless, the damage had been done. Marx used the letter to have Bakunin expelled, not for his alleged intrigues, but for his failure to complete an obligation to the publisher.

At the Hague Congress, Marx pulled his crowning bureaucratic maneuver. London was becoming too hot for the General Council. The British trade unionists who Marx had earlier managed to play off against the other factions of the International also wanted more autonomy from the General Council, although they were 'not anarchists.' This increased the likelihood that the General Council stayed in London it would fall into the hands of the Blanquists, the French refugees from the fall of the Paris Commune who had only recently joined the International. Because of political repression, the General Council could not be moved to Germany nor France. Just about anywhere else, Spain, Switzerland, or Italy, were anarchist strongholds. The only place left was the United States, where the few adherents to the international were either uncommitted to either side or were Marx's supporters. So Marx pushed through a motion relocating the General Council to the U.S. (Marx had actually pulled the same maneuver years earlier when he relocated the headquarters of the Communist League to keep it from falling into the hands of rivals. --see Mehring p.232) At one fell swoop, Marx betrayed his Blanquist allies and kept the International's headquarters away from the growing anarchist menace. Marx also pushed through a motion increasing the powers of the General Council to suspend, not only local sections, but entire federations.

The anarchist sections of the International refused to accept the results of the manipulated Hague Congress. They held their own congress at St.Imler a few months later, and refused to recognize the new General Council and the resolution on political parties. Instead a new federal coordinating body was set-up accountable to the membership with very limited authority. The new General Council in New York retaliated by suspending all the anarchist sections. It is worth noting that while the International based in New York soon collapsed. The rest of the International continued until 1881, including the participation of many non-anarchist sections (the English and Germans). Thus in
Retrospect, the true splitter of the International was not Bakunin, but Marx!

The Nature of the State: Economic or Political?

Diemer in his defense of Marx and the marxist notion of the workers' state, says the anarchists got it all wrong. Marx was neither an economic determinist nor a statist. Diemer quotes Marx: "...it is men that change circumstances" ("Third Thesis on Fuerbach") and "History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends." (THE HOLY FAMILY) He also quotes Engels, who defending the extent of marxist philosophy wrote that "of Marx' view 'the economic element is the ONLY determining on."' (Letter to Block Sept. 1890). Supposedly these isolated quotes somehow dismiss all the flaws in "historical materialism" as minor details not worthy of consideration.

Yet by ignoring Marx's "historical materialism" and its economic determinist implications, it is impossible to understand the marxist position on the state, as well as the basis of the anarchist critique of it. For Marx the workers' state or "dictatorship of the proletariat" was not an end, but a MEANS, by which the working class would suppress the old bourgeois rule. Authoritarianism of this dictatorship would not be a problem (a temporary one at worst), because as the representatives were to be wrested from an authority of pre-capitalist and the emerging socialist mode of production, its underlying democratic character would be guaranteed.

Diemer has misunderstood the passages he quotes. When Marx wrote that men make history, he was only saying that history is SOCIALLY produced, not the produced by some outside metaphysical agency. These statements do not in anyway contradict what anarchists have referred to as Marx's economic determinism. Men [and women] create their own economic relationships and these (according to Engels) "ultimately" determine everything else. But does this mean we are free to choose any economics we wish? Not according to Marx, as he makes clear in THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY:

"What is society, whatever its form may be? The product of men's reciprocal action. Are men free to choose this or that form of society? By no means. Assume a particular level of man's productive forces, and you will get a particular form of commerce and consumption. Assume particular stages of development in production, commerce and consumption and you will have a corresponding social system, a corresponding organization of the family, of social orders, or of classes, in a word, a corresponding civil society. Assume such a civil society and you will get a political system appropriate to it, a state which is only the official expression of civil society. That is what M. Proudhon will never understand."

Therefore it is also something M. Diemer will never understand. Therefore it should come as no surprise that Diemer, having missed the point about "historical materialism", should also not understand Marx's view of the state. What Marx was extolling about the Paris Commune, was not its libertarian organization, but its (supposed) character as a working class government. In fact its is clear from his interpretation, that while he can accept to some extent its democracy, he denied or apologized for the fact that the Paris Commune renounced rule over the rest of France and called for a free federation with the (hoped for) other communes of France:

"Not only municipal administration, but the WHOLE INITIATIVE HITHERTO EXERCISED BY THE STATE was laid into the hands of the Commune. (p.83). The few but important functions which still would remain for a central government WERE NOT TO BE SUPPRESSED, AS HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY MISSTATED, but were to be discharged by Communal and therefore, strictly responsible agents...While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, ITS LEGITIMATE FUNCTIONS were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society. (p.85)"
that UNITY OF GREAT NATIONS which, if originally brought about by political force, has now become A POWERFUL COEFFICIENT OF SOCIAL PRODUCTION. The antagonism of the Commune against the State power has been MISTAKEN for an exaggerated form of the ANCIENT [ie. outmoded] struggle against over-centralization. (p.86). . . Its true secret [interpretation] was this. It was essentially a WORKING-CLASS GOVERNMENT, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class . . . .(p.88). . . . If the Commune was thus the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society, and THEREFORE THE TRULY NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, it was, at the same time, a workingmen's government . . . .(p.94)" (THE CIVIL WAR IN FRANCE, my emphasis)

For Bakunin, the mode of political organization was just as important as the economic mode of production. Contrary to the accusations of the marxists, Bakunin did not reject all forms of organization nor the election of responsible individuals to perform limited coordination functions. What he, and all anarchists, objected to was the election of representatives, who once in office were free to act as autocrats, making decisions without regard to how the workers might actually feel. The more removed these officials became from the actual day-to-day existence of their worker "constituents", the more they would form a political elite, ignorant and unsympathetic to the troubles of ordinary working people. It is instructive to read the notes Marx made to Bakunin's STATE AND ANARCHY, where Marx responds directly to what Bakunin writes, since these provide us with a sort of dialogue between the two:

Bakunin: "The universal right of election of representatives and rulers of the state by the whole people."
Marx: "...[such a thing as the whole people in the present sense of the word is a phantasm]."
Bakunin: "...this last word of the Marxists as well as the democratic school is a lie, which conceals the despotism of the RULING MINORITY, and is all the more dangerous for appearing as the expression of the would-be popular will."
Marx: "Under collective [capitalist] property the so-called popular will disappears to be replaced by the genuine will of the co-operative."
Bakunin: "Hence the result is that the vast majority of the people is governed by a privileged minority. But this minority will consist of workmen say the Marxists."
Marx: "Where?"
Bakunin: "Yes it may perhaps consist of former workmen, but as soon as they become representatives or rulers of the people they CEASE TO BE WORKMEN."
Marx: "...no more than does a manufacturer today cease to be a capitalist on becoming a town councillor."
Bakunin: "...and view all ordinary workers from the eminence of the state; they will no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their pretensions to govern the people. Anyone who doubts this does not understand human nature."
Marx: "If Bakunin understood: at least the position of a manager in a co-operative factory, all his illusions about domination would go to the devil."

