ABSTRACT

A Ballad Against Work, the most recent publication of Kamunist Kranti (reviewed in “Notes etc.” DB83) raised the hackles of the Communist Workers Organization, who criticize it as an expression of KK’s regression into “a spontaneist trajectory.” DB published the original letter and the ensuing discussion for it insights into two views of appropriate revolutionary activity. Next Robin Cox takes issue with Dave Stratman’s view that Marxism is deterministic. Gary Boswell examines the debate between Dave Stratman and Robin Cox on Marxism in recent issues of the DB and concludes that Stratman “is advocating a kind of anti-Marxist Marxism without Marx” in response to the general
between Dave Stratman and Robin Cox on Marxism in recent issues of the DB and concludes that Stratman “is advocating a kind of anti-Marxist Marxism without Marx” in response to the general perception that Marxism is responsible for the evils of the USSR. In his next letter Cox comments on essentially the same aspect of the Stratman-Buick debate that concerns Boswell, the alleged “crude economic determinism” that leaves the working class outside the revolutionary equation.

Next the De Leonist Society of Canada answers Irving Silvey’s critique of the addition, described in their thesis “Democracy -- Political and Industrial,” of a political dimension to De Leon’s SIU concept of post-revolutionary society. Bob Black’s letter strongly attacks both my review of his book (DB84) and what he sees as my and Murray Bookchin’s age-related physical and mental infirmities. Next I

(To p. 12)

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 the 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 copier 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.

Subscription Information

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[Note: In the following ten-page E-Mail debate, the Indian group Kamunist Kranti (KK) defends its recently published pamphlet, A Ballad Against Work, from criticism by the Communist Workers Organization (CWO), a British group, which traces its origins to a very early split in the Italian Communist Party. At issue is the question of just what constitutes appropriate revolutionary activity in these final years of the 20th century. The second and third letters of this debate were published recently in the CWO's Revolutionary Perspectives 7. DB has the full text thanks to Curtis Price, who is also publishing it in Collective Action Notes 13. Copies of The Ballad Against Work are available free and postpaid from the DB. -- fg]

MAY 20 [May 16 (?) to KK from CWO]

Yes, we have received 2 copies of 'A Ballad Against Work'. We would have replied sooner but to be frank we were at a loss as to how to respond tactfully about a document that has obviously involved a lot of effort and of which you appear to be very proud.

In one of our recent letters we asked for a statement from KK of your present political positions since in over a decade of correspondence your political evolution has not been clear. In particular the central issue of the role and tasks of the political organisation has been left hanging in the air. Now, however, your current trajectory into the eclectic marsh has been made clear with 'A Ballad Against Work' which may as well be called 'A Ballad Against Organising for Revolution'. KK's long-standing refusal to face up to the question of how the proletariat can organise - internationally - to prepare for the overthrow of capitalism or to consider your own role, if any, in this process has culminated in this 'ballad' against political organisation.

Hitherto KK has earned our respect by its tenacity at maintaining its relationship with the working class in difficult circumstances but now we really do wonder what message you have for the workers of Faridabad (or anywhere else). Apart from the glossy presentation and pseudo-intellectual aphorisms what you've produced is a collection of ahistorical, timeless anecdotes illustrating the universal nastiness and dehumanising nature of work under capitalism. But so what? Our job is to demonstrate to workers that the possibility of OVERTHROWING capitalism lies within their grasp. The only thing that comes over from your ballad is that "it's the same the whole world over". You make no attempt to link your reports of local or individual, sporadic acts of resistance to capitalist exploitation to a longer-term political struggle for the transformation of the world. [In fact, judging from your booklet's frontispiece, you appear to think that a basic feature of communist society - the free distribution of goods - can be achieved gradually under capitalism.] You fail to present any kind of vision of communism, you don't link the present situation of the world's working class to the ever-deepening economic crisis of capitalism, you provide no overall political or historical context for the anecdotal evidence and above all there is no perspective whatsoever of how workers can organise or advance their struggle against wage slavery. This is not an iota of use for the class struggle but the most disappointing aspect of all is that the 'ballad' is clearly not designed to be so. It is rather addressed to the angst-riven radical intellectual - more worried about the meaning of life and trying to appear clever to the eclectic morass of correspondents you list than in connecting with the working class and constructing a political movement to change the world. The struggle for communism is rooted in workers' daily experience and resistance to capitalist exploitation but as you very well know, does not end there. The role of the political organisation is to synthesise and explain the significance of that experience by putting it in a clear revolutionary framework. For us this can only mean a marxist framework - i.e. based on a materialist understanding of class society, of the potential power of the working class to overthrow capitalism as a result of their relationship to the means of production, of the necessity for a POLITICAL revolution to overthrow the capitalist state and consequently of the necessity for the most class conscious workers to organise politically. With this latest document it appears that KK has abandoned any attempt to fulfil its basic function as a revolutionary political organisation in favour of a thinly disguised idealism and the mystifying posturing of the radical pseudo-intellectual. ["Aufheben" indeed, what is anyone supposed to make of that?]

