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### Bulletin Matters

The first two articles in this issue relate to a matter that should be a permanent feature of this bulletin: differentiating socialism from "leftism" in both its Leninist and social democratic phases. Although leftist critiques of the effects of capitalism may help in making people more socially aware and in that way prepare them for the socialist message, the studied avoidance by leftists of any reference
to the culpability of the capitalist system creates the illusion that reforming capitalism is the solution. Murray Bookchin’s article takes the leftists in general (whom he dubes “liberals”) to task while Adam Buick does the same for Leninism. Next Robin Cox’s reply to an earlier article raises the related question of exactly what constitutes reformism. Readers who see a strong vibrant capitalism as the victor in the struggle with the Soviet communism will be interested in Dave Ferrin’s review of a book detailing the system’s weakness.

Next Pat Eyohson and I respond to Larry Gambone’s DB87 article on Hegel and Marx. Curtis Price’s article on the instinctive and unorganized resistance to capitalism by young proletarians—the “underclass” to use the ruling class term—raises questions about the

(To p. 9)

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The Discussion Bulletin is affiliated with the Industrial Union Caucus in Education (IUCE). It serves as the financially and politically independent forum of a relatively unknown sector of political thought that places the great divide in the “left,” not between Anarchists and Marxists but between capitalism’s statist leftwing of vanguardists and social democrats and the real revolutionaries of our era: the non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists. They are organized in small groups of syndicalists, communist anarchists, libertarian municipalists, world socialists, socialist industrial unionists, council communists, and left communists. The perspective of these groups with their rejection of capitalism’s wage, market, and money system as well as capitalist politics and unionism constitutes the only real alternative to capitalism in both its market and statist phases.

In the DB the often antagonistic groups that make up this sector can debate and discuss the issues that divide them, gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities and begin a process, we hope, of at least limited cooperation.

The pages of the DB are open to anyone in this political sector, the only limitation being that submissions be typewritten, single-spaced, and copied ready. We do no editing here. As to content, we assume that submissions will be relevant to the purpose of the DB and will avoid personal attacks.

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When Socialists Discovered They Were Liberals...

By Robert Keller

Socialism, as we shall call it without quotation marks, ceased to write its own history some two decades ago, when the theatrical "New Left" became a Marxist parody of the "Old" and entered into middle-age. Thereafter it began to write bourgeois history, dealing with social issues almost entirely on terms established by the mass media, the polls and the academic and public literati. Since words are cheap, this history has been spiced by nostalgic glances at bygone eras of stress and storm. There have always been exceptions to the rule. But for the most part, Socialism's "best and brightest" act aside their crash helmets in favor of academic caps and gowns, their badges in favor of word processors, their combat jackets in favor of three-piece suits, their militant scowls in favor of the relaxed facial composure of well-regarded professionals.

Still, the air at various Socialist Scholars Conferences and in the pages of well-entrenched "Leftist" weeklies and journals is rife with accounts of the incurable ills of capitalism and with belated attempts to encompass feminism, the ecological crisis and community problems in the Socialist orbit. On the whole, this process of absorption generally has followed the filthy capitalist press and the more progressive liberal periodicals like Newsday, which reduce issues of emancipation to the right of homosexuals to be warriors and women to be active gunsmingers in that paragon of democratic institutions, the United States Army. In the 1950s and 1960s, on themes like the civil rights movement and the "counterculture," no less than today on the need for a new civic politics, Socialists and their press have often limped behind the "liberal consensus," generally echoing progressive conventional wisdom rather than summoning innovative radical ideas.

This is not to say that our current crop of Socialists are not nostalgic about their nearly forgotten history.
May Day always afforded an occasion for haunting editorial ruminations; less so anniversaries of the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Revolution of 1936. But it was only a matter of time before the American "Left," as it still ecumenically calls itself, would have to confront the disparities between its fiery legacy — indeed its revolutionary foundations — and the deadening conformist politics that increasingly flourished in its midst.

And now the time of reckoning has finally come. In the two leading "Leftist" periodicals in the United States, The Nation and Dissent, writer after writer has surfaced with articles that bear titles like "What Was Socialism... And Why We Will All Miss It So Much." The latter article — by novelist Norman Rush — appeared in The Nation of January 24, 1994; in almost the same mail delivery, I received "A Symposium: The Left 40 Years Later," in Dissent, which contains articles that echo Rush's piece with a vengeance.

Rush's title speaks for itself: a tasteless farewell to Socialism, that lovely dream of "our" youth and really "I'll" always remember it, you see — but now, let's get down to reality or business and live with its demise. This reasonably fair paraphrase might summarize most, if not all, of the seven authors, mostly journalists, who contribute their wisdom to Dissent's symposium. Most of them share Rush's nostalgia for a lost "romance," as they frequently put it, and some seem to ask in bewilderment: Were we really Socialists for the past decade or two?

There is very little that is politically indecent about this near-simultaneous confession of lost faith, coming from the two leading "Leftist" periodicals in the United States. What is rather indecent are the pretensions The Nation and Dissent exhibited as "voices" of "the Left" for years, when other radicals, particularly Left Social Libertarians (not to be confused with anarchist mystics, spray-can artists, neo-primitivists — an oxymoron — and neo-Situationists), made serious attempts to build a new Left movement that extended its visions beyond those of the old "New Left" and advanced a new politics that went beyond single-issues and the institutions of nation-state. Victor Navasky, the editor of The Nation (currently on a leave of absence for a year), opened his periodical to the inanities of Kirkpatrick Sale, a mystical ecology "dweller in the land" who nurtures an avowed hatred of Green Leftists, and exhibited no qualms about publishing wacky ecofeminists, an expressly anti-Semitic work by Gore Vidal and occasional neo-Stalinist articles debating whether the "Great Leader" killed five, ten, fifteen or twenty million people in the gulags.

Dissent, in turn, had already been watering down its Socialism for the greater part of forty years. It long provided a showplace for the agility, cunning, cynicism and snobbism of self-styled Socialist writers, along with a stable of Europeans ranging from Perry Anderson to Cornelius Castoriadis, who engaged in the fine art of sounding radical on paper while shaping their views into a liberalism so subtly conformist that by comparison even Bill Clinton seems a rank amateur in spin-doctoring NAFTA into a form of "Leftist" populism. That the late Michael Harrington, a decent chap, and his arrogant mentor, the late Irving Howe, had both come perilously close to acting like cold warriors in the late 1950s, were initially hostile to the "New Left" during its early libertarian phase and were grossly laggard in their treatment of "the new social movements" when they emerged, are bad memories that recent eulogies to their lives have largely ignored.

Dissent, the magazine currently described by the bourgeois press as a "gentlymanly Left" periodical, was formed partly to create a "Leftist" voice in the Democratic Party. Despite the futility of this enterprise, the magazine always tried to make its version of Socialism rather stylish, like a "Leftist" version of The New Yorker. What made this feat difficult to perform with consistency was not only the rise of the "New Left" in the 1960s, which indirectly shamed it into something more socialist in character than genteel, but also today the brutal fact that the Democratic Party has now moved far to the right — so far, in fact, that the "L-word" in its midst no longer denotes "Leftism," but "liberalism." This has produced the fascinating paradox that to be to the Left of Clinton is to be a "liberal" rather than a "Leftist." A political chiropractor is very much in need nowadays to adjust what calls itself the "Left" in the United States, so that Socialists can quietly conform to the demands of the time without openly acknowledging that they have really been liberals for years anyway, and hence still keep at least their youthful "romance" with Socialism alive as "progressives" or "Dissenters" with a Socialist conscience.

In The Nation, thankfully, Rush makes no attempt to do this at all. He simply calls a spade a spade; we must live with capitalism indefinately, if not permanently — and that's that. The Nation is a weekly that still, in the wake of the collapse of the "Soviet" system, has to find its bearings and it will probably do so very badly, if past experience is any indication. Dissent, as I noted, is more subtle. Paul Berman, one of the participants in the symposium and scion of a famous Yiddish anarchist family, lets his readers know in no uncertain terms: "To argue today
against privatization and some other market-oriented measures would be, here and there [when and where?], around the world, plainly reactionary” (emphasis added). If this wholesale generalization is meant to slap down the Stalinist nationalization of property, one is obliged to ask Berman if there are not other alternatives to privatization? That someone with Berman’s background does not know this defies credibility. No less significantly, Berman tells us: “The programmatic choice … [between] radical socialism (“hope”) versus social democratic modesty (“piecemeal”) … has become … obsolete, considered as a worldview.” Whereupon, having left us with only the choices of fundamental social change on the one hand and full surrender to liberal ineffectuality on the other, Berman acknowledges with reasonable candor, “the magazine faces a bit [sic] of a crisis.”