(ANARCHISM AND ANARCHOO-SYNDICALISM. Pp.150-151)

Bakunin's position becomes even more clear when we actually read page 153 in BAKUNIN ON ANARCHY, which Diemer says calls for a "post-revolutionary state":

"...the confiscation of all the property owned by the Church and the State as well as the precious metals owned by individuals, for the benefit of the federative Alliance of all the workers' associations, which will form the commune...for the purpose of effecting the organization of the revolutionary commune by permanent barricades, and the office of a council of the revolutionary commune by the delegation...of deputies invested with IMPERATIVE, ALWAYS RESPONSIBLE, AND ALWAYS REVOCABLE MANDATES...declaration by the capital city, rebellious and organized as a commune, to the effect that, having destroyed the authoritarian, controlled State...it therefore renounces the
right, or rather any claim, to govern the provinces...an appeal to all
provinces, communes, and associations to...reorganize themselves on a
revolutionary basis, then to delegate their deputies, likewise invested with
IMPÉRATIVE, RESPONSIBLE AND REVOCABLE MANDATES, to set a meeting place for
the purpose of constituting the FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS, COMMUNES, AND
PROVINCES..." (from "The Program of the Revolutionary Brotherhood", 1869, my
emphasis)

There is no talk of an "army" or "parliament", but of self-managing communes
coordinated by delegates with strict, binding, and limited mandates, defended by
popular militias. The similarities to the actual program adopted by the Paris
Commune are striking. If Diemers wants to call this a "state", he merely does so
to confuse the debate, or else he has totally missed the point, probably both.
At any rate it should be clear to anyone else why Bakunin was an anarchist and
Marx was not.

Conclusion

I suspect I am putting a bit of a damper on the idea of bringing the
anarchists and the non-leninist Marxists together as a "third socialist force".
I do not regard the old marxist-versus-anarchist controversy as personality
conflict which got out of hand. As Marx's official biographer, Franz Mehring,
himself a devoted marxist, wrote, "...nothing is more un-Marxist than the idea
that an unusually malicious individual [or individuals], a 'highly dangerous
intriguer', could have destroyed a proletarian organization like the
International." (p. 507)

I am also not so naive as to think any dyed-in-the-wool marxist will change
their mind about anarchism because of what they read in this bulletin. I
imagine everything I have just written will be hotly contested. Therefore any
attempt to synthesize anarchist and marxist ideologies is going to fail. The
best we can do in ideological terms is agree to disagree on the relative merits
of our political traditions.

The only possibility I see of anarchist and non-leninist Marxists working
together is on limited projects, where both sides remain free to withdraw
without recrimination when they believe the relation has gone sour. Obvious
examples would be anti-war agitation and protests against specific government
bills, political persecutions, etc. (The anti-poll tax struggles in Britain
might be a good example.) The bulletin could be a useful tool for encouraging
this kind of non-sectarian cooperation.

As for starting workers' organizations such as "socialist industrial
unions", "workers' councils", etc., this would depend on the circumstances. If
we are talking about an open non-party organization such as Spain's
Coordinators, or the attempt at starting an industrial unionist network in
education (the IUCE), I don't see why anarcho-syndicalists couldn't participate.
But if we are talking about trying to start a recruiting front for a labor
party, then no anarcho-syndicalist is going to feel good about it. As an
education worker, I was sorry to see the IUCE fold. Perhaps a discussion about
how to restart this and other industrial networks, might be a more practical way
to build some solidarity between non-leninist socialists than making allusions
about each others' "ambiguous heritage".

Sources for "Diemer's Heap":

ANARCHISM & ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM: Selected writings by Marx, Engels, Lenin.

BAKUNIN ON ANARCHISM by Sam Dolgoff


KARL MARX: THE STORY OF HIS LIFE by Franz Mehring

MAX NEITZELA'S WRITINGS ON BAKUNIN edited by Carl Slienger, London 1976

MICHAEL BAKUNIN by E.R. Carr

MICHAEL BAKUNIN AND KARL MARX by K.J. Kenafick, Melbourne 1948
AN INTERESTING NOTE ABOUT TWO MENSHEVIKS

For some time we have been receiving the Discussion Bulletin from the United States, published by a small group in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In a fairly recent issue we found a short but interesting note about two well-known and prominent Mensheviks: Pavel Axelrod and Julius Martov. The content of this article is most important because it also sheds some light on certain aspects of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. Thus we present it here in translation.

The author of the article -- one Larry Gambone -- asserts first of all that the "Leninists" tried in every way to make the Mensheviks appear suspect and impossible, as opportunists, right-wing social democrats, and counter-revolutionaries. In reality, Gambone argues, they were in a somewhat different position.

Two wings could be distinguished among the Mensheviks [1]. The right wing did not distinguish itself from German social democracy and could correctly be called "opportunist". The other wing -- the left Mensheviks -- did not adhere to any form of state socialism and resembled neither social democracy nor the Bolsheviks.

All too often and all too easily one forgets that the division between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the time was not the result of differences between socialists and social democrats. The question that kept these two Russian tendencies apart was what kind of party was needed in Russia [2].

Lenin's disciples wanted an elite of conspirators, centralized in the extreme; their opponents wanted a broad democratic movement. The two Mensheviks who opposed the Bolsheviks most forcefully, because they perceived the seeds of totalitarian ideas in them, were Axelrod and Martov.

Pavel Axelrod was one of the first Russian Marxists, and he exerted great influence over the Mensheviks. Contrary to Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders, he was a worker and came from a poor family. From the beginning he opposed the elitist and "mechanical" ideas of Plekancy; he emphasized human activity rather than determinist laws of development. Axelrod was of the opinion that socialists should be zealots for freedom, and he advocated the formation of a democratic mass movement. He had no sympathy whatsoever for revolutionary intellectuals and their outlines, because he realized that for them the workers would end up being nothing more than cannon fodder.

He saw the Russian Social Democratic Party as an organization of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia that strived to bring the working class under its influence. Instead Axelrod wanted the intellectuals to participate in a proletarian mass movement, one that would counteract their pretensions.

In view of these ideas, it should not surprise anyone that in 1903 when the division between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks became final, he called Lenin a "Jacobin" and characterized Bolshevism as a "... putschist, conspiratorial approach, a mix of Bakuninist and Blanquist tendencies, hidden behind a Marxist phraseology." He also called Bolshevism a "... particularly simple copy of the bureaucratic-autocratic system of our [Czarist] Department of the Interior."

Axelrod believed the Bolshevik grab for power to be "counter-revolutionary" and a "crime without precedent" which would lead to the undoing of Russia.

Julius Martov shared Axelrod's ideas in many respects. He also considered socialism not as the destruction of some people's personal freedom but, on the contrary, as its complete realization. He was also opposed to the formation of a party of professional revolutionaries, and he was a champion of a more decentralized party with autonomy for local branches. Like Marx, he was of the opinion that the struggle of the working class was one of self-liberation, or "a revolution from the bottom up".
Martov did not see the revolution as a conquest of power by a party or by an elite, but as the almost spontaneous revolt of the masses.

Martov also stressed local autonomous activity. His relentless advocacy of the idea of self-government started to bear fruit in 1905 with the formation of the St. Petersburg soviet [3].

During the October Revolution the soviets seemed to be the realization of Martov's ideas, but he pointed out emphatically that one party alone should not dominate these organizations. Revolutionary workers supported the Bolsheviks at the beginning, but slowly they started to be attracted to the ideas of Martov. During 1918 the Menshevik following grew in the soviets. The Bolsheviks feared they might lose their majority. They expelled Martov and his supporters from the Central Executive Committee and forbade their newspapers. For Martov this signified the death of the revolution and the beginning of the end of freedom and socialism. He greeted the outbreak of revolution in Germany and Austria with joy, because he hoped that if successful, they would be a support for Russian workers and would save the Revolution in Russia.