Comrades, we urge you to reflect on how you have come to be travelling on this self-indulgent, essentially
petty-bourgeois trajectory and return to the serious work of developing class political consciousness and the nucleus of a political organisation before you destroy the fruits of the real links you have built up with the working class over the years.

Internationalist greetings
CWO

To CWO; From Sher Singh, Faridabad, India
Date: May 24, 1997

Dear friends,

Thanks for your e-mail dated May 16, 1997. We were taken by surprise by such an avalanche of dramatic condemnation. It seems that we are always deviating from some expressway of revolutionary ought to dos. It feels as if some barometer is thrust upon us and unfortunately we seem to have always failed in giving sufficiently illuminating results.

Anyway, to try to answer some of your accusations.

1) "ballad" concerns itself with the concrete history of the work regime that has evolved over the last two hundred years. We call this period the emergence and dominance of wage-labour based production for the market. Now, may be you disagree with our contention in "ballad" that this period has led to the following:

a) intensification of work & other aspects of everyday living
b) lengthening of the working day
c) intensive and extensive expansion in the disciplinary apparatus
d) lowering in the standard of living
e) increase in the extraction of produce. It seems you have disagreements on these points. Had they been expressed more concretely, we could have understood our analytical inadequacies better.

2) Another basis of your perturbation could be:

a) wage-workers face a very different reality than what has been portrayed in "ballad" or
b) more damagingly, we have deliberately erased & suppressed very effective methods of struggles or
c) the instances of struggle & analysis in "ballad" motivadely disarm wage-workers in their resistance to the apparatus of extraction, control & discipline.

Again, had your contentions been clearer, we would have been able to evaluate our own experiences differently.

3) We are not very clear as to how you understand the perceptions of wage-workers. Our interactions and conversations with a large cross section of wage-workers have led us to recognize a few important things: There is a strong anti-leader, anti-militants (not militancy) feeling amongst wage-workers because of a realisation born of repeated bitter and painful experiences. Militants or leaders are now & then crushed and often capitulate and are co-opted by managements.

This realisation forces a recognition of the terrain of everyday struggles that each & every wage-worker wages, without leaders-representatives- middle persons, individually or collectively in small groups. These are the very struggles that managements & leaders make all out efforts to erase so that representation can survive and sustain hierarchies. We are at present attempting to give these small steps some confidence and erase the guilt that is associated with being against work, against discipline and against productivity.
These struggles have their particular dynamics and momentum which have to be recognized and disseminated. It is out of these seemingly small struggles that new forms of organised activity and resistance could emerge that will not allow the collective strength of wage-workers to get abducted by different unities. How some people in the name of the proletariat can and do organise is fundamentally different from how wage-workers can do organised activity on a global scale.

If you think otherwise, you need to give us concrete examples to the contrary. Not merely homilies on class-conscious workers and political organisations.

4) That the future should be the product of the imagining of a few, and that others will follow and act on the basis of that imagination is not acceptable to us. What we envisage, instead, is the emergence of a practice that takes into account every wage-workers participation in order to imaginatively invent a non-hierarchical global community. Your statements make it look like that the path is already there, all one has to do is to steadfastly follow it. Is this a naturally ordained path or a historically derived one? If this is an historically derived one, then it is based on a specific set of experiences and conceptions and can be critically evaluated. Then, at least we presume, it should be open to dialogue with other experiences and conceptions.