The “crisis,” in a sense, is the subtext of the entire symposium: none of the participants in the Dissent “symposium” are actually Socialists. At best, they are “liberals” and, given the widespread suspicion of the “L-word” these days, perhaps they will even distance themselves from New Deal liberalism, for what it is worth, in the years to come. Not only do they relegate Socialism to a hopelessly unattainable “vision” or “utopia,” a word that the late Irving Howe used shortly before he died — but one apparently cannot be a Socialist with “vision” without being a liberal in practice. A little of Michael Walzer’s theoretics are essential as well. The socialists (lowercase, here) who adhere to the revolutionary theories of “yesteryear” seem to be regarded as “fanatics” — equatable with totalitarianists, as Norman Cohn had it in The Pursuit of the Millennium years ago. Hence the liberal Socialists — or, quite simply, liberals — would seem to deserve public accolades for retaining a Socialist “vision” in their liberalism because by doing so they crowd out the “fanatics” and “barn-burners” who would otherwise set society afire in an all-destructive blaze. The implication is that all revolutionaries — democratic, libertarian, or otherwise — are equatable with totalitarianists and must be firmly resisted, while all flaccid reformists, Socialist or otherwise, stand vigilant at the gates of civilization, guarding it from the barbarians outside.

More circuitously and paradoxically, Todd Gitlin, one of the most intelligent of the seven contributors and, for a time, an active “New Leftist,” nuances this complicity of “Left” liberalism with uncertain Clintonesque centrist by declaring that “social democracy is the left’s horizon.” Indeed, “Socialism is no longer a design” — that is, a practical project — “but a disposition: a spirit with which we wish to animate political life, and from whose absence political life suffers,” for Socialism’s function is to retain “the social bonds” that “unbridled markets destroy.” This raises the intriguing question of how to keep markets bridled. In any case, as he bows to “the acknowledged goods of which markets are capable,” it is not hard to suspect that Gitlin is moving in “practical” terms away from “market socialism” — already widely accepted by Socialists these days and bad enough — to social capitalism, which few European Social Democrats would accept.

Thus does the Dissent symposium unfold with a sophistication and troubled nuances that Rush’s crudely nostalgic rejection of Socialism lacks and with implications that cannot be ignored. The remaining participants in the symposium say nothing intriguing — and generally sound even more puzzled and constipated than Berman and Gitlin — but the implications of their remarks are generally the same. Dissent versions of Socialism, certainly the most sophisticated among the mushrooming “market socialisms” abroad today, occupy a niche within the free market: to stabilize liberal capitalism against the threat of ill-bred revolutionaries who might bang at the door of the existing society. Where this cynical opportunism will take the symposium Socialists politically, as the “L-word” migrates across the political spectrum over time, is unclear. But based on the best parts of — yes — Marx’s Capital, we can be reasonably certain where the “C-word” (capitalism) will migrate across the economic vocabulary. And it puzzles me that this is not self-evident to the best Socialist minds of Dissent, at least as they are represented by Berman, Gitlin and even Lewis Coser, who once was a part of the “Old Left.”

The insight that Marx gave to Socialism of all kinds — libertarian, authoritarian, democratic and oligarchical — is being realized with a vengeance: capitalism is indeed a system of unbridled accumulation and competition that no environment, traditional social relations, culture or psychoanalytic couch can withstand. The maxim “grow or die” is more than a rallying cry for economic mobilization; it is the inherent law of capitalist life, of the uncontrolled and uncontrollable “free market” — which is the only market people find plausible as an alternative to a totalitarian state capitalist society. No ethically oriented guilds can restrain it and no state “reformists” or bureaucrats can hope to do more than condition it. It is the floating power of the capitalistic commodity that can now travel with the mobility of a tornado, but whose destructive power is greater and more lasting. To talk about a “controlled market” or, correspondingly, “market socialism,” is like talking about a “controlled death” or a “little bit of extermination.” Marx radically counterposed revolutionary Socialism (or social anarchism) to any
form of reformist Socialism (or lifestyle anarchism). So logically and practically are both pairs at odds with each other that their airy "reconciliation," soothing to the souls of our middle-aged "New Leftists" and Howeian Socialists, makes Sorel's myths seem plausible rather than demagogic.

The extent to which the Dissenters, given more to theoretics than The Nation crowd, have literally betrayed their Socialism to an intrinsic capitalist development with a logic of growth for its own sake, will only become clear, I believe, as capitalism becomes more mobile, increasingly interlocked electronically by coordinated command systems and more globally reckless than it is even today. In short, the market has never been freer spatially than it is at present and its wage-price determinants have never been more unbridled — disturbingly, they may well be even more so in the coming century. To ride this gravy train as though it had no force of its own to pull its occupants where it wishes to go, not where the Dissenters think they can steer it through the formidable pages of their magazines and books, is myopic if not cynically obfuscatory.

Worse still is another subtext of the symposium: an obsequious passion for "credibility" — for public or, dare I suggest, institutional acceptance? The academics have blotted up not only "the best and the brightest" of American Socialists, not only the old "New Leftists" who disdained the academy in the 1960s, but also the public intellectuals (whom 19th-century Russians called the intelligencia). Bourgeois society has absorbed "utopia" itself, in suitably modified form, into its inventory of commodities and brand names. If there can be a reactionary Disneyland, why not a "revolutionary" one with automated Marxes, Lenins, Trotskyas, Maoas, and even Bakunins and Kropotkins? If such a worthy as Norman Thomas — the bane of Irving Howe in his raging Trotskyist days — enjoys the distinction of having a New York high school named after him, why not perhaps Howe and Harrington as well?

If Socialism is to be reduced to a patina for a marketized world that has devastatingly dissolved social bonds, and if it can acquire "credibility" only by providing "somewhat" communitarian social bonds in a "democracy" that is "radical" only in its drift toward an authoritarian world — in contrast to the cries of revolutionary "dogmatists" — then a Dissenter looking into the historical mirror will see a face that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the critical, indeed, angry visage Socialists once possessed. Domesticated, defanged, buried beneath mountains of published dissertations on Adorno, Habermas, Bloch, et al., our Socialist's voice will scarcely be audible and it will be tuned out with indifference by the very public it courts.

Yes, the Socialists have discovered that they are liberals, as though this were not already evident to serious social theorists years ago. Capitalism today has been very, very good to the movers-and-shakers of most "Left" periodicals. At the same time, however, capitalism is "downsizing" even privileged employees, while grinding minorities into the dust on a scale unprecedented even in the Great Depression. Even as capital sneaks around the world like a bandit and despoils vast forests, eroding entire regions of soil, vegetation and wildlife — while criminality is establishing itself in Russia as a new social order within the bowels of the existing one, indeed, as a tapeworm that is nearly as large as its host — Rush seems to have discovered that there is an "environmental problem" that may awaken the public's radical sensibilities. Should we cry "Eureka!"? Gitlin declares that "radical hope has to be coupled with another: that human society should endure" (only that?) in an era of "thermonuclear bombs, mass famines, and greenhouse effects." Thus does a message of mere survival become a de facto substitute for hope and vision.

With all due respect to our new liberals, it would seem that this kind of Socialism states the well-known problems without remotely suggesting how to resolve them. Has there been a chilling loss of nerve in a movement that once stormed the heavens? Would it have not been better to try with resolution and character to fight for a new world rather than embellish a dying one in the hope of having "credibility"? Time was when age brought dignity, not cowerer before the given; when it could teach, not obfuscate; when it offered wisdom, not canniness.

Green Perspectives

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Editors: Janet Biehl, Murray Bookchin, Mark Etlin, Cindy Milstein, Marko Tohdo
Marxism versus Leninism

Marx's theory of socialist revolution is grounded on the fundamental principle that "the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself". Marx held to this view throughout his entire forty years of socialist political activity, and it distinguished his theory of social change from that of both those who appealed to the princes, governments and industrialists to change the world for the benefit of the working class (such as Robert Owen and Saint Simon) and of those who relied on the determined action of some enlightened minority of professional revolutionaries to liberate the working class (such as Buonarotti, Bianqui and Wellging).

Conscious Self-emancipation

Marx saw that the very social position of the working class within capitalist society as a non-owning, exploited, wealth-producing class forced it to struggle against its capitalist conditions of existence. This "movement" of the working class could be said to be implicitly socialist since the struggle was ultimately over who should control the means of production: the minority of capitalists or the working class (society as a whole)? At first the movement of the working class would be, Marx believed, unconscious and unorganised but in time, as the workers gained more experience of the class struggle and the workings of capitalism, it would become more consciously socialist and democratically organised by the workers themselves.

The emergence of socialist understanding out of the experience of the workers could thus be said to be "spontaneous" in the sense that it would require no intervention by people outside the working class to bring it about (not that such people could not take part in this process, but their participation was not essential or crucial). Socialist propaganda and agitation would indeed be necessary but would come to be carried out by workers themselves whose socialist ideas would have been derived from an interpretation of their class experience of capitalism. The end result would be an independent movement of the socialist-minded and democratically organised working class aimed at winning control of political power in order to abolish capitalism. As Marx and Engels put it in The Communist Manifesto, "the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority".