Martov realized that Russia was not ripe for socialism because there was no significant working class and because peasants desired private property of land instead of a socialist economy. He was also opposed to the nationalization of land. On top of that, he believed that under a Bolshevik regime one could not speak of socialism but only of state capitalism. Martov was probably one of the first to reach this conclusion. According to Martov, the Bolshevik repression of the soviets and factory committees, which became tangible with the destruction of the cooperative movement, made every form of real socialism totally impossible.

The left Mensheviks, anarchists, and council communists were defeated by means of Bolshevik terror. Now Leninism itself is dying. Perhaps fighters like Axelrod and Martov will now win the recognition they deserve.

COMMENTARY

As far as revolutionary disposition and activity go, the "left" Mensheviks were not out-organized by the Bolsheviks. A Menshevik like Boris Nikolaevsky, for example, was arrested eight times before 1917 and three times exiled to Siberia. He managed to escape twice from there, and one time he escaped from a prison. There are only a few Bolsheviks who could boast of a similar "record" [4].

What separated the Mensheviks from the Bolsheviks were indeed their contrasting ideas on party organization. We share the opinion of Pavel Axelrod that the Russian Social Democratic Party following the Bolshevik model was an "organization of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia." We also think that he was right in calling Lenin a Jacobin, something that Lenin himself also did [5]. And in our opinion, Axelrod was not wrong either when he characterized Bolshevikism as a "mix of Bakuninism and Blanquism".

However, the Mensheviks did not see in a country like Russia of which Martov later said -- in view of its class relations -- that socialism was not on the agenda, that a historic role was reserved precisely for a Jacobin party in the forthcoming revolution. The policy which the Bolsheviks chose, or rather were forced to choose, did not mean (unlike what Martov thought) the "death of the revolution" or "the end of socialism", for the simple reason that socialism had been out of the question all along and that the revolution could not have created any other society but the one Martov himself designated with the words "state capitalism".

As far as the article in the Discussion Bulletin is concerned, in our opinion its author overlooks that both the St. Petersburg soviet of 1905 and later ones consisted mainly of representatives of various political parties and that these organizations thus did not embody the ideas of Axelrod or Martov to the extent that he assumes. When he refers to "revolutionary workers", he attributes certain socialist ideas to those who were in fact fighting for their own interests. We believe that they hardly held these (socialist) ideas at all. We also believe it is incorrect to say that the Bolsheviks defeated "council communists". Council communist ideas arose in Western Europe only as the true character of the Russian Revolution gradually became clear. (Notes on next page)
Dear Friends,

When I read the DB I think to myself, "no, no, this isn't the way to go" but I keep reading and subscribing in order to keep up with old friends and opponents and to see what's new with you all.

It seems to me that most of what is discussed in the DB is pretty small potatoes and that discussion often reaches a point where only the writers and a few others really know what is being said. And much of it has been said before, over and over again, so that the lines are drawn and are predictable. It's what isn't be said that interests me.

A lot of time gets spent trashing the left. These days that isn't hard to do and you won't get much argument from anyone about doing it, the left included. The days of the old vanguardism which so amazes most DB writers is over and the vanguardists know it.

So—-who is taking part in the debates in the left with a good libertarian point of view? Who is speaking to the fractured left about building other kinds of movements and organizations? Who is talking about these problems from experience?

The old debate about working within unions and working to create some kind of OBU goes on, though perhaps in slightly different forms than it did when I was active in the DB current. The reality is that the debate was always less important than it seemed and neither side did much workplace organizing. With deindustrialization the terms and meaning of the debate should change.

So—-who out there is doing any kind of workplace organizing? Who out there goes into their workplace or out into their community to test their ideas and take part in other people's struggles? What are you learning from doing that?

I spend the greater part of my time going into factories and talking to people. There is a lot of fear in the shops now. People are afraid of plant closings and strikes and of being blacklisted. The militancy of the '60s and '70s is dead and gone and it ain't coming back. This was the militancy which made the ideas of the IWW so attractive to me then and made even the most utopian ideals seem possible. Now that the militancy which I grew up with is gone I'm rethinking what is appropriate political and workplace activity for myself and what the real chances of social change are.

So—-how are you all reacting to the fears of your co-workers and the absence of struggle in the working class? In the absence of a wildcat movement what are you trying to build? How are your ideas changing?

Most of the good work I see is being done in workplaces and communities these days being done by Blacks and women. Some of this work is being done in unions—especially in the Teamsters, the Mailhandlers, the IBEW and among the miners—and most of it is being done in the smaller towns and poorer regions.

So—why are there no women or people of color writing in the DB and
why is the DB current even predominantly white and male? Why don't the libertarian socialist ideas reach the people who are already in motion? Why isn't there an analysis being worked out in the pages of the DB and similar publications which comes directly from the experiences of the women and Blacks who are in motion?

I'm not attacking you all or trying to come off as if I know something that you all don't. These are just the questions which pass through my mind as I read the few publications from the DB current which reach me.

So—what am I doing about all this? I'm just another confused person. We do have wildcats and strikes here regularly and I do my best to help out. I travel across my region trying to organize local unions and I have some successes and a lot of failures. I go to the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church here, I try to be a help in my community, I coon hunt every chance I get and I try to organize local lodges for the various fraternal groups I'm a member of. The strikes and wildcats will eventually become regional actions again, I'm sure. The locales will always have a mixed character. My Church is working class and is a community. Coon hunting keeps me out in the woods and keeps my aim good. My community is Black, Italian and Slavic and most people here work, or worked, in the mines. The lodges are just small ethnic organizations which do mutual aid work and which give me a chance to have constant contact with ordinary Russian and eastern European folks through correspondence and meetings. I try every means of self-organization that I know about. Some work. Most don't. I do give credit to the movement for teaching me about self-organization and spontaneity. Your instincts were right. I think you missed most of the particulars.

Well, that's all from here. Please take this letter seriously and take my word that it was written in a comradely spirit.

Best Wishes, Bob Rossi, P.O. Box 277, Dalslow, WV 26531

Dear Frank,

My letter in DB47 has a sentence so badly worded that it fails to express the intended meaning. The paragraph near the foot of p.17 should have read: "freedom to try to accumulate possessions". It is hard to see why Bulletin Matters should have read that letter as part of a crusade against the SPCB. It agreed with their statement that the working class do practically all the work of controlling the activities of society today. Anybody who looks forward to a classless society is almost forced to agree with them on this, for it provides the direct evidence that the workers are capable of running a society without the capitalists.

George Walford, IDEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY, 15 Calabria Rd, London N6 1JB

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BALANCE: June 22, 1991

(deficit) $29.61

Fraternally submitted,

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee
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BALANCE: June 22, 1991

[deficit] $28.01

Fraternally submitted,

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee
June 28, 1991

To: The Discussion Bulletin Committee

Dear Comrades:

This letter is being enclosed only with the copies sent to subscribers who have contributed to the DB financially or by writing for it—the "DB Committee" members who used to get the dittoed "Report" before we began including it under "Bulletin Matters." If you have already read "Bulletin Matters" in this issue, you learned that this issue was reproduced by a copier, not by offset printing as in the past. The cost of printing a 28-page issue is now $130 with future increases in sight. At the same time postage costs are "skyrocketing" to use the language of the local paper. The only way I could see to escape the consistent deficit spending that has marked the past couple years of the DB was to cut down on printing costs by doing the work myself. This is feasible now that I have retired and have the time.