If, however, the path is a naturally ordained one, a revealed category of faith and belief, then why fight over it. Your belief is yours.

5) As regards marxism, it is best for us to hold our comments until the publication of our next text "Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy". We will send you a copy as soon as it is out, and then pick up the debate about marxism in detail.

6) Some minor details:

a) as regards aufhebened. A small word which apparently means a lot. Our presumption in using it stems from the confidence that if in the 19th century workers were willing to read Capital, a book which deployed categories of Hegelian philosophy, as well as footnotes in Latin, Greek, Italian and French languages, then it is surely possible that in 1997 one word will not be such an impediment.

b) as for the glossy cover, ours is a dusty landscape and the gloss makes for a good dustcover. It is perhaps a question of geo-cultural perception.

Looking forward to hearing from you in more detail.

With greetings,

Sher Singh

Date sent: Thu, 5 Jun 1997 15:36:15 -0400

Dear Comrades

You've missed the main point of our criticism which is that your 'Ballad' has nothing political to say. To take the most important point first, the question of revolutionary organisation for the emancipation of the working class. We entirely agree that the future communist society will not "be the product of the imagining of a few" with the rest of the working class ("others") following and acting on the "basis of that imagining". However, you say that this is unacceptable to you. We say that this is unacceptable because it is IMPOSSIBLE. It is idealist utopianism. The world is not changed by the dreams of intellectuals being
taken up by the masses. Nor will it be changed by every wage worker "imaginatively inventing" his/her own utopia. We who are living under capitalism today can't possibly predict what the future global community will be like precisely because it will be shaped by the human 'collectivity' as it responds to material and practical problems. Unlike our pre-marxian forebears, we are not concerned with drawing up more or less imaginative blueprints for the future. That is not what we meant when we said that your document lacks a vision of communism.

To our mind it's confusing to speak of communism simply in terms of a "non-hierarchical" society and to present the struggle for communism as a struggle against hierarchies and leaders. [In a strict sense it is also wrong, since exceptionally talented or skilled individuals in particular fields will always be recognized and admired by their fellow creatures, albeit that in a communist world DIFFERENT talents will be appreciated.] But to return to the point. You know; we know; that communism means a stateless, classless society where wage labour, commodity production and money do not exist and where everyone who is physically and mentally able contributes to the communal effort of producing society's needs and to the equally communal process of deciding what those needs are. [Although it doesn't mean the abolition of work altogether as your Ballard implies.] How do we know this? Is it because each of us has responded to our own experience of wage labour and happened to have 'imaginatively invented' a similar 'non-hierarchical global community'? Or is it because we, in our own political 'collectivities', have (even indirectly) absorbed, read, discussed and criticised the ideas in key political texts - notably, in this case, the Communist Manifesto? When it comes to HOW wage workers can transform their implicit resistance to capitalism into an outright revolutionary struggle for its overthrow and replacement with communism we entirely agree that this is a "historically derived" path; i.e. it is not a path which is naturally revealed by the continuous workplace skirmishes which occur daily under capitalism but rather requires an appreciation of the historical lessons of previous struggles of our class, an understanding of the nature of capitalist society and the capitalist state, and in fact a [historically conditioned] vision of a communist alternative to existing society. In other words, communist consciousness does not arise directly from the immediate struggle of 'wage workers' but is the collective product of theoretical analysis, historical experience and reflection on that experience. Now, at least the CWI and the International Bureau make no bones about the lessons we draw from past experience and apart from our regular press these are summed up in the IBP Platform and the CWI's Socialism or Barbarism. Despite our long relationship KK has never "critically evaluated" either of these texts. However, this is not our current preoccupation. Our concern is that KK currently says less and less about what it has derived from history about the path to communism and that the Ballard Against Work doesn't say anything at all, at least not clearly and explicitly.