This in fact was Marx's conception of "the workers' party". He did not see the party of the working class as a self-appointed elite of professional revolutionaries, as did the Blanquists, but as the mass democratic movement of the working class with a view to establishing socialism, the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production.

Lenin's Opposing View

This was Marx's view, but it wasn't Lenin's. Lenin in his pamphlet What Is To Be Done?, written in 1901-2, declared:

The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. (Foreign Languages Publishing House edition, Moscow, pp. 50-51)
Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. (Lenin's emphasis, p.133)

The spontaneous working class movement by itself is able to create (and inevitably creates) only trade unionism, and working class trade unionist politics are precisely working class bourgeois politics. (pp. 159–60)

Lenin went on to argue that the people who would have to bring "socialist consciousness" to the working class "from without" would be "professional revolutionaries", drawn at first mainly from the ranks of the bourgeois intelligentsia. In fact he argued that the Russian Social Democratic Party should be such an "organisation of professional revolutionaries", acting as the vanguard of the working class. The task of this vanguard party to be composed of professional revolutionaries under strict central control was to "lead" the working class, offering them slogans to follow and struggle for. It is the very antithesis of Marx's theory of working class self-emancipation.

The Bolshevik Coup
The implication of Marx's theory of working class self-emancipation is that the immense majority of the working class must be consciously involved in the socialist revolution against capitalism. "The proletariat movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority".

The Bolshevik coup in November, 1917 carried out under the guise of protecting the rights of the Congress of Soviets, did not enjoy conscious majority support, at least not for socialism, though their slogan "Peace, Bread and Land" was widely popular. For instance, elections to the Constituent Assembly, held after the Bolshevik coup and so under the Bolshevik government, gave them only about 25 per cent of the votes.

John Reed, a sympathetic American journalist, whose famous account of the Bolshevik coup, Ten Days That Shook the World, was commended in a foreword by Lenin, quotes Lenin as replying to this kind of criticism in a speech he made to the Congress of Peasants' Soviets on 27 November, 1917:

If socialism can only be realized when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see socialism for at least five hundred years. . . The Socialist political party — this is the vanguard of the working class; it must not allow itself to be halted by the lack of education of the mass average, but it must lead the masses, using the Soviets as organs of revolutionary initiative. . . (Reed's emphasis and omissions, Modern Library edition, 1960, p.15).

Compare this with a passage from the utopian communist, Welting: "to want to wait...until all are suitably enlightened would be to abandon the thing altogether!" Not, of course, that it is a question of "all" the workers needing to be socialists before there can be socialism. Marx, in rejecting the view that socialism could be established by some enlightened minority, was merely saying that a sufficient majority of workers would have to be socialists.

Lenin's Legacy
Having seized power before the working class (and, even less, the 80 per cent peasant majority of the population) had prepared themselves for socialism, all the Bolshevik government could do, as Lenin himself openly admitted, was to establish state capitalism in Russia. Which is what they did, while at the same time imposing their own political dictatorship over the working class.

Contempt for the intellectual abilities of the working class led to the claim that the vanguard party should rule on their behalf, even against their will. Lenin's theory of the vanguard party became enshrined as a principle of government ("the leading
role of the Party") which has served to justify what has proved to be the world's longest-lasing political dictatorship.

The self-emancipation of the working class, as advocated by Marx, remains on the agenda.

(From p. 2)

Tactics socialists should use. The second part of Larry Gambone's article on Marxism and socialism goes beyond his call for a synthesis—or better an updating—of orthodox (or fossilized) Marxism in the light of a century of capitalism. In fact I regard his defense of the Fabian tactics advocated by the prince of reformers, Bernstein, as definitely a criticism of my revolutionary "fetishes"—to quote the term he used in DB67. It raises questions about whether he is "confused, ignorant, petty bourgeois...."

The existence of a revolutionary group in Serbia, which the U.S. media see as the rival of Iraq and North Korea as the principal homeland of evil, deserves some ink as does John Zerzan's book, which is worth $7 for the title essay alone. As usual we finish with some short reviews and announcements.

FINANCES

The DB continues to operate in the black due largely to the copier method of printing. The surplus would be embarrassing except that we have a big ticket item coming up around the first of the year, the annual bulk mailing fee, and since I sank over $80 in copier repair a month ago, the DB will have to foot the next repair bill.

CONTRIBUTIONS: Robert Blau $7; Lynn Olson $7; Bill Helberg $22; Joseph Tupper $22; Anonymous $11; Phillip Colligan $9. Total $78. Thank you, comrades.

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Fraternally submitted,

Frank Girard
for the DB
ON THE REDEFINITION OF REFORMISM

I should like to respond to some of the points raised by Dave Perrin in his article in DB66. I am particularly concerned with the question of economic reforms vis-a-vis political reforms. Dave argues that "there is no clear-cut distinction to be made between the two types of reforms". I want to argue that there is and that the advancement of our movement will be much assisted by making just such a distinction.

In DB62, I stated that capitalism can be essentially defined as an economic system, a specific mode of production. Thus, for political activity to be defined as "reformist", it must seek to modify the behaviour of this economic system while leaving its basis intact. The socialist case against reformism, which I thoroughly endorse, is that it is based on false premise. Ultimately, all such attempts to modify the behaviour of capitalism in order to ameliorate the economic problems that arise within it, are foredoomed to failure. For those problems do not arise inadvertently but are a manifestation, or the working out, of capitalism's economic laws which are intrinsic to its very nature.

So by "reformism", socialists really mean the advocacy of economic reforms. Political reforms, on the other hand - like the right to vote and the right to form political parties - are something quite different. They are not, strictly speaking "reformist" at all. Why not? Well, quite simply, because they are not concerned with modifying the systemic behaviour of capitalism as an economic system. What they are concerned with is changing the political structures, the political climate, within which capitalism is managed. Political reforms are oriented to the political realm; economic reforms - or "reformism", properly speaking - are oriented to the economic realm even though they are enacted via the political structure of the state. There is thus a good case for regarding these different types of reforms as distinguishable and distinct.

I am afraid that I do not entirely accept Dave's representation of the case of the Socialist Party (or SPGB). It is not true to suggest that it makes no distinction whatsoever between political and economic reforms. I have been active member of the Socialist Party since 1974 and to the best of my knowledge our position on political reforms is that where elementary political rights - like the right to vote or form political parties - do not exist, socialists should actively work for - that is, advocate - the institutionalisation of such rights while taking care not to involve themselves in pro-capitalist democratic movements working towards that same objective.

I entirely accept this position. So too does Dave - or so it would seem - when in DB63 he remarks that a "distinction must
always be made between being supportive of the pro-democracy efforts of the working class, as a class, and being supportive of the expressly reformist pro-democracy organisations which workers might group in". He may want to argue that "being supportive" is not the same as "advocating" such political reforms but I would suggest that that is a distinction without a difference; in practice they amount to the same thing.

However, that is secondary to my main point which is this: while the Socialist Party holds that socialists should advocate or actively work for the institutionalisation of elementary political rights where no such rights exist, there is no equivalent sense in which the Party advocates a set of elementary economic reforms as an essential precondition for the advancement of socialism. So in this strictly formal sense Dave is wrong to suggest that the Socialist Party treats political and economic reforms identically.

I would agree that the issue becomes rather more complicated in a situation where those elementary or essential political rights already exist. Should socialists in this situation continue to press for the (further) democratisation of the political climate? Dave seems to be saying that any further political reforms over and above those elementary reforms that enable us to effectively operate as a political party, will be "diversionary and misleading".

I'm not too sure that this is the case. But even if it were, this does not mean that advocacy of such reforms constitutes "reformism" in the strict sense. If, as Dave says, groups such as Charter 88 in the UK "do not have a list of economic reforms, only constitutional ones", and I would not know about this since I have not made a detailed study of this group, then I would have to agree with him that such a group is clearly not covered by this definition of reformism. It is interesting though that he should talk of "expressly reformist pro-democracy groups". This implies the possibility pro-democracy groups which are not reformist and of which Charter 88 is presumably a good example.

I am not saying this automatically qualifies Charter 88 as an organisation worthy of socialist support. I suspect that some of its program is probably worth supporting. But, and here I want to make an important point, this is something that needs really to be done, not by a socialist political party or organisation as such but, rather, by individual socialists. I agree that it is important for a socialist party to concentrate on the pursuit of its socialist objective and attract support only on that basis. But, and this is a big "but", it is equally important that it should not be unduly restrictive in circumscribing its members' freedom of action to support such causes outside of the party that might actually help change the climate of opinion to the benefit of the party itself.
All too often, in my experience, the role of the party and the role of individual socialists have tended to become confused. This can lead to a great deal of unnecessary grief and aggravation. Thus, idiosyncratic views are promoted as a basis for discussion within the party but it is not often made clear for what purpose this discussion is being held. Is it to transform the particular view being expressed into official doctrine or is it simply to enlighten individual members so that they might take it up in their capacity as individuals?