To that end I bought a used 2625 Panasonic copier for $936. Figuring the cost of paper and toner, 250 copies of a 28-page DB would cost $30.87, a saving of nearly $100 over the cost of offset printing. I went overboard a bit on this issue printing 300 copies--because we need more than 250 and because I didn't know how many would be spoiled-- and increasing the size to 32 pages. The cost of printing this issue by offset would have been nearly $180.

The whole job is much more time consuming than I thought it would be; for one thing the printer used to do the folding. And the quality leaves something to be desired. Some of you may get copies with a couple of wrinkled pages. But I am catching on with the help of a couple of experts, and the last pages are much better than the first two or three.

Now comes the catch. I wouldn't have bought a $936 copier if it hadn't been for the DB, even though I do find a copier very convenient for personal projects. What I propose is to split the cost of the copier with DB supporters, paying $50 out of DB funds for the next nine issues--that is through DB56--until the DB has paid $450 of the cost. Then we would revert back to the actual cost of materials. The financial statement in this issue indicates how it would be done if supporters have no objections. Please let me know how you feel about this.

Fraternally,

Frank Girard
Dear Discussion Bulletin:  

SOME SUGGESTIONS WHICH MIGHT HELP ADVANCE COUNCILISM

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to our Editor, Frank, for his dedication; sacrifice of time and money, and energy; but most of all for his great tolerance in publishing ideas with which he often differs. I find the latter quality a very rare one on the left especially where too often ad hominem attacks by one comrade on another or by one group on another with frequent disregard for the feelings of the others or seeking the truth which we should all be about!

Therefore, my first suggestion is that we grant this Editor, when we can trust not to abuse it, our permission to return any ad hominem attack, or one that is predominantly so, to the sender with an admonishment to rewrite it in a more comradely fashion. Speaking for myself, I do not wish to read a Discussion Bulletin which is replete with personal attacks, rather than sound arguments based on facts.

My second suggestion is that our frequent writers recruit at least one person to the workers' councilist philosophy before submitting another article to DB. I strongly believe that we are very long on talk but short on action such as the vital one of recruitment, not to mention securing new subscribers for the newspapers and literature in our milieu. I think frequent writers have the special responsibility to support DB.

My third suggestion is that we really support our press, like the DM and the People, to the best of our ability, but especially the DB which doesn't have the expert fundraisers that the People has, so that the Editor can devote more of his time to his real work and not to having to beg for the small sums of money he requests periodically put of necessity. What do outsiders think of our seriousness, and good faith, if we don't adequately support our Press and organizations, and don't treat each other in a loving, fraternal manner?

It is also surprising to me that our writers, or many of them including the Editor are trying to link workers councilism of socialists with anarchism in spite of the opposition of our great thinker, Karl Marx. I suggest, therefore that we all read what Marx has to say on the subject, especially his debates with Bakunin at all cost before we continue to urge possibly being in the position of mixing oil and water. I have much doubt in my mind as to the democracy in some anarchist groups or of the logic of promoting disorganization when organization is needed. I do agree that organization should be decentralized and minimal to avoid bureaucracy and authoritarianism.

I find that most members of the Socialist Labor Party, and like thinkers approach possible recruits as if the latter, regardless of their prior training and experience, have little or no knowledge of socialism, and talk to one and all like they are the teacher and the other is a very ignorant supporter of the bureaucracy! Comrades, and SIU please remember we have much to learn from others so let's begin to do it!

My final suggestion is that we should immediately try to get unity, even a loose federalist start, of the various socialist workers' councilist groups and individuals to coordinate our activities such as our Press, political action, and educational functions. Again, to outsiders, if we can't cooperate together, and stay together in small groups, we can't practice what we preach and therefore can't be taken seriously. I urge the Editor of the DB to use this page for this purpose more than it has been till now.

I hope that I've been able to spark some thought and possibly some needed action. As an old friend of mine says, it is difficult enough to get someone's attention let alone get him/her to really listen, and to act!

Fraternally,

[Signature]

Ron Burgins
The deepening crisis of the world capitalist system is magnified in India because the faction of capital that rules here is weak. This is a normal situation for capital - strong capitals 'oppress' weak capitals in whatever arenas they be functioning. To avoid any misunderstanding we would like to clarify here that capital is a social relation, mass labour based commodity production being its essence, hence capital does not have a nationality.

World capital is not an homogeneous/amorphous entity. Global capital today is made up of factions of capital essentially organised on nation/country basis. There are visible differences in different factions of global capital as well as in different parts of each faction of capital. It is a normal practice for strong capitals to exploit/oppress weak capitals. But lest there be any misunderstanding, we would like to repeat that capital is a social relation, capital has no nationality.

The world capitalist system's epochal\(^1\) and other crises are incessantly deepening. This is giving rise to social turmoil throughout the world. This turmoil is magnified in areas under the rule of weak capitals - their own specificity is the major reason for this enhancement, though transfer of parts of their loads by strong capitals onto the shoulders of weak capitals also plays a role in this.

This is the global setting for the present turmoil in India. An area under the rule of a weak faction of global capital, the specificity of the social situation in India that is putting its imprint on the ongoing events is this: in India there are hundreds of millions of peasants and artisans (simple commodity producers); tens of millions of petty bourgeois; tens of millions of wage-workers with a substantial section of industrial workers; tens of millions of lumpen-proletariat; and millions of representatives of capital. This distribution is not even, but all the same when large enough areas are taken into consideration they are more or less spread out evenly in the country. Now this is where capitalist development is taking place - AND CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT THAT IS TAKING PLACE IN THE ERA OF CAPITALISM'S DECADENCE AND THAT TOO IN AN AREA UNDER THE RULE OF A WEAK FACTION OF CAPITAL. The capitalist development in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe itself gave rise to pauperisation/proletarianisation of tens of millions of peasants/artisans and of those belonging to the petty bourgeoisie. The capitalist system in Europe could absorb only a portion of the tens of millions of this pauperised/proletarianised mass. Millions, tens of millions, migrated to Americas, Australia, South Africa and openings were found for some in colonial administrations. But the hundreds of millions who are facing a similar situation in countries like India have nowhere to go. Hundreds of thousands are able to migrate by hook or crook to America-Canada-Europe-oil producing Arab countries but this simply an insignificant number of those desperately looking for an outlet. THERE ARE NO OUTLETS IN THE WORLD AT LARGE FOR THE HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS FACING SOCIAL DEATH IN COUNTRIES LIKE INDIA. This is an objective situation for incessant violent struggles with their high and low points and brutal suppression by the state. Incidentally, rapid increase in the size of the military-bureaucratic apparatus in countries like India is basically a reply to the growing discontent of the masses - that the expenses incurred on this vast machine for oppression in its turn deepens the crisis faced
by the concerned faction of weak capital is one of those vicious grips which now and then give rise to a lot of liberal blabber about the need to cut down expenses on the military-bureaucratic machine and 'spend instead on development that would be in the welfare of all'.