Your letter, however, is more revealing and confirms that KK is becoming more and more subject to what you yourselves once termed the "fetishing of spontaneity" (as opposed to the "fetish of the party"). [In a KK text "for discussion on 'Challenges before the communist movement' at Nagpur 15-16 Feb 1992"] Five years or so ago KK could state that "Between these two extreme views, there is the possibility of an approach which synthesises both the objective and subjective factors. There is an urgent need for Marxists to join on a broad international platform." With this we could only concur, but we did take issue with your view of the Russian Revolution, summed up in the sentence that followed, viz: "With all its limitations the Bolshevik practice between Feb. 1917 and Oct. 1917 provides a direction to a productive relationship between a Marxist organisation and the working class." Without going into the details, we argued that this revealed an essentially anarchistic view of October as a Bolshevik coup d'état, the beginning of an attempt to establish a party dictatorship over the working class. You didn't accept this and evidently saw no need to re-examine the strange conclusion you had drawn that the party which had raised the watchwords which best articulated the immediate aspirations and way forward for the working class [Down with the War and All Power to the Soviets], which had encouraged the Russian proletariat to see their revolution as the first step in the world revolution, which had organised and led the insurrection, that on the morning afterwards should no longer have "a productive relationship" with the working class. This is an untenable position. Either you have to recognise that the most class conscious workers, those most clear and active in the revolutionary struggle, were Bolsheviks (hence the Party's enormous following and influence over the working class as a
whole) and that this didn't change the morning after the insurrection; or you have to conclude that somehow the working class was duped into allowing soviet power to be substituted by a vicious party dictatorship. In the latter case, you have to immediately imply a separation between the party and the working class and downplay the significance of the political leadership accorded by the Bolsheviks [particularly Lenin with the April Theses] in the initial success of the revolution. Moreover, as you found, it is difficult to explain how "the writer of 'State and Revolution' came as you put it, to 'actively participate(s) in the formation of a standing army and secret police ...' only 3 or 4 months after October if you see the road to communism in idealist terms, simply as acting in consonance with communist philosophy, and ignore the fact that before the proletariat in Russia could get on with enjoying life in the transitional 'semi-state' they had to confront the armed reaction of their own bourgeoisie backed up by the military might of over a dozen imperialist powers. If the formation of the political police and the red army were mistakes they were mistakes forced on the proletariat by the exigencies of the situation. Granted, the Bolshevik Party ended up as the executor of a brutal state capitalist dictatorship in a society where the word 'soviet' was emptied of all meaningful content but this was after more than 2 years of absolutely devastating civil war and famine, not to mention the failure of the revolution in Germany and the rest of Europe. Literally hundreds of thousands of workers, particularly the most class conscious, BOLSHEVIK workers, died. Many more were forced by starvation to 'drift back to the countryside'.

The rest of the working class in Russia was on its knees. The influx of new members into the party in 1921 at the same time as factions were officially banned is, we think, symptomatic of what had happened to the Bolshevik Party: from the guiding light of the revolution to conservator of the Russian state. Excuse us dwelling on what you probably know very well but what we are trying to emphasise is that essentially the Bolshevik Party became what it did as a result of the process of defeat of the revolution. It was not the cause of that defeat. On the contrary, the initial victory of the proletariat in Russia would have been impossible without the Bolshevik Party. Don't you agree? And don't you agree that this is the crucial lesson we have to learn today in the face of the bourgeois version of history which tells us that all revolutions end up with reactionary terror and dictatorship, that all power corrupts and that political parties per se are 'anti-democratic' and bureaucratic (the 'iron law of oligarchy'). In other words, any attempt at revolutionary political organisation will end up as a reactionary force. This scenario is of course echoed by the anarchists and in the case of the Russian Revolution by the heirs of Hermann Gorter and the German Left, the council communists. (And the so-called libertarian communists who may not even be aware of their historical precursors.) The CWO began its political existence by thinking it could follow in Gorter's footsteps and build a "party of a new type" "hard as steel and clear as glass" and without hierarchies. However, we had to break from this legacy, not only in order to have a consistent analysis of the Russian Revolution (whose defeat the German Left explained essentially in terms of the hierarchical Bolshevik Party) but in order to explain our own existence as an organised, class conscious minority. Most importantly, we had to accept the necessity of the existence of such a 'precocious' minority of the class in the development of a wider class consciousness and the practical building of a revolutionary movement.