I have been as guilty in this respect as many others in the SPGB. However, in recent years I have increasingly come round to the view that it is necessary to resist this unfortunate tendency to impose an official party line on every subject under the sun. This only serves to alienate members who may not endorse this or that particular line. They begin to question whether they should belong to an organisation whose official policy on a number of subjects are at variance with their own. And of course, the wider the scope of official policy, the more such questioning will it prompt.

It is for that reason that I think a socialist political organisation should adopt a rigorously minimalist approach to official policy - to confine it to the bare essentials of what ought to constitute a socialist political programme. Let us have fewer pious resolutions on what the party should think on this or that matter. Let us have rather more items for discussion in our conferences and delegate meetings which do not need to be voted upon but should be left to individuals to draw their own conclusions. Voting is important but it should really be confined to issues of fundamental significance or to choose between different courses of action. It is not healthy to vote on opinions; that only encourages party line-ism and a crippling conformism. In fact, the Discussion Bulletin is itself an excellent example of the kind of approach I favour. Though the political differences expressed in its pages are necessarily wider than those contained within any single organisation contributing to it, there are differences to be found within each of these organisations as well.

We should acknowledge, even celebrate these differences - not behind the scenes but, publicly, for all to see. At the same time we should take due care to emphasise the common framework of ideas that unite all of us and within which our differences arise. The model that DH provides for our non-market non-statist political sector should be applied within each organisation comprising this sector. Not only is this likely to widen the appeal of such an organisation but will also improve the atmosphere within it. Less pressure on rival factions to capture the "commanding heights" of official policy will encourage a climate of greater tolerance and mutual respect.

But to return to the question of individual socialists supporting causes outside of a socialist party itself, my
feeling is that as long as these are not anti-socialist or pro-
capitalist in their stance, one should not be "prevented" (i.e.
threatened with expulsion) from participating in whatever one
feels might have some beneficial consequences for the
advancement of socialism. Furthermore, it should not be the
business of a socialist party to condemn or attack any such
organisation or activity for not being explicitly pro-
socialist; it should only condemn and attack what is
demonstrably anti-socialist or pro-capitalist.

This brings us back to the question of economic reforms vis-
a-vis political reforms. While the former necessarily implies
retention of the economic basis of capitalism and is therefore,
by definition, pro-capitalist or anti-socialist and so should
not be advocated by individual socialists, let alone socialist
organisations, the latter does not have this necessary
implication - that is, it does not impinge upon that economic
basis of capitalism. It is merely a modification of the
political superstructure. This is not to say that political
reforms cannot be anti-socialist. If political reforms work to
restrict political democracy then they will also work to hinder
the growth of the socialist movement which requires a
democratic environment in which to flourish. However, in this
case such political reforms are anti-socialist not because they
are reformist but because they are anti-democratic.

But what about those political reforms that help to expand
political democracy, that do aim to deepen a democratic
culture? Here we encounter what in cybernetics is called a
positive feedback loop - that is to say the benefits that
accrue from such reforms are accumulative and progressive from
the standpoint of the socialist cause. The more democracy there
is the better it is for the socialist movement. It is therefore
nonsense to talk about such reforms being "diversionary" and
"misleading" if their effect is, in fact, to help the cause.

Of course, I appreciate that they could become diversionary if
we were to devote all our efforts to promoting, let us say, a
Bill in parliament which would institute an automatic right of
reply in the capitalist press. Quite obviously, this would be
at the expense of our socialist propaganda. But then we are
always having to make a considered judgement of the opportunity
costs of our actions, in any case. Should we plough more
resources into the refurbishment of our head office when the
money might be better spent on publishing more literature?
Should we risk the almost certain loss of our electoral deposit
now by standing in elections when we could embark on a costly
advertising campaign in the capitalist press instead. In all
these cases, there is no easy answer as to what proportion of
our effort and resources should be devoted to what activity. It
is up to us to maintain a sense of balance and perspective.

Political reforms of the kind I am talking about could also
become diversionary if they were merely pursued for their own
sake. It must therefore be made clear that the purpose of any such pursuit is to facilitate the spread of socialist ideas -
not to encourage bourgeois democrats into our ranks. In fact,
every time the SPGB, my party, protests at some infringement on
its freedom of speech it is engaged in kind of political reform
process. It is attempting to reform the political climate, to
pressurise the authorities to amend the regulations governing
some particular activity to allow it to more effectively put
across its own ideas. This is a sensible approach; without this
constant grassroots pressure from organisations, such as
ourselves, our rights to free assembly and free speech will
gradually and imperceptibly be whittled away.

But when it comes to economic reforms - reformism, properly
speaking - we encounter a very different proposition
altogether. Instead of a positive feedback loop, we have a
negative feedback loop. Any reform enacted in the economic
realm almost invariably generates a counteracting tendency
which tends to keep the status quo intact. What you gain on the
swings you lose on the roundabouts. That is why socialists do
not advocate economic reforms - reformism. It simply cannot
solve the problems of workers because the very nature of
capitalism prevents that. Moreover, as long as workers
continue to put their faith in economic reforms, they will
continue not to challenge the economic basis of capitalism from
which those problems arise. The advocacy of economic reforms is
thus necessarily anti-socialist in a way that political reforms
are not. This, I believe, is the essential core of the argument
for making a vital distinction between political and economic
reforms - the nature of the feedback mechanism in each case.

I want finally to say a little more about why I feel that
making such a distinction will benefit the socialist movement.
It boils down to this: one of the greatest obstacles to a wider
acceptance of revolutionary socialism is that it seems to
encourage a kind of all-or-nothing mentality: there is nothing
we can do "in the meantime" while we have capitalism, apart
from working for socialism. Reformism offers no solution, we
rightly point out, and is therefore to be avoided. Even trade
unionism, which we do urge workers to support, unlike
reformism, is a purely defensive activity, the limited
successes it is capable of achieving being largely conditional
upon the state of the economy at the time. Thus, all our hopes
for a significantly improved existence appear to lie with
revolutionary transformation of society in the future.

However, the prospect of a socialist future cannot bring
succour to the suffering, mental and physical, we currently
endure, will not eradicate the very human urge to do something
about our condition now as we experience it. To urge workers
to work for the glorious day is a bit like preaching the
protestant theory of abstinence; it is kind of inverted
capitalist ethic. I am amazed that Dave should ever have
imagined that I might have "downgraded the importance of the
material interests of the working class as a consciousness raising factor. Actually, it is precisely because of the importance of this factor that I feel we need now to seriously address the objection that is so often raised that socialism is a nice idea for the future but "in the meantime" we have to solve the pressing problems thrown up by capitalism.

True, reformism provides no solution to these problems whatsoever and, what's worse, delays the only really effective solution to these problems. However, under the catch-all label of reformism we have tended to lump a whole range of activities which are not strictly reformist at all, which could have immediate implications for the quality of life today and which, if properly integrated into a socialist perspective can do much to enrich and advance that perspective. The revolution, comrades, is not some event that is going to happen in the future; it is something that we are engaged in today, now and this very moment. Trotskyist mumbo-jumbo notwithstanding, we are already in a "revolutionary situation".

The real question is how do we prosecute this revolution more effectively. My argument is that this dependent upon the formulation of a much tighter, more logically consistent definition of reformism along the lines suggested; by having a clearer idea of what is possible - or permissible in terms of socialist political activity - and what is not, this will help to relieve the sense of intellectual paralysis that has gripped the socialist movement, the feeling of being mere commentators on the capitalist spectacle, mere spectators on the sidelines of the game of life.

I have tried to argue elsewhere (DB62) that we need to expand our taxonomy of activities relevant to the socialist case from the traditional three-fold typology - reformism, revolutionism and trade unionism - to a fivefold one, embracing also consciousness-modifying activities and abstentionism. This last category would include all those non-market productive activities which exist today and also various forms of direct action such as squatting for which, incidentally, the SPGB has quite rightly expressed its support, pointing out that it is "no more a reform than stealing" (Socialist Standard April & July 1969). This is not the place to rehearse the arguments I have already presented in the case of abstentionism. But, as far as political reforms are concerned, I would like to suggest that these be explicitly removed from the category of reformism and inserted in the category of conscious-modifying activities.

Such activities, along with abstentionism and trade unionism each have the potential to reinforce and underpin our revolutionary political activity. By releasing this potential and fostering it we will not only directly benefit from it but also, and this is the point, will gain in credibility by having at our disposal a much more cogent and effective critique of reformism as a consequence.

Robin Cox, 486 Caledonian Road, London, England N7 9RP.
Is the world slump over yet?


The odd thing is that its authors are both gung-ho supporters of the very system - capitalism - that is capable of unleashing such horror, and find no contradiction in their position. They view the economic basis of capitalism as being fundamentally unstable, yet their advice is only to those already wealthy enough to be able to use their capital to their own advantage in the coming economic crunch. No talk of revolution here.