With hundreds of millions on the brink of bankruptcy at all times, even in the most democratic countries and even during normal times in them (India and its long duration of parliamentary democracy provides a lot of such examples), the level of social discontent and its brutal suppression is of such an order that a person looking through west-european eyes at the last forty years' events in India will hardly find anything democratic in them. Besides killing people in police firing, cold-blooded murders of prisoners by the police-paramilitary-military is a daily occurrence in India even after 1947 and up to the present - the pace and number of such murders is constantly rising. The discontent born of this objective situation was expressing itself, by and large, in the strengthening of state-capitalist tendencies calling themselves communist. The increasing discontent expressing itself into extremely violent upheavals and armed struggles on maoist/guerrilla format were a natural culmination of this. Whether one looks at indo-china or Indonesia-malaysia, India or South America or Africa, the scenario does not change. When the discontent of hundreds of millions of peasants/artisan and petty-bourgeois and proletarian was expressing itself through the strengthening of state-capitalist tendencies whether in their stalinist or maoist or che guevarist or trotskyist colours, these struggles has been labelled "revolutionary" and "progressive". The increasing bankruptcy of the state-capitalist tendencies calling themselves communist was concomitant with the growth of what is known as the Khomeini phenomenon. The content was the same, even the form of its expression was almost the same, but a mere change of some words gave rise to a lot of blabber about obscurantism, religious revivalism, resurgence of hindu caste consciousness and what not.

And coming to the current situation in India, with the December 1989 elections, the parliamentary circus in India reached the stage of a farce. In their attempts to become 'popular', every parliamentary party, faction of a party, nay even every parliamentarian started desperately looking for straws to reach the parliamentary pinnacle. If one looks at the issues that have been attempted to be raised in the past twelve months, one will have to appreciate the desperate attempts to find the Midas touch - that there is hardly any creative thinking remaining in parliamentary politics is of course a general reflection of the present state of this institution and the parliamentary knights have as a rule not risen above the material constraints.

If one were to look at the situation in India through the eyes of the bourgeois press, one would find not only resurgence of caste consciousness but also resurgence of religious consciousness, one would not only find resurgence of regional (read national) consciousness, but would also find resurgence of Indian consciousness. The Indian faction of capital is presently more and more unable to tackle the growing discontent within the bounds of parliamentary democracy. To put this genie in the bottle is the present need of the representatives of capital here. A hindu Hitler or a military Hitler is on the agenda of capital's representatives here.
In the above write-up one might wonder at the absence of any mention of the role of the working class in India. In fact, the working class movement in India has not been able to acquire an independent status to-date. This is largely due to the specific situation in India AND the absence of significant communist work—an absence which has led to the non-development of conscious revolutionary working class movement in India. Many a spontaneous outburst of working class movement have been led by diverse state-capitalist tendencies into state-capitalist marsh or have withered away. And thus has the extreme discontent of the labouring masses not been able to play a revolutionary role.

In this situation, the foremost task in our opinion is the formation of a communist organisation in India that works for the development of a conscious revolutionary working class movement by concentrating on the industrial workers and besides, works for the development of an independent working class position. Thus alone, in our opinion, can we hope to break the vicious circle. But then, the development of a communist organisation in India is closely linked to the development of the communist movement—and here we optimistically look forward to the efforts being made throughout the world.

1. Those interested may refer KK's abridged version of Rosa Luxemberg's "Accumulation of Capital".

- A Kamunist Kranti Text
December 1990

BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS RECEIVED

La Coordinadora: A Union Without Bureaucrats by Don Fitz; 1989, 22 pp. $1.00 from WD Press, P.O. Box 24115, St. Louis, MO 63130. Don Fitz contrasts what passes for unionism in the U.S. with La Coordinadora, the Spanish dockworkers' union. According to the author, "Coordinadora has combined the hiring hall job rotation, industrial unionism, and Spanish anarcho-syndicalist assemblyism. The result is one of the most democratic labor organizations anywhere in the world." Probably the most telling improvement on ordinary business unionism worldwide is the Coordinadora's organizational structure that involves what amounts to worker self-management of their union. Union officers are paid at the going rate of dockworkers. The national office of this 8000 member union gets by with two paid officers.

But it's hard not to view the success of La Coordinadora, a success that includes major strike victories—as a result of a glitch in Spain's labor relations laws. Once the state gets around to writing La Coordinadora into the AFL-CIO mold, the whole thing will be over. Unions can be independent and revolutionary only when the state isn't involved. Roosevelt's New Deal did in genuine unionism in the U.S.

The Strike Weapon: Lessons of the Miners' Strike, No date, 21 pp. $1.00/ 30p, from the Socialist Party of Great Britain, 52 Clapham High
Cont'd on p. 32
Dear Frank,

I'm addressing this to you personally rather than to D.H. as it might be too personal for publication. You decide.

I'm feeling optimistic about the Revolution, at least in the belief that the choice between Socialism or Barbarism is being forced upon us. The demise of Bolshevism has finally freed the Revolution from an image of tyranny and backwardness (the Soviet reality has been a "godsend" to the apologists for capitalism). And now we are increasingly being faced with the "external limits of capitalism", as Murray Bookchin has described. A choice is indeed looming and many old blinders have been removed.

Part of all this and what fascinates me most is what has happened to the Revolution in the last thirty years. It is no longer the private preserve of parties or sects, who have authoritatively and self-righteously decreed who is revolutionary and what the revolution means. The Revolution is manifest in all critiques of civilization and capitalism.

May I be personal? When I encountered Socialism around 1960 I was already filled with the Plains Indians, Shelley, H. Rider Haggard, the Beat Poets, and a general dislike of authority. I became familiar with SPGB literature and got straightened out regarding the Bolshevika, though I hung around their bookstore in order to purchase literature. Although the SPGB and the CP were sworn enemies and I certainly sided with the SPGB position, I felt uncomfortable around both of them. In both I sensed authority, exclusiveness, and a closed system of thought (as though nothing of consequence had happened since Engels' death). I placed my Marx & Engels affectionately beside my Shelley & friends, and considered myself an unsocial, eccentric socialist; a contradiction I felt uneasy about.

With the Sixties came Folk Music, Coffee-Houses, and the early days of the New Left. I became literally "blown away" by William Blake, Walt Whitman and D.H. Lawrence. The Beats and what has been called the New American Poetry led me back to the Plains Indians, Ecology, and to a critique of civilization that now seemed everywhere, past and present. It was there in Blake's Marriage of Heaven & Hell; in Henry Miller's essay on American bread, The Staff of Life; in Lawrence's The Rainbow; and I'll be damned, it was even in T.S. Eliot! Journals and small newspapers proliferated, not attached to parties and programs, and they audaciously spoke of Marx and Blake and McC. Brown in the same sentence!

It was pretty obvious that the Revolution was not the "private property" of the feuding parties and sects, who appeared more and more like vestigial organs whose purpose, once perhaps real, has lost any purpose. The Movement is the Movement, as it exists -- not how we wish it to be. The birth-panes as Marx put it: no easy road of programs, but a long march through all the institutions of society, as someone put it.
How uncomfortable I once felt (and angry too) when I would read or hear Wm. Morris dismissed as a dreamer, Blake as a mystic or Lawrence as a quasi fascist. Not anymore! If anything the tables were turned. The so-called Scientific Socialists turned out to be the Religious Socialists (Larry Gambose, D.B. #47). If anything brought this home it was Paris, 1968. The Graffitti spoke the language of Blake & Marx, and people danced & made love in the streets. "Take your dreams for reality...."