Once we did that (and again, this was a process shaped by practical experience not an instantaneous intellectual conversion) the difficult responsibility of building a clear political nucleus capable of influencing and politicising the daily class struggle has remained our central aim. Without, we hope, having a grossly exaggerated sense of our own importance, we accept that without a two-way relationship between revolutionary organisations and the wider class movement any sparks of class consciousness generated from day to day clashes between capital and labour will be dampened down by the unions and the capitalist left or simply burn themselves out through lack of political oxygen.

Our task, surely, is to encourage those sparks of consciousness to become revolutionary flames by drawing them together in the political organisation, or collectivity if you like, where they can develop into something more permanent that is fired by the process of political education. What worries us frankly, is that KK does not accept this responsibility out of a misguided fear that political leadership would disarm workers in struggle, would undermine their self-reliance and ability to organise independently and so on. In other words your trajectory is the self-contradictory path of 'libertarianism': a political organisation
which rejects the need to organise politically because all supposedly proletarian organisations are hierarchical rackets designed to "abduct" the struggle (like Jacques Camatte and his heirs, several of whom you claim to "have gained immensely from") and undermine the self-confidence of workers. If this is the case, then what becomes of Kamunist Kranti? Answer - limit your role to recognising and disseminating news of small independent struggles from which "new forms of organised activity and resistance could emerge". Laudable as this is, disseminating news of struggles is not the be all and end all of revolutionary work. Moreover, although we readily accept that there is a distinction between the organisations workers create for themselves when they begin to struggle outside the unions and a political organisation or 'collectivity', we certainly don't accept that this means political organisation is irrelevant to the class struggle. (If this is what you mean by the obtuse reference to "How some people in the name of the proletariat can and do organise is fundamentally different from how wage workers an do organised activity on a global scale.") The potentially class wide bodies which emerge during struggles are in general temporary organs which disintegrate or are diluted and co-opted by management as the struggle dies down. The proletarian political organisation, on the other hand, is a permanent acquisition of THE WORKING CLASS (not a set of usurpers ready to act in the name of and against the class) which not only disseminates news of struggles and wherever possible is actively involved in them, but which also aims to generate political consciousness by putting local struggles in the context of the broader, long term struggle for communism. And the best gauge of how successful we have been in developing class consciousness is how far we are able to strengthen the revolutionary political organisation. A revolutionary organisation which does not try to win over worker militants or, even worse, which pretends that it is not really interested in doing so and when it does pretends that it has nothing to teach them out of fear of being seen as just another political racket is really leaving potential communists in the dark [and arguably is one of the most dishonest of all].

This is not a question of elitist intellectuals thinking they have all the answers but of recognising that the struggle for communism is more than a question of organisational forms. By all means encourage workers to fight their battles collectively without any illusions that the unions will do it for them but we are in a better position to do this when we have communists in the workplace - as we know KK has in Faridabad. Now, are you saying that when workers struggle autonomously there are no leaders? This would be a complete fantasy. Of course the leaders are DIFFERENT leaders and are trusted by the rest of their workmates because they haven't been part of previous union sell-outs, management stooges or whatever. It is the most clear sighted people, with ideas about how to organise and the precise aims of the struggle who emerge as leaders and who end up being delegated by their fellow workers to the strike committee or whatever other collective body is created. Naturally this is an entirely different kind of leadership from the trade union official, with a permanent job paid to act in the service of capital. A genuine collective struggle demands regular mass meetings and the participation of everyone involved with worker delegates subject to recall. As the strikes in the winter of 1995/96 showed in France the steps towards such a struggle are not necessarily going to be entirely outside the union mentality and framework. (They are more likely to be if genuine communists are involved.) Unfortunately, despite the undoubtedly widespread cynicism and mistrust of the trades unions that exists today, it is not our experience at present that workers are itching to break out on their own: they are either apathetic or still following the union methods although with little expectation of success. Evidently the situation is different in India. In any case this does not alter our basic disagreement that the anti-capitalist struggle is not about getting rid of leaders and hierarchies as such. On the contrary, com units have to be ready to put forward alternative ways of Organising and be prepared to take on the responsibility of leadership. Simply focussing on 'anti-hierarchical' forms of struggle is doing a disservice to the working class and it is another fantasy to think that this too cannot be co-opted by capital. [We are reminded of the plethora of 'self-management' struggles in the Seventies which ended up with workers taking over bankrupt factories and self-managing their own, more intense, exploitation and redundancies. Today, for example, Japanese-style management techniques are based on the concept of anti-hierarchy: apparently workers are more ready to up productivity if they eat in the same canteens and think they are in the same boat as management.] In short, we think that 'anti-hierarchy' is not the core focus for communists.
Moreover, we think you are up a gum tree if you think that the struggle is against work as such. Against capitalist exploitation and wage labour, certainly but communism will not mean the abolition of the necessity to produce. It WILL mean that everyone becomes a producer and an end to the alienation of the majority of members of society from control over the means to determine how and what is produced.