Nevertheless, *The Great Reckoning* is a fairly sophisticated book, which is unusual for one that prophesies a Doomsday scenario. Central to its analysis is its prediction of a 1930s-style economic crisis from which other dangers will follow. Davidson and Rees-Mogg claim that there are two main reasons why the world capitalist economy is in for a major period of slump. One is taken from the work of the Austrian physicist Cesare Marchetti who has spent time analysing the penetration of innovations and products in the capitalist economy. Marchetti dispenses with price-analysis and deals only in physical quantities, claiming that the penetration of commodities into markets can be equated with the spread of living species. He has, for instance, argued that the growth and spread of motor-cars into Western Europe can be described by the same logistic equation that describes the penetration of, say, rabbits in Australia. Ten years ago Marchetti claimed that most of the markets that provided the spur for the post-war economic boom, like motor-cars, had become saturated. This he reasoned, would mean global economic slowdown.

**Economic slowdown**

Marchetti's argument doesn't fully take into account that technological innovation itself is a huge spur to capitalist growth and that the "old" industries are forever being replaced by new ones - and continue to be so. If capitalism is true to its development so far, the industries supposedly at the point of market saturation today will be heard of only in history books in the future. It should also be noted that devices exist - from proverbially "reinventing the wheel" to built-in obsolescence - which ensure that long-term growth in cars, televisions and many other lines of production continues apace. There used to be near-physical market saturation for black-and-white TV's, but did that stop growth in the market for television? - Hitachi, Sony and Ferguson are a testament to the fact that it did not. The manufacturers replaced black-and-white with colour, then brought out VCRs, then replaced colour mono with colour stereo, then stereo with surround-sound. Market saturation disappeared in a flurry of pound notes and dollar bills.

In truth, Davidson and Rees-Mogg have a far better argument than Marchetti's to justify their view of the major world economic slowdown. Their second, and more plausible view, is that capitalism is currently drowning in an
"Debt cannot go on compounding faster than output forever. At the rate it expanded in the United States in the 1980s, interest payments would consume 100 per cent of GNP by the year 2015. No such thing will happen. Long before debt reaches that extreme, it will be wiped away...One way or the other we expect a great reckoning. A settling of accounts. We expect the long economic boom and credit expansion that began with World War II to come to an end. The end, when it comes, will not only reveal the insolvency of many individuals and corporations, it may also bring bankruptcy to the welfare state and widespread breakdown of authority within political economies."

There is more than a grain of truth in this. In many world economies, debt is compounding at a faster rate than income and total world indebtedness, by every yardstick that can be named, was heavier at the start of the present slump than at the beginning of any other. In the United States alone the ratio of debt to nominal GNP is now 195 percent, compared with 120 percent before the 1929 crash.

History has demonstrated that sustainable recoveries only begin when a considerable portion of debt built-up during the boom has been liquidated. If debt liquidation is insufficient, growth will remain sluggish even when "recovery" has supposedly begun, such as at present. Davidson and Rees-Mogg estimate that the amount of debt still to be liquidated during this slump in the US is three to four trillion dollars-worth.

The extension of credit effectively delays the onset of capitalism’s periodic economic crises only to make them worse when they finally occur. In all economic booms some industries over-extend their operations in the pursuit of further profits and find that they have overproduced for their particular markets. A case in point in the present slump was the commercial property sector.

**Perilous situation**

While some industries get into difficulties, other sections of the owning class find that their profits are increasing. The banks, acting as intermediaries between the buyers and sellers of money capital, lend out their accumulated capital to the enterprises in difficulty to keep them going. But this cannot generally correct the fundamental disproportion in growth between the industries and uneven expansion in relation to market demand. Through knock-on effects in industry overproduction spreads and the demand for money capital rises, pushing interest rates up. In this way, the mechanisms of credit extension in the capitalist economy papers over the underlying weaknesses in the productive sphere and buys firms some breathing space before the crisis comes - and this usually occurs when demand for credit is highest and interest rates are at their peak. However, the ultimate outstanding debt increases through this process, requiring a much greater "correction" in the slump as capital assets are devalued to bring productive capacity and market capacity back into line. The result is not merely an industrial slump, but can be a financial, banking and property crash as well, as in the 1930s.

Davidson and Rees-Mogg see this as the present outlook for world capitalism. Mounting corporate, government and personal debt has placed the world economy into its most perilous situation for decades. They are all too aware that the only way out for capitalism, sooner or later, is a financial reckoning which will bring about a growth in poverty, a
reduction in social welfare programmes and possibly more armed conflict between nation states.

Their analysis of the situation ends there. There is no prescription for how the slump can be avoided - we must just let it wash over us. The authors are completely blind to how the world might be organised to avoid periodic slumps, without the market mechanism which causes them in the first place. They dismiss the Soviet Union's model of capitalist planning out of hand, as well they might, but in doing so claim that this proves socialism to be an impossible dream. Particularly crass is a chapter on the fall of the Eastern bloc - which socialists predicted - containing the assertion that this demonstrates the failure of Marxism. Indeed, some of the comments in this chapter, like the assertion on page 188 that workers exploit the capitalists rather than the other way around, defy rational analysis and are completely at variance with the otherwise coherent account presented. But, of course, the likes of Davidson and Rees-Mogg want workers to think that there really is no alternative to capitalism, however bad it may be, and that, despite everything, workers still get a good deal out of the system. Unluckily for them some of us know different.

[Note: The preceding review by David Perrin of *The Great Reckoning* was taken from the August 1984 issue of the *Socialist Standard*, published by the Socialist Party (of Great Britain), 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN, England.]

(from p. 32)

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THE PEOPLE. A letter sent to subscribers in October announced the resumption of publication again as a semi-monthly after a six-month hiatus because of problems involved in moving the Socialist Labor Party's national headquarters. The new address is 111 West Evelyn Ave. #208, Sunnyvale, CA 94086. The subscription price remains the same $4 per year -- $10 for a three-year sub.

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THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION AND THE WAR IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. We recently received this sixteen-page article translated from issue three of the Greek periodical *Ta Paidia Tis Galairis* (Children of the Gallery). A correspondent describes TPTG as possibly "left communist/situationist" if we need a classification. The article focuses on the Macedonian and Greek nationalism in what could become a full scale Balkan war. Readers can obtain it from TPTG, P.O. Box 78148, Nea Smirni 17110, Athens, Greece. No price is given but we suggest at least three dollars to cover copying and postage.

* * *

EDUCATION WOB. This eight-page quarterly billed as the "newsletter of the Education Workers Industrial Union 620 (IWW) Organizing Network contains articles and letters from workers in a variety of jobs in the education industry. We have at hand the Fall 1984 issue. Interested readers should send a dollar for a sample copy or $4 for a year's sub to EWIU 620-IWW, 4043 N Ravenswood #205, Chicago, IL 60613.

--fg
RESPONSE TO LARRY GAMBONE

If Larry Gambone represents a significant tendency among DB readers, I am really distressed. Today, capitalism is consolidating its control of both the world economy and the human spirit and Gambone says -- Back to Hegel! Maybe I should just cut my throat if this is what the "revolutionary left" amounts to today.

Obviously Gambone has read a lot of books; but maybe he hasn't read the right ones, or maybe he hasn't understood what he has read. I suggest that he immediately read Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Carefully. This explains the relationship of Marx to Hegelism in a very clear, but also in a very profound, manner. And it is from someone who -- unlike Gambone's MacGregor -- lived the controversy and the polemics as they took place. Anyway, what Engels makes plain is that the whole point of the Left Hegelian attack on Hegel's "idealism" was not really a debate over the correct interpretation of texts or abstract philosophical positions at all. Instead, it was an ideological/cultural war over how what was really valid in Hegel's thought was to be used: whether as bullshit justification for the Prussian ruling class, or as a method for linking the intellectual skills of a new intellectual class to the needs of society's more exploited and less educated majority. Particular philosophical positions in this struggle -- for example Feuerbach's "understanding" or "misunderstanding" of Hegel's "idealism" -- cannot be grasped correctly by mere abstract textual analysis alone; an understanding of the total political context must also be applied.

Thus, the whole debate between "materialism" and "idealism" in the 1840s was not primarily a debate over metaphysics at all. It was essentially a political/ideological debate over using a particular tradition (Hegelian) in certain ways, as opposed to certain other ways. That is, Right Hegelianism was the use of an idealist interpretation of Hegel to justify siding with the ruling class; while the Left was intent on pushing Hegelianism into materialism as an ideological step towards class struggle -- a path that would eventually lead both Marx and Engels to communism. As Engels points out, the path on the right led, over a couple of decades, merely to "innate eclecticism" and an anxious concern for career and income." A result not entirely unfamiliar to the post-Sixties left in the US today.