The Surrealists, the Situationists, the Anarchists -- take it, share it. The Poem -- take it, share it. Take the metaphors from alchemy, astrology, old myths & mysteries, and make it new and alive. There is no Party or Sect to expel you from. Yes, we must eventually organize, but it is well enough for who knows how long that we are removing the dead weight of the past, its tyrannies and absolutes.

I take and share from Bob Black, whose Abolition of Work is stimulating and delightful to read. I gave a copy of this to an old Partyman who later wanted to discuss it with me. I declined because I wasn't interested in a lecture and hearing Black dismissed as one more who doesn't get it right. I'm personally no more a Blackist than a Blakist. Both have something to offer. I may be amused but I'm not concerned about Bob Black's heated arguments with others. It's wonderful that neither Black nor anyone else who has written for D.B. can be expelled! There's nothing to be expelled from anymore. Maybe that's the message of Bob Black!

There is a freedom in the air of our milieu, and D.B. is right in the mainstream, along with so many of the journals mentioned in D.B.'s review of periodicals. Feels good.

We have a very comprehensive radical bookstore here that covers the whole critique of capitalism and civilization as a whole. We also have a very comprehensive New Age bookstore where one can get as goofy as all get out. But this latter store also carries solid work on Ecology, Animal Liberation, Feminist Studies and Health. Now some of their titles are also available at the radical bookstore. Convergence? This reminds me of some lines by the poet, Robert Duncan:

Where there is no commune,
the individual volition has no ground.
Where there is no individual freedom, the commune
is falsified.

Are we not both trying to get "from here to there"? Journals like D.B. and Spanner, to name only two, would seem to be the meeting place. I don't mean today -- but eventually.

Whitman: Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

Chomsky: We should not be worshipping at shrines, but learning what we can from people who had something serious to say...while trying to overcome the inevitable errors and flaws.
"A FAIR DAY'S WAGES FOR A FAIR DAY'S WORK"

VS

"ABOLITION OF THE WAGES SYSTEM"

--BY ALAN SANDERSON

"They [the working class] ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights incessantly springing up from the never-ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economic reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wages for a fair day's work!' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wages system!'"

---Marx

Capitalism has long since more than amply engendered the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economic—that is, a socialist—reconstruction of society, yet what remains the motto of working class organization?—"A fair day's wages for a fair day's work." What is not seen on their banner?—"Abolition of the wages system!"

Nevertheless the De Leonist Society pins its hopes for the future upon its belief that moribund Capitalism will finally and at last shatter the workers' conservative mindset and thus render them receptive to the Marxist—De Leonist revolutionary program.

In the meantime there are of course many differences of opinion among individuals and groups calling themselves socialist. Obviously, therefore, the essential views that differentiate one from another should be well studied and assessed by all who wish to advance the socialist cause.

In keeping with the above aim the De Leonist Society has from time to time charged (and backed up its charge with specifics) that the ex-tant Socialist Labor Party abandoned the De Leonist revolutionary position it once espoused. Naturally we could not expect that our efforts to distinguish between bona fide De Leonism and its fraudulent counterpart would be met with instant and universal approval. Far otherwise! As for instance a letter in The Discussion Bulletin by Sam Brandon—a letter that takes us to task for our recent article "Socialist Labor Party 'Centennial'" (I). Quoting Brandon as follows:

"The November 1990 issue of The De Leonist Society Bulletin was sent to me by one of its subscribers...."

"The November issue contains a long article entitled, 'Socialist Labor Party Centennial', by Alan Sanderson. He claims the S.L.P. was destroyed by the revisionists, who resorted to it, because of the steadily shrinking membership. Sanderson is blind to the facts!"

Comment: Sanderson still maintains that was the case and offers as proof the following excerpt from a Statement on "The Need for Agitational Direction" by the then National Secretary Nathan Karp, reproduced in the printed proceedings of the 1977 NEC Session, SLP of America:

"Despite the rather long period of time during which we
were compelled to concentrate our energies on various organizational problems, we have not been oblivious of the steady decline in membership and party activity. Quite the contrary. It was this same decline, reflected most acutely in the headquarters crisis, that was the starting point for the changes that have taken place."

Brandon next claims that Sanderson has been guilty of a sin of omission. He writes:

"We, of the I.U.P. are aware that the present S.L.P. has compromised some of its principles during the past 15 years. We have issued documents critical of them. However, Sanderson under the pretext that he is giving a De Leonist criticism, makes an unforgivable error. He refers to an article in the Centennial edition of the Weekly People [It was the Centennial edition of the People--A.S.] in which the following sentence appears. 'Accordingly, the S.L.P. holds that the mission of unionism must be to organize all workers, as a class, along industrial lines, to not only defend workers' immediate interest in protecting wage levels and working conditions, but, when sufficiently organized, to assume control of the means of production...)' The rest of the sentence Sanderson does not quote which is, 'dispossess the capitalist class of its ownership of them, and to form the basis for a new socialist government and social system.'"

Comment: If the omission vitiated the full meaning of the sentence then Sanderson is indeed guilty as charged. But did it? It can hardly be argued so because any reader having at least a brushing acquaintance with the subject under debate will immediately grasp that "to assume control of the means of production" necessarily implies performance of the revolutionary act--an act which just as obviously "dispossesses the capitalist class," etc.

Brandon now charges that "Sanderson is trying to make us believe that De Leon was opposed to workers fighting for better working conditions, higher wages, shorter hours, etc. etc. He calls these immediate demands, reforms! Sanderson should study his De Leon."

Comment: A member of the De Leonist Society, Sanderson has utmost admiration for De Leon (for that mastermind who ventured into uncharted waters and sounded their depths) and would be deeply chagrined to think he had misrepresented his mentor. However, he does not think Brandon's accusation can stick. Where is the evidence? While he has many times over the years cited De Leon to show that he (like Marx) stressed abolition of the wages system as THE GOAL workers should constantly aim for, he has never to his knowledge suggested that De Leon was "opposed" to workers' engagement in what Marx termed "these unavoidable guerilla fights."

As to the charge, "He calls these immediate demands reforms!! Sanderson should study his De Leon":

Comment: The most likely candidate for this charge could be the article's question, "WHICH SLP is right?--the bona fide SLP that directed the revolutionary spirit straight to the goal, or its reformist/revisionist namesake that 'educates' for Socialism by diverting the revolu-
tionary spirit into the quagmire of 'immediate demands'?

So what is reform? Apart from the obvious point that "immediate demands" are not themselves the things demanded, and granting that local demands for higher wages and better working conditions are not usually thought of as demands for reform, nevertheless Brandon overlooks the sense in which widespread "immediate demands" may connect with the term. Thus demands for "better working conditions [such as safety regulations], higher wages [such as a higher minimum wage], shorter hours, etc. etc." continually make their way onto the political field for legislative reform. Then, too, there is the broad view of reform that counterposes amelioration of wage servitude to revolution such as expressed by De Leon in his Daily People editorial, "Abolition, Not Lessening of Poverty," now published as one of a series of editorials under the title, "Abolition of Poverty." Quoting as follows:

"Social science establishes that, one time, the poverty of some was necessary to social progress...The only thing then possible was the 'lessening' of poverty, or, to speak more precisely, the mitigation of the ills entailed by poverty--a reform [!], not a revolution, as the abolition of poverty implies."