As for the details of the Ballad itself, it doesn’t seem to us to be a very concrete history. If you are talking about the history of the conditions of exploitation over the last 200 years it’s not true, at least here in Europe, that things have steadily got worse since the inception of capitalism. Certainly wages and living standards have been reduced since the onset of the crisis in the early Seventies but conditions are still not the same as in the early days of the industrial revolution. The boom that followed the 2nd World War gave workers in the metropoles an unprecedented high standard of living; probably higher than the ‘lucrative’ middle class market that is currently emerging in India, according to Financial Times reports. The picture is a much more complex one than you make out. In our view it would have been much more useful if you’d written a systematic article on the evolution of wage labour in India with more conclusive evidence that living standards are worse than under feudalism. We’d also like to know to what extent globalisation (notably the transfer of jobs from the metropoles) is affecting the structure and conditions of the working class in India. Is a relatively better-off ‘workers aristocracy’ being created? More generally, we’d like to see you link the worsening conditions of the working class to the capitalist crisis. Is it really simply that conditions have declined for 200 years?

However this is not the main criticism we would like you to address. Our more fundamental concern is that KK seems to have forgotten that to reach communism both the Soviets [workers councils] and the party [the organised expression of communist consciousness] are necessary. We are sorry to see how far you have travelled down the spontaneist trajectory. To our mind it means that the efforts of KK will be increasingly wasted and irrelevant to the working class.

Internationalist greetings
ER  pp CWO/IBRP

June 16, 1997
Faridabad, India

Dear ER,

Received your e-mail of 5th June,1997. Thank you. We take this opportunity to engage with some issues emerging from your letter.

1) We are a little taken aback by your bold-bald assertion that “the boom that followed the IInd World War gave workers in the metropoles an unprecedented high standard of living”. Our indices for measuring the standard of living of wage-workers are:
   a) Intensity of work
   b) Rate of exploitation
   c) Duration of working-day

Does it need an elaboration to assert that all these three indices have risen exponentially especially after the IInd World War? We were under the impression that you agreed to this since you published our write-up, "The Working Year and The Working Day" in Workers Voice three years ago.

Galbraiths and McNamaras harp about the standard of living of wage-workers in units of TV antennas and dishwashers. It is very distressing to see the same logic underlying your assertions. What is understandable in Galbraith et al. is unpardonable when it comes from CWO/IBRP. To us it is a sad reflection of your distance from wage-workers’ lives.
2) Your understanding of wage-workers resistances and struggles in terms of big, unifocal (around a charter of demands on the basis of a factory, a branch of production or a region) mobilisations of wage-workers implies the dependence of wage-workers on leaders.

This is anachronistic in a milieu where all the traditional modes of organisations which imply representation have been discredited and/or rejected because they have been found to be counter-productive and dangerous by wage-workers at large. This rejection you are aware of but because of your distance from wage-workers you have theorised it as apathy among workers.

If your situation does not permit conversation with wage-workers at large, do read some management manuals wherein you would find the basic premise of all managerial theory & practice, strategy & tactics is that wage-workers are against work, against discipline, against productivity. It would be pertinent to talk with managers to figure out whether the workers are apathetic or highly creative in their resistances and struggles. Isn’t it strange that apathetic wage-workers have given rise to astronomical progress in surveillance industry, especially after 2nd World War? Reality is complex comrades!