In other words, "idealism", in the context of 1840s' intellectual life, meant career-oriented avoidance of the inherent revolutionary responsibility of the intellectual; while "materialism" meant taking the skills and knowledge gained in ruling class institutions and making it available to a revolutionary segment of the proletariat. In this real context, it is absurd to say, as Gambone does, that idealism and materialism can be "overcome dialectically". What exactly is the dialectical resolution of Marx seeing
his children die of poverty in post-1848 London and fat-ass academics and bureaucrats mouthing whatever is politically safe?

I have, of course, simplified some very complex issues; but this simplification is, I think, closer to the truth than Gambone's muddled textual wanderings. Hegel's thought certainly did contain some valid social insights; it also contained a real revolutionary core: the notion of the real world as one unified, structured historical process. This revolutionary core-concept, however, could not become a progressive force in society unless three things happened:

1. The concept had to be taken out of the hands of sell-out academic careerists,
2. It had to be connected to the work of developing modern science (Engels names biology, thermodynamics and Darwinism), and
3. It had to be made available to the masses through an organized revolutionary movement.

From 1845 on, the life work of Marx and Engels centered on just these tasks.

For anyone interested in these issues, I suggest reading Helena Sheehan's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science* (Humanities Press, 1985). This gives a detailed account of the long and complex struggle within Marxism to complete the real work of Marxism's founders: the creation of a revolutionary materialist science of existence. This is an aspect of revolutionary Marxism little recognized by the American left, and something of which Gambone certainly seems to be unaware. Marxism as it stands at any point in time is not, of course, Holy Writ: it always needs to be developed and pushed ahead. But for this reason - because Marx's intent was to create a true science - Marxism no more has "limits" than does material reality itself. Gambone seems to me very much like someone playing in the shallows and mistaking them for the ocean.

Finally, intellectuals, as a "contradictory class", always walk a difficult line between bad faith to their own real essence as intellectuals (truth) and blocked careers. In this fundamental dialectic, Hegel's career represents a classic case of bad faith, while Marx remains the modern era's most deep example of commitment to truth.

Let's not get these two models confused in the Discussion Bulletin.

PAT EYCHISON
Dear Comrades.

Every time my eyes encounter the words Hegel or dialectic, my brain goes into a defense posture and then seeks for escape. I attribute this reaction to an early and traumatic exposure to Raya Dunayevskaya-thought while trying to read News and Letters. As a result, in my role as DB assembly worker I read Larry Gambone's article "The Limits of Marxism" and, finding nothing there that would upset the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Party, assumed that if there was any dangerous revisionism it would be there. I felt safe then in disavowing my censorship duty when I encountered the word Hegel in the harmless sounding title of Larry's second essay. My earlier experience with Gambonean heresy should have taught me better.

After reading a line or two of Pat Eychison's article, I realized that I had indeed erred. I stopped to avoid being influenced by Eychisonism and then carefully read Larry's "The Communist Idea in Hegel and Marx." What follows is my attempt to root out error and prevent its propagation. For a title readers can choose between "ANTI-GAMBONE or HERR LARRY GAMBONE'S REVOLUTION IN SCIENCE" and "THeses AGAINST GAMBONE."

1. This letter will deal only with the heretical views Larry presents and will not try to adjudicate the Marx vs. Hegel competition he has initiated.

2. p. 17, paragraph 1 -- Here Gambone seems to affirming an interpretation of Hegel's idea a) that the struggle of workers is psychological, each worker engaged in an individual struggle for productive property in order to gain status, rather than in the economic class struggle for a greater portion of her/his product; and b) that workers lay a claim to the means of production through their involvement in it.

3. p 17, para 3 -- Gambone, who longs for a conflict-free transition to socialism, presents Hegel's idea that in the future corporate capitalism will entail the rise of trades unions to the point where they will empower workers and lead to socialism.

4. p. 18, paras 1 and 2 -- Gambone seems to mistake the partnership of the capitalists and their corporate managers with the capitalist unions as evidence of working class influence bordering on control of the workplace. He mentions downsizing of the supervisory sector, flexitime, QOWL -- all management initiated techniques to increase production by making the work force happier. I wonder if he has heard of deindustrialization, outsourcing to Latin America and the Far East, and downsizing the work force. As I write this, GM workers in Flint, Michigan, are striking to end sixty-six-hour weeks and GM's policy of using temps during periods of high production. None of this suggests a synthesis of capitalist and worker developing...[Hegel's] form of communism called 'the rational state' where 'the corporations gradually come under workers' control." Given what we know about the profit motivation of capitalist corporations, this "revolution by synthesis" is truly pie in the sky.

--Frank Girard
The Refusal of Work In The 90’s

Certainly, in one sense, the tendencies Reeve described have occurred - with a vengeance. For many people in the U.S., Great Britain and elsewhere, today's real choice is no longer between being denied a promotion into the office from the assembly line because of your "bad attitude" or being stuck in the grind for the rest of your working life but between sleeping in a doorway and a part-time minimum wage job. The collective tendencies toward absenteeism and sabotage (broadly defined) no longer keeps the bosses awake at night. Undeniably, all the forms of the "revolt against work" are much more difficult to identify then they were twenty years ago.

To many people this is further proof that the working class is on a permanent downward spiral or even that "The American working class has been smashed" (as the WILDCAT U.K. group argued a few years ago in its journal, only to turn around a year later and hail the L.A. riots as proof of a new "proletarian" upsurge!)

Others will point to the declining level of both strikes and union membership (although this has been slightly reversed in the U.S. according to the latest figures) yet as further evidence of the passivity of the working class in face of the brutal restructuring and attacks on workers' living standards.

In fact, if it wasn't for the miner's strike last year pulling down the figures to one day in forty years, the strike figures for American workers are so pitifully low nowadays that if current trends continue, the average worker would stand to lose a days work due to a strike or lockout once every hundred years! (U.S. Labor dept. statistics quoted in the May 94 issue}
of LABOR NOTES.)

But it is one thing to say that people no longer have confidence in or join traditional organizations and another to say that they no longer struggle.

To take this point a step further, we would argue that this is true even of spontaneous visible struggle — those struggles waged outside traditional organizations, which could be easily added to the first half of the equation above without changing the essential point. (A partial exception being Los Angeles in 1992).

Put another way, if twenty years ago you had a rejection of traditional organizations coupled with autonomous partial struggles erupting outside all the usual structures (unions, parties, etc.) set up to contain them, today you can see a parallel decrease in both, at least for the time being.

Yet that is different from saying there is no struggle. We think this is a crucial point. The usual equation relating traditional vs. autonomous struggles is skewed because it omits other possibilities and interpretations. Visible struggle is not the only yardstick we can use to measure such things. True, visible struggles, both official and unofficial, are at a low ebb but could it be that is because struggle (again, broadly defined) has gone underground in less visible forms?

In the United States, we can point to many examples of this tendency toward invisible struggle on the micro-level: all taking place well after the present downturn in so-called visible struggles began fifteen or twenty years ago.

A left-liberal sociologist influential in academic circles, William Junius Wilson, in the course describing the growth of the ghetto "underclass" in a New York Times interview July 26th 1992, identified something he calls "cultural mismatch" between white employers and Black working class men. He cites Black men's widespread rejection of low wage service work as one side of this mismatch. If Wilson's hypothesis is true, then this would provide an interesting counterpoint to the argument that the revolt against work would evaporate when unemployment rose and social benefits were cut. It is considered enough of a concern that liberal corporate foundations have rushed in to fund such research.

In a book "Longshoreman: Community and Resistance on the Brooklyn Waterfront", William Difazio points to the "refusal to work" among longshoremen in New York, who have used the Guaranteed Annual Income won by the union as a partial protection against the effects of containerization. The longshoremen are of course a historically powerful section of the traditional working class (even if their jobs have been decimated by automation since the mid-sixties).

Difazio underscores his first hand study by emphasizing the ways in which these longshoreman both accommodate and resist the demands of the system (as represented respectively by management and the union):

"They collectively struggle for wages without work and for free time as opposed to work time. No longer is their well being attached to hard work as it was in the past. Now it is attached to managing their own time away from work. They rightly perceive that productivity in the workplace is opposed to their interests."

This twin dynamic - resistance and accommodation - Difazio quite correctly relates as linked to the divide between the worker's own informal organization and the formal organization imposed by the structure of the industry and the role of the union. To quote further:

"It is these informal organizations,
autonomously constituted by the workers which are most significant because they create the potential for alternatives, for the conditions of change. Informal resistance is the basic shift that creates possibilities for change. Transformative struggles are possible when there is a convergence of individual and social needs. This convergence of individual and social at the level of informal resistance is community.) (P.2)

Dave Wagner, in his book "Checkerboard Square: Culture and Resistance in a Homeless Community" points to the anger homeless people in Portland, Maine felt toward employers who were trying to rip them off and their overall determination to avoid wage labor: the homeless "... understand in an insightful - if non-academic way - that options are closed, they frequently confront employers, resist work demands, and choose other survival strategies that are independent of the primary labor force. To the extent that this norm of resistance dominates a sub-culture of poor people, it is not clear whether the creation of more jobs alone or possibly even of good jobs will immediately change the world of the Checkerboard Square subjects". (P.73)

What connects most of these examples, extending from the Black ghetto of large cities to an once powerful section of the industrial working class to overwhelmingly white homeless people in a poor rural state with one of the highest poverty and unemployment levels in the country, is that in each case, all these hidden forms of struggle against work are taking place practically invisible to those outside of the people directly involved themselves.