"Today, the excuse, the apology for the involuntary poverty of a single member of society exists no more. Material conditions have changed so radically that, so far from insufficiency, there is to-day the material possibility of abundance for all."

"Under such material social conditions, Socialism spurns the goal of 'lessening poverty' as a miserable Reform [!], as a betrayal of Man's opportunity and duty."

There is, however, one aspect of Brandon's criticism that, in a roundabout way, may point to what perhaps really bothers him. It is contained in what he imagines is a coup de grace, to wit: "Let him [Sanderson] refute the following quotes!!" And here follow three quotes from De Leon, widely separated in point of time, all reflecting directly or indirectly De Leon's view that the "immediate mission" of economic organization was to conduct the day-to-day struggle for "immediate demands."

Comment: As previously stated, the writer has never denied that this was indeed the position! However, if Brandon is also making a case that the thrust of the article "Socialist Labor Party 'Centennial'" is at odds with the said position, then he is perfectly correct and the bottom line question in the debate becomes: WHY OUR CHANGE OF POSITION?

Why indeed if not that times and circumstances have changed over the years, and changed so hugely that the then "immediate mission" of the economic organization has to all intents and purposes become obsolete!

Contained in one of De Leon's quotes cited by Brandon is the following passage: "In the second place trades unionism has an immediate mission. The supreme mission of trades unionism is ultimate. That day is not yet...At any rate, we are not yet there." The De Leonist Society holds that the day of the supreme mission is no longer "ultimate," is now here, is now not merely eminently feasible from a material and prac-
tical standpoint but is by far the most urgent need of the hour—a mis-
sion which if not very soon accomplished must expose civilization to a
terrible fate. Man, look at the changes that have taken place—changes
such as we could only touch on in our reviews of De Leon’s two addresses,
"The Burning Question of Trades Unionism" and "Socialist Reconstruction
of Society."

As his conclusion, Brandon offers the following parting shot:
"Perhaps, Sanderson and The De Leonist Society have abandoned the fact
that there is a class struggle in capitalist society." Bearing in mind
that the overwhelming majority of workers are as yet unorganized (have
not yet organized themselves!), we reply: Perhaps Brandon and the IUP
think organization to prolong the class struggle is better than organi-
zation to end it!

--from The De Leonist Society Bulletin, P.O. Box 944.
Station F, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4Y 2N9

What sort of Class War?

Comrades will have seen announcements of the creation of an alliance of
revolutionary groups behind the slogan "No war, but Class War". Few
anarchists will not have sympathy for the slogan, but some may not feel
the strategy so far pursued by the groups involved, is the best way
either to wage the class war, or to oppose the present international
one.

Anarchist appeals to class war, traditionally, have been of two sorts,
class war can be seen as purely defensive action against the onslaughts
of the bosses, or as a future struggle on the part of a revolutionary &
united working class. This seems to be neither.

I would not want to see anarchists produce any hard & fast "line" on
the matter, but I would think that there are points that need to be
considered generally. Namely:

1. It is obvious that it is a necessary & fundamental part of class
struggle that radicals oppose the militarism of the state, &
particularly the brain-washing of the working class that the
ruling class Media performs during wars.

2. But it may not be a correct understanding of the class struggle
to assume that the class war is best waged by yelling about it; &
it does not necessarily follow that the best way to oppose war
is to chant the rhetoric of class war.

3. Class struggle arises because each & every member of the ruling
class, in order to retain his/her position in that class, attempts
constantly to increase her/his power (monetary or otherwise) which
can only be done by making inroads into the freedom, or living
conditions, of the ruled.

4. If the rulers were able to do this without any limitations, they
would so destroy the working class, that they—the rulers—then,
would no longer have anyone to exploit. As it is long periods of
overwhelming ruling class unchallenged dominance usually produce
glums.
5. However, the ruling elite's freedom in this respect is limited by the need of the oppressed to survive. However conditioned by the ruling class's propaganda, whether through Media, education, general sociological conditioning, or some taught ideology, the working class may be, the need to survive is not overcome.

6. In consequence, however low the political consciousness of the working class, defensive class struggle is inevitable. But while the working class is subject to the mental conditioning that capitalism imposes, its members cannot wage a successful class war. So to do would involve them in challenging all their imposed beliefs.

7. But in such circumstances: (indeed in all normal circumstances:) the ruling class is the aggressor in the class war; the ruling class rules precisely because its members are, individually, more competent at fighting to attain selfish interests, &—until the exploited classes are united—class war can only be fought on the basis of protecting individual interests; any class conflict which is fought, where the working class has not previously attained a very high level of unity & consciousness, is bound to lead to a ruling class victory.

8. Class War will be transformed when the exploited are conscious of their economic position & of the need to change the basis of society. It is therefore an essential element of any future successful class struggle, that we now oppose the additional opportunity for conditioning that war presents.

9. It is however nonsense, at a time when, at the very least, 65% of the population supports war, to suggest that the working class is already sufficiently united & consciousness to wage the sort of class struggle that could stop the war.

10. It follows that we need to use those tactics best designed to raise consciousness, & that premature calls to class war, if they alienate other workers may well be counter-productive.

11. Moreover there is a danger of vanguardist elitism. Some raise the old slogan "turn your guns on the bosses", but any successful struggle on that basis would have to be a guerrilla-terrorist campaign, & could, at best, lead to a Lenin-type "revolutionary" dictatorship.

12. No doubt chanting helps to raise the morale of the activists. It is not often that revolutionaries find themselves in large numbers & the desire on such occasions to boost our own feelings is natural; but we need to decide whether it is worth risking alienating potential supporters to get this morale boost.

_Don't send the class militant minority out on suicide missions._

Don't have a road for Leninists to use

L.G.,
Call
Wellingon,
T.F.1-1 P.E.

This is a personal view, not the agreed position of Wrekin Syndicalists.
(In DB46 we reprinted "Analysis and Critique of Wildcat's Capitalism and its Revolutionary Destruction" from the journal Echanges. Published below is the Wildcat's response to Echanges.)

Dear comrades,

We are writing, rather belatedly, to comment on the review of our pamphlet, 'Capitalism and its Revolutionary Destruction', which you published in Echanges no. 31.

It is evident from the review that several important differences do exist between Echanges' outlook and our own: for example, over the proletarian or bourgeois nature of the 1917 revolution in Russia; the role - if any - of organised political groups of communists in the class struggle; the differences - again, if any - between capitalist development in the 19th century and today, which influences our historical view of national liberation struggles and trade unionism; and so on.

Having acknowledged the real differences such as these, however, we must point out that a large part of what is written in the review is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of our view of the relationship between class struggle and class consciousness. This misunderstanding is summed up in the statement that Wildcat "regards the struggle of the working class as the result of its consciousness". Frankly, we are more than a little puzzled as to how your reviewer arrived at this assessment, since it is just the opposite of what we believe.

While the question of the emergence of class consciousness is not one which we have dealt with in any great detail in our publications, the whole direction of our interventions and activity over the past few years has been based on the view that if widespread class consciousness is to emerge it will be as a result of working class people participating actively in their collective class struggle, and that the progress of the working class movement in a revolutionary direction will be made largely in response to overcoming the immediate practical problems which crop up in pursuing and extending the class struggle. Moreover, we base ourselves on this materialist position in our frequent opposition to idealist tendencies in the working class movement here such as the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB), who see class consciousness as the product of passive reflection on the evils of capitalism, and who argue that the working class must somehow become conscious communists before engaging in any revolutionary activity.