3) What you condescendingly call "workplace skirmishes" are to us the smouldering coal seams burying away the foundations of capital. These simmering layers of anti-work, anti-discipline, anti-productivity acts are the foundations for imaginatively inventing non-hierarchical production relations and non-wage labour based social formation.

"Workplace skirmishes" is the terminology that managements and representatives-leaders routinely use in attempts to downplay, to counter and to erase from workers memory the steps that wage-workers take on their own. Constant attempts are made to channelise resistances and struggles into big unifocal events for which managements, representatives and state apparatus are geared to control, crush and manage. Efforts are made to keep alive these spectacular events as glorious defeats of wage-workers. It is not an accident that the language of bravery, heroism and martyrdom is routinely parroted by hierarchies to browbeat the meek, small, puny little wage-workers and sustain apparatuses of extraction, eradication and discipline.

4) Imaginative inventions of wage-workers are not taking place in thin air, just like the imaginations of "exceptionally talented or skilled individuals" but are grounded in historical experiences and memories. Memories which include the fact that the key political texts of revolutionary organisations have been published, translated and popularised through millions of copies by Stalin, Mao and their protégés throughout the world. Routine resistances and struggles of wage-workers are the only means by which any key political text can be validated, modified or invalidated. Debates and discussions without direct experiences of resistances and struggles cannot produce any imagination of a future without capital. If this were not so, marxist academicians would have been true communist visionaries.

5) "The nature of capitalist society and the capitalist state" that we have learnt from "workplace skirmishes" and the redundancy of big unifocal struggles are:

The concepts of capitalist and private property are dangerous and used by the left of capital to perpetuate class rule.
Lockouts by managements and strikes by leaders are twin strategies to impose retrenchments, wage-cuts, work intensifications.
Nationalisation, statisation, privatisation are one and the same thing.
Work intensity, rate of exploitation, working day have all increased.
The "labour aristocrats" are the most exploited sections amongst the wage-workers.
Starting from a leader in a small factory to a head of state constitute a continuum for the perpetuation of hierarchies.
The rate of exploitation of wage-workers in "advanced" regions and factories is much higher than in "backward" ones.

6) A little elaboration on what we do at workplace as there seems to be some misunderstanding about it. It
is a common practice at workplaces for small groups of workers on the basis of department, sections, shifts to take steps on their own (without leaders) against management practices routinely. These steps are not spontaneous but rather they are deliberate, thought out, conscious acts that read, evaluate, test and counter management strategies. The steps by themselves are small but the premeditation is deep and elaborate. There is no bravado and no bragging. We presently engage ourselves in bringing the importance of these steps into discussion amongst wage-workers at large and actively participate in their spread. At the same time, we grapple and analyse the ideological, theoretical and practical problems which are posed in these steps amongst wage-workers at large.

As the arena of these struggles broadens to say factory level, there is a tendency of leaderships of various kinds to emerge. We participate actively in undermining this tendency and attempt to evolve alternate strategies.

7) The point is to understand wage-workers resistances & struggles and the means & methods of spreading them to make them more effective so that the system as such is challenged. The space for leader based struggles is shrinking. Big unifocal struggles are being marginalised. For many it is a disaster. We welcome this.

In this situation there is a tremendous possibility of anti-hierarchical challenges on a global scale. In this context, holding on to the old modes of hierarchically organised practice sabotages the possibilities of emerging wage-workers struggles. This is the lesson we have drawn from events in Russia in this century. Communist Manifesto, volumes of Capital and other such key political texts in their millions were thrown on the faces of wage-workers to justify extreme repression and exploitation. Red covers of mitigating special circumstances were and are provided by fringe revolutionary organisations. As far as our historical experiences go we can be sure that the accentuation of wage-workers struggle would not lead to situations of red carpet welcome but rather situations with "special exigencies". Does this mean that coercive apparatuses will always be thrust on the wage-workers?