In other words, to return to the case of the Longshoreman, if as an outsider, you only looked at what the union was doing (or not doing) or whether a formal "rank and file" opposition caucus emerged or whether there were strikes (official or wildcat), you would draw quite different conclusions than if you had spent significant amounts of time in the longshoreman's own hall.

This is what we call the "micro" level and it is at this "micro" level that most struggle takes place these days. We don't pretend the concept of the "micro" level is anything startlingly new. It merely describes part of the daily class struggle dismissed by the traditional Left because it is outside the heroic (and exceptional) open and direct confrontations. As Hal Draper put it:

"To engage in class struggle it is not necessary to "believe in" the class struggle any more than it is necessary to believe in Newton in order to fall from an airplane... The working class moves toward class struggle insofar as capitalism fails to satisfy its economic and social needs and aspirations, not insofar as it is told about struggle by Marxists. There is no evidence that workers like to struggle any more than anyone else; the evidence is that capitalism compels and accustoms them to do so" ("Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol. II The Politics of Social Classes", P.42)

Since we intend to return to this issue frequently in future editions of "Collective Action Notes" and think it is pretty important to document examples of this micro level resistance, we strongly encourage readers responses, both pro and con, to the points we raised here. Q. Curtis Price

NOTES

(1) Charles Reeve's article can be found most easily nowadays in the "Echanges" pamphlet "The Refusal of Work", available from either Collective Action or directly from "Echanges", BP 241, 75866 Paris Cedex 18, FRANCE

(2) John Zerzan's article is contained in his "Elements of Refusal", available from Left Bank Books in the U.S. or AK Distribution in Scotland.
Rosa Luxemburg is one of the most important figures of revolutionary socialism. Her libertarianism and opposition to Leninism has also put her in good stead with anarchists. But this finest of socialists was also a product of the dominant ideology of the time - orthodox marxism - and suffered from this. While we revere Luxemburg, we tend to overlook this factor. Nowhere is this "orthodoxy" more apparent than her classic work, Reform or Revolution, where she attacks Edouard Bernstein for "revisionism".

Luxemburg adhered to the literal reading of CAPITAL, as favored by Karl Kautsky and seemed to have been unaware that the work is a kind of scientific metaphor or model. Bernstein was chiefly criticized because he rejected the idea that capitalism would collapse. According to Bernstein a general decline of capitalism seems to be increasingly improbable because, on the one hand, capitalism shows a greater capacity of adaptation, and on the other, capitalist production becomes more and more varied.

Poor Rosa! Consider this was written in 1898 and how much capitalism has adapted and how incredibly varied production has become.

Criticism turned into swearing - Bernstein's theory reveals its reactionary character when it refers to the rapid capitalist development that is taking place at present. We now have the wisdom of hindsight - capitalism was developing very rapidly the very moment she wrote those words. the long depression of 1872-1892 was over, the electrical and auto industries were in their infancy, and aviation a Jules Verne fantasy. Bernstein was more correct than he could ever imagine. Why get branded as a "reactionary" for stating an economic fact. Is this because the truth is unpleasant to the ears of the faithful?

Bernstein's great sin was that he ...pulls away the first of the three fundamental supports of scientific socialism. He says that capitalist development does not lead to a general economic collapse. Therefore Social Democracy...must not expect to institute socialism as a result of a political and social crisis, but should build socialism by means of the progressive extension of social control and the gradual application of the principle of cooperation. Either revisionism is correct... on capitalist development and therefore the socialist transformation of society is a utopia, or socialism is not a utopia and the "theory of the means of adaptation" is false. Luxemburg really put her foot in this one. Today no one believes that the collapse of capitalism is the absolutely necessary precursor of socialism. - we are all

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2 ibid, p. 61
3 ibid, p.39
4 ibid, p. 41
Bernsteinists now. Furthermore, the notion of cooperation and social control as something worth striving for is supported by the majority tendency of the anarchist movement. Are they "reactionaries" too?

Without the collapse dogma, L. thought socialism no longer an "historical necessity", and if reduced to will of proletariat alone socialism would become idealist. Luxemburg, trapped by the collapse theory, could not see an alternative to the sterile either-or of vulgar materialism or naive idealism.

Bernstein himself sees nothing new in these theories. On the contrary, he believes them to be in agreement with certain declarations of Marx and Engels. The problem is, in the later writings of Marx and Engels there are a fair number of examples which would bolster Bernstein's conception of capitalist development. He was also Marx and Engels literary executor, a task that neither would trust in the hands of the "philistine" Kautsky.

If anyone was in a position to comprehend their views on such matters it was Edouard Bernstein.

Her catastrophist position made her misunderstand the future direction of the trade union and co-operative movements as well as democracy generally. We are not moving towards an epoch marked by a victorious development of trade unions... The reduction of wages, as Marx pointed out, one of the principle means of retarding the fall of profit. Cooperatives are an attack made upon the twigs of the capitalist tree. Trade unions cannot improve the lot of the workers since the share of the social wealth going to the workers is being reduced.

History has proven otherwise. The "epoch marked by a victorious development of trade unions" was from 1940 to 1980. And until the present neoliberalism, excepting the 1930's, the tendency was for both wages and the workers' share of the wealth to increase. In many countries co-operatives have become vast undertakings, most particularly in finance, insurance, retailing and farming.

For Luxemburg... democracy doomed. (The state) ...loses more and more its character as a representative of the whole of society and is transformed... into a pure class state. As soon as democracy shows itself an instrument of the real interests of the population the democratic forms are sacrificed by the bourgeoisie... Democratic institutions have completely exhausted their function as aids in the development of bourgeois society...liberalism...now useless to bourgeois society."

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5} ibid, p. 39}
\text{\textsuperscript{6} ibid, p. 50}
\text{\textsuperscript{7} ibid, p. 71}
\text{\textsuperscript{8} ibid, p. 55}
\text{\textsuperscript{9} ibid, p. 56}
\text{\textsuperscript{10} ibid, p. 74-75}\]
Democracy superfluous for the bourgeoisie...  

It is interesting to note, if by bourgeois democracy one means universal suffrage and basic rights, there were no democratic states in 1898. The big shift to democracy came in three waves. After WWI with the enfranchisement of women and the abolition of property qualifications, post-WW2 with the democratization of the former axis powers and the post-Berlin Wall collapse of Stalinist totalitarianism. And rather than the "pure class state" we got the welfare state. Far from democracy being exhausted, it has been the very means by which capitalism has transformed itself. Note too, the idea that democracy would be sacrificed, a line the Leninists picked up to back their erroneous claim that fascism was the ultimate form of capitalism. Rather than dictatorship, democracy has proven to be the best possible instrument for the bourgeoisie to modify the desires of the working population, i.e., change, but not too much change.

L. had no concept of transition. The title of her polemic, Reform Or Revolution says as much. There was no concept of structural reform, no inkling that social revolutions are long drawn out affairs. As a result of trade union and parliamentary struggles, the proletariat becomes convinced of the impossibility of accomplishing fundamental social change through such activity. Either the collapse of capitalism leading to a seizure of power by the workers or petty-reformism, which really can't happen because capitalism isn't up to it. The task of socialists is only that of propaganda for the final struggle. And if the final struggle is a myth, then what?

While Bernstein made many serious errors in Evolutionary Socialism much of his political and economic analysis has born up better than his "orthodox" adversaries. In attempting to relate marxism to the real empirical world he was also remaining faithful to the spirit of Marx. For the orthodox, including Luxemburg, socialism was a secular faith with God replaced by Historical Materialism and the Apocalypse by the Collapse of Capitalism. It was tragic that someone with as much energy, intelligence and ability as she had become a true-believer of Kautsky's vulgarizations and mystifications. And while Kautsky-brand social democracy was a rather innocent faith, which at least maintained some sense of ethics, in the future lay the ultimate religious cult, marxism-leninism, which Luxemburg to her eternal honor opposed vociferously.

Larry Gambone

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11 ibid p.60
12 ibid, p.58
13 Such as rejecting the labour theory of value, assuming that the petty-bourgeoisie was not going to shrink in numbers, assuming that crises would be reduced in intensity and his chucking Hegel for Kant.
Number 2... 09.09.1994.

Young anarchist Milan H. from Lučani was expelled from school after he had distributed the first issue of "Preko zidova nacionalizma i rata" ("Over the Walls of Nationalism and War") bulletin to his teachers.