In other words, with regard to this issue at least, our approach is basically the same one which is defended against our supposed view in your article!

We hope you will publish this clarification of our views as a contribution towards clearing the way for a fruitful debate on the issues which do separate us, rather than wasting time and space on issues where we are more or less in agreement.

Yours fraternally,

M.S. for Wildcat.
THESSES ON THE PARTY
by the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD)
(July 1921)

1. It is the historical task of the proletarian revolution to bring the disposal of the wealth of the earth into the hands of the working masses, to put an end to the private ownership of the means of production, thus rendering impossible the existence of a separate, exploiting, ruling class. This task involves freeing the economy of society from all fetters of political power and is, of course, posed on a world scale.

2. The ending of the capitalist mode of production, the taking over of this production, and putting it in the hands of the working class, the ending of all class divisions and withering of political institutions, and building of a communist society is a historical process whose individual moments cannot be exactly predicted. But, as regards this question, the role which political power will play in this process is nevertheless settled on some points.

3. The proletarian revolution is at the same time a political and economic process. Neither as a political, nor as an economic process can it be solved on a national scale: the building of the world commune is absolutely necessary for its survival. Therefore it follows that until the final destruction of the power of capital on a world scale, the victorious part of the revolutionary proletariat still needs political power to defend, and if possible attack, the political violence of the counter-revolution.

4. In addition to these reasons which make political power necessary for the victorious part of the proletariat, there are additional reasons relating to the internal development of the revolution. The revolution -- looked on as a political process -- has indeed a decisive moment, the taking of political power. The revolution, viewed as an economic process, has no such decisive moment, long work will be necessary to take over the direction of the economy on the part of the proletariat, to eradicate the profit motive, and to replace it by an economy of needs. It is self-evident that during this period the bourgeoisie will not remain idle, but will try to regain power for the purpose of defending their profits. It follows that in the countries with a developed democratic ideology -- that is, the advanced industrial countries -- they will seek to mislead the proletariat with democratic slogans. It is thus essential that the workers possess a strong, unwavering political power till they have taken over, in concrete terms, the control of the economy and broken the grip of the bourgeoisie. This period is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

5. The necessity for the proletariat to hold political power after the political victory of the revolution confirms, as a consequence, the necessity for a political organization of the proletariat just as much after as before the seizure of power.

6. The political workers' councils (Soviets) are the historically determined, all-embracing form of proletarian power and administration: at all times they pass the individual points of the class struggle and pose the question of complete power.
7. The historically determined form of organization, which groups together the most conscious and prepared proletarian fighters, is the Party. Since the historical task of the proletarian revolution is communism, this party, in its programme and in its ideology, can only be a communist party. The communist party must have a thoroughly worked out programmatic basis and must be organized and disciplined in its entirety from below, as a unified will. It must be the head and weapon of the revolution.

8. The main task of the communist party, just as much before as after the seizure of power, is, in the confusion and fluctuations of the proletarian revolution, to be the one clear and unflinching compass towards communism. The communist party must show the masses the way in all situations, not only in words, but also in deeds. In all the issues of the political struggle before the seizure of power, it must bring out in the clearest way, the difference between reforms and revolution, must brand every deviation to reformism as a betrayal of the revolution, and of the working class, and as giving new lease of life to the old system of profit. Just as there can be no community of interest between exploiter and exploited, so can there be no unity between reform and revolution. Social democratic reformism — whatever mask it might choose to wear — is today the greatest obstacle to the revolution, and the last hope of the ruling class.

9. The communist party must, therefore, unflinchingly oppose every manifestation of reformism and opportunism with equal determination in its programme, its press, its tactics, and activities. Especially it should never allow its membership to expand faster than is made possible by the power of absorption of the existing communist kernel.

10. Not only in its entirety, but in its individual moments, the revolution is a dialectical process; in the course of the revolution the masses make inevitable vacillations. The communist party, as the organization of the most conscious elements, must itself strive not to succumb to these vacillations, but to put them right. Through the clarity and principled nature of their slogans, their unity of words and deeds, their entry into the struggle, the correctness of their predictions, they must help the proletariat to quickly and completely overcome each vacillation. Through its entire activity the communist party must develop the class consciousness of the proletariat, even at the cost of being momentarily apparently in opposition to the masses. Only thus will the party, in the course of the revolutionary struggle, win the trust of the masses, and accomplish a revolutionary education of the widest numbers.

11. The communist party naturally must not lose contact with the masses. This means, aside from the obvious duty of indefatigable propaganda, that it must also intervene in the movement of the workers caused by economic needs and attempt to clarify such movements and develop them, by encouraging appeals for active solidarity so that the struggles are extended, and where possible, take on revolutionary and political forms. But the communist party cannot strengthen the spirit of opportunism by raising partial reformist demands in the name of the party.

12. The most important practical performance of the communists in the economic struggle of the workers lies in the organization of those means of struggle, which in the revolutionary epoch in all the highly
developed countries, are the only weapons suitable for such struggle. This means that the communists must therefore seek to unite the revolutionary workers, (not only the members of the communist party), to come together in the factories, and to build up the factory organisations (Betriebsorganisationen) which will unite into Unions and which will prepare for the taking over of production by the working class.

13. The revolutionary factory organisations (the Unions) are the foundation for the outbreak of struggles and action, the nuclei of fighting workers, the forerunners and foundation of the revolutionary workers' councils.

14. In creating these wide class organisations of the revolutionary proletariat, the communists prove the strength of a unified, united body. And in the Unions they give an example of communist theory in practice, seeking the victory of the proletarian revolution and subsequently the achievement of a communist economy.

15. The role of the party after the political victory of the revolution is dependent on the international situation and on the development of the class consciousness of proletariat. As long as the dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary, the communist party must do all it can to push events in a communist direction. To this end, in all the industrialised countries it is absolutely necessary that the widest possible amount of revolutionary workers, under the influence of the spirit of the party, are actively involved in the taking over and transformation of the economy. Being organised in factories and Unions, schooled in individual conflicts, forming committees of action, are the necessary preparations which will be undertaken by the advanced guard of the working class itself and prepare them for the development of the revolutionary struggle.

16. In as much as the Unions, as the class organisation of the proletariat, strengthen themselves after the political victory of the revolution and become capable of consolidating the foundation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of the system of councils, they will increase in importance in relation to the party. Later on, in as much as the dictatorship of the proletariat is assured thanks to being rooted in the consciousness of the broad masses, the party loses its importance against the workers' councils. Finally, to the extent that the safeguarding of revolution by political violence becomes unnecessary, in as much as the masses finally change their dictatorship into a communist society, the party ceases to exist.

*This translation is taken from Revolutionary Perspectives No. 2 (1975), with minor modifications taken from the version published in International Review No. 41 (1985). It was originally published in German in Proletarian in July 1921.*)
Street, London SW4 7UN, England. In this pamphlet the SPGB uses the 1984-5 miners' strike 1) to argue the hopelessness of relying on state ownership of industry to improve the condition of workers, 2) to point out that the strike at best is what De Leon referred to a rearguard action—an effort born of desperation to avoid being ground down still further by the master class, and 3) to present the attitude socialists should take toward strikes. This boils down to supporting striking workers but pointing out to them that the strikes can't solve their problems.

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