Anarchist Dragan M. from Smederevska Palanka also had problems. Because of the same bulletin a member of the Serbian Radical Party (right-wing nationalist party) threatened him with a gun.

Milan Dj. from Smederevo received a letter from the manager of the Serbian National Library, in which he was informed that, as an "editor" of the "P.Z.N.i.R." bulletin he could be fined from 1,000 to 10,000 DNH, because the newspaper hasn't been officially registered.

Libertarian press

"Torpedo" has released five issues of "Torpedo - Informator" in Serbian and two issues of "Torpedo - News Flash" in English. Also, the group participated in making the first and the second issue of "P.Z.N.i.R." bulletin, prepared to edit the third issue, cooperates in starting a new magazine "Anarhistička bose" ("Anarchistic Fight") and prepares the first issue of its own paper which will deal with theory of revolution.

Visit:


Contacts

We succeeded in making the right contacts and cooperation with many groups and individuals. That means a lot to us and we hope that we'll make much more connections.

Help

We still desperately need any help. Printed material deals with libertarian themes, office supplies, IRC's... especially that would be good, to send us an IRC in every letter.
It helps us a lot and it quickens the contact with you, comrades from abroad. If you decide to send money (and we wouldn’t recommend that) then hide it very well. Several remittances already got lost.

Also, you will help us if you make few copies of this info-sheet and send it to your friends. Or, maybe, you can print this in your papers.

We are grateful to:
This time we would like to thank the following comrades from abroad and from country who helped us a great deal:
- Alan + "ContrafLOW", London, United Kingdom
- Yves T., Paris, France
- Will F. + F.A.U.-I.A.A., Berlin, Germany
- Steve + "Green anarchism", Oxford, United Kingdom
- Frank G. + "Discussion bulletin", Grand Rapids, U.S.A.
- Anarchist Media Institute, Parkville, Australia
- Petri N., Tampere, Finland
- Alex N., Billingham, United Kingdom
- Education Workers Network, Manchester, United Kingdom
- Norwich Solidarity Centre, Norwich, United Kingdom
- Dragan M. + Crni pavlan, Smederevska Palanka, P.R. Yugoslavia
- Max A., San Francisco, U.S.A.

For more information write to: Milan Djuric, M. Velikog 12/10, 11300 Smederevo, Serbia-Yugoslavia.

FUTURE PRIMITIVE -- AND OTHER ESSAYS by John Zerzan, Autonoma & Anarchy, 1994, 185 pages paperback. Autonoma, PO Box 586, Williamsburg Station, Brooklyn, NY 11211, $7.00.

For those of us whose introduction to anthropology was the Marx-Engels-Morgan schema, the title essay of John Zerzan’s book will come as a revelation or perhaps a fabrication. In the classic Marxist view humanity abandoned the dead end of primitive communism, driven by the need to assure a constant supply of the necessities of life. Class divisions and private ownership of the means of production arose with development of agriculture and the ability to produce surpluses. These made feasible both slavery and a non-productive upper crust of priests, shamans, chiefs, nobles, warriors etc. who could live on the surplus. The continuing evolution of society from chattel slavery to feudalism to capitalism was fueled by technological improvements in the means of production. Today these have created a condition in which the ability to produce goods in excess of human needs makes class divisions unnecessary, providing the material basis for a golden age, the cooperative commonwealth of socialism.

Zerzan’s primitivist world view sets this interpretation of history on its head. He holds that our ancestors experienced the “golden age” of material plenty in the earliest era of their emergence on the planet. In fact, that is a major part of his thesis; the other is a corollary: that until quite recently--15,000 years ago--humans consciously (or intuitively) sought to remain as one with nature, avoiding even the
predatory life as hunters that would have put them on the road to civilization. A defect is Zerzan's failure to explain just what set our species on the road out of Eden.

In the first few pages of the essay he argues that the beginning signs of civilization—"domestication" he calls it—date from perhaps 15,000 years ago. The previous 2 1/2 million years or more of our species' existence was spent in a golden age of stagnation, another creature in the community of nature.

In support of his contentions he argues first of all that our early ancestors were not prevented from developing civilization by lack of the mental or physical capacity to do so. Referring to the research of scholars in the field, he shows that the biological classification of our ancestors into different species by virtue of evolutionary changes in cranial and other skeletal differences is artificial and misleading. Although smaller, crania of Homo habilis, for instance, who produced the first stone tools nearly 3 million years ago show evidence of brain organization remarkably like those of modern humans.

In fact, quoting recent authorities in the field, he argues that differentiation between Homo erectus (appearing 1.75 million years ago), and Homo sapiens, who appeared 30,000 years ago) is artificial, brain size and physical differentiation exhibiting so many intermediate stages that a line cannot really be drawn. The teardrop shaped, symmetrical, beautifully balanced Acheulean handaxe of one million years ago, according to the authorities Zerzan quotes, required mental (brain) organization equal to that of moderns.

From Zerzan's point of view, the term 'hunter-gatherers' to describe our primitive ancestors is false. Hunting, he believes, would have led our species onto the road to civilization much earlier than his thesis asserts. For one thing, hunting promotes the development of symbolism, the first step in the development of culture and civilization, as well as the sexual division of labor as we see it in the societies of which we have historical records. Marshalling evidence from experts on the subject, he shows that until quite recently, 100,000 to 200,000 years ago, our ancestors did no significant hunting; the human diet consisted mainly of vegetable matter, and food gathering did not entail a division of labor between women and men. Meat, an unusual element in the diet, came from scavenging.

Basic to Zerzan's position is the view that in our ancestors' state of natural innocence symbols, the backbone of culture, did not exist. This includes speech, language being symbolic by its very nature. He finds authorities to show that "...no evidence exists of speech before the cultural explosion of the later Upper Paleolithic."

Looking at the results of civilization—"the 'horrendous present,'" he calls it—Zerzan finds little to be optimistic about. Unless we can draw comfort from a remark which speaks of his essay's showing us "who we are and what we might become again," which unfortunately he doesn't enlarge on, we seem to be doomed in the absence of a Lord and Saviour.

Besides this title essay, three others—The Mass Psychology of

--Frank Girard

NOTES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHORT REVIEWS


Scottish working class youth were "severely dealt with" both in school and, when they left that at a very early age, at work. In the case of John Taylor Caldwell, the right hand man of the prince of anarchists, Guy Aldred, and author of his biography (Cone Dungeons Dark, 1986, reviewed in DB36), the severity carried into his stressful and unhappy home life as a child. This first installment brings his autobiography from his birth in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1911 up to 1927. Subsequent volumes will deal with the author's experiences as a bell boy and steward on board ocean liners, and with his years in the Glasgow anarchist and socialist movement.

During those years he, his three siblings, and his parents had moved to Belfast where he had witnessed that part of the Northern Ireland troubles that occurred before 1925. Perhaps it was this along with an opportunity to witness the mindless cruelty of an asshole father and similar teachers in charge of educating the children of the Belfast "lower middle class," that led him into the libertarian socialist movement, although that lies beyond the scope of this part of his story.

His parents regarded themselves as middle class, his father being a tailor with a small business and an income barely large enough to support his family. According to Caldwell the principal differences between him and the working class boys a few blocks over were that he was a protestant and wore shoes.

Caldwell seems to be gifted with almost total recall--he remembers his second birthday--and it is the details of his early life and especially the vivid word pictures that charm the reader. The blurb on the back cover reads, "A moving, often humourous account of a determined quest for knowledge and understanding in the teeth of poverty, brutality, and injustice." It's all of that.

SURVIVAL OF THE WEAKEST (LOVE, SCIENCE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE) by Ken R. Smith, author of Free Is Cheaper reviewed in DB34. Some idea of the content can be gained from the following in the advance flyer: "The revival of moral community is undermining capitalism. The political
act, hitherto regarded as the catalyst, will be simply the outward manifestation of a reality that is already coming about. The revolution is taking place, now.” We hope to have a review in DB99.

For more info: Ken Smith, Folly Lane, May Hill Gloucester GL17 8NP, England.

BULLETIN OF THE SOCIAL LABOR MOVEMENT. Persons interested in the history of DeLeonism can expect publication of the second issue of the Bulletin of the Social Labor Movement sometime in November or early December. This issue will contain articles on the SLP’s alternative press—the lesser known periodicals that were not edited by De Leon. Most of these belong to the early period of the party, between 1876 and 1890. Continuing the project that saw De Leon’s 1896 datebook diary transcribed and annotated for the first issue of the BSLM, Ben Perry has completed the same work on the 1898 datebook/diary which De Leon kept during this important year in SLP history. Ben describes it as “More informative than that of 1896.

SPANNER. The DB recently received notice that Spänner has ceased publication because of printing problems and the difficulties of communication.

THE DE LEONIST SOCIETY BULLETIN. A recent letter from the Canadian publishers informed us that the DLSB had ceased publication for the time being but hoped to resume after the first of the year in a new

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