8) A basic premise underlying revolutionary organisations disturbs us a lot and requires some elaboration. Hierarchical societies do not just divide the world in exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled, but also in enlightened and ignorant, literates and illiterates, intelligent and idiots, preachers and pupils, leaders and led, cultured and uncultured, civilised and savage, brave and the meek, etc. All great managerial treatises and manuals be they in political theory, history, culture, surveillance, medicine or other matters of mundane affairs lend their arsenal to the perpetuation of these dichotomies, which are the basic premises of all hierarchies.

We strongly feel that communist practice and leadership are not coterminous. Rather they are in contradiction to each other. Let us not reproduce the rationality of hierarchies in our fight against hierarchies.

End of hierarchies is end of class rule.
Looking forward to your reply.

With greetings, Sher Singh for KK
Against Stratman's View of Marx

Dave Stratman asserts that the Marxist paradigm of history as an essentially deterministic one in which the working class appears as an essentially passive entity manipulated by economic forces beyond their control. The following quotation from Erich Fromm's *To have or to be?* which I recently came across puts a rather different slant on this:

Marx wrote (in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*) that 'free conscious activity' (i.e. human activity) is 'the species character of man'. Labour for him, represents human activity, and human activity is life. Capital, on the other hands, represents for Marx, the amassed, the past, and in the final analysis, the dead (*Grundrisse*). One cannot fully understand the affective charge which the struggle between capital and labour had for Marx unless one considers that for him it was a fight between aliveness and deadness, the present versus the past, people versus things, being versus having. For Marx the question was: Who should rule whom - should life rule the dead, or the dead life? Socialism for him represented a society in which life had won over the dead.

Marx's whole critique of capitalism and his vision of socialism are rooted in the concept that human self-activity is paralysed in the capitalist system and that the goal is to restore full humanity by restoring activity in all spheres of life.

Despite the formulations influenced by the classic economists, the cliche that Marx was a determinist, making human beings the passive objects of history and depriving them of their activity, is the very opposite of his thinking, as anyone who themselves read Marx, rather than a few isolated sentences taken out of context, will be easily convinced. Marx's views could not be more clearly expressed than they are in his own statement: 'History does nothing; it possesses no colossal riches, it "fights no fight". It is rather man - real, living man - who acts, possesses and fights everything. It is by no means "History" which uses man as a means to carry out its ends as if it were a person apart; rather History is nothing but the activity of man in pursuit of his ends' (Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*).

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(from p. 2)

answer his letter. David Stratman shares with the DB a letter written to Staughton Lynd, who stands on the more militant, left wing of what passes for a labor movement in the U.S. in the late nineties. As usual we end with some notes, announcements and short reviews.

BULLETIN MATTERS

Finances

The response to the statement of the DB’s financial difficulties in the last issue was far beyond my wildest dreams. We have never before raised this much money in a two-month period. As a result we are out of the red with a healthy surplus that will carry us through the turn of the year expenses for the non-profit bulk mailing fee ($85) and the January post office box rental fee ($40). These generous donations were most welcome, for the cost of copier repair was much more than I expected: $173.46 for two rollers, not one as I had expected; then an additional problem required a house call at $40. Figures below tell the story.

(to p. 26)
Dear DB readers:

The Stratman/ Marx debate is one I’ve been following for a while now. I have to respond, finally, to the comments in DB 84.

Adam Buick’s 2nd and 3rd reply statements seem to refute Stratman’s assertions quite nicely, but I’d like to sort out some of the issues and offer my observations.

Stratman tells us that Marx offers 1) a vision of a liberated society; and 2) a paradigm of history, the world, etc. Marx’s vision is apparently O.K. since with regard to his own idea of a revolutionary society, Stratman asks: “Will it be also a fulfillment of Marx’s vision of a liberated society? Yes, I think so.” (DB 84, p. 18)

But the alleged paradigm is a problem: “I have argued that Marx’s view of history rests on a paradigm which sees humanity as mere victims of a process beyond human control…” (Stratman, DB 84, p. 17)

Stratman then quotes Robin Cox who talks about Capitalism as a system. Cox characterizes this system as machine-like. This quote is to be taken such that it “fairly represents the Marxist view of the world.” The problem here is that Cox makes no mention of “the world,” rather, he is talking about Capitalism as a system, as a part of the world—the very part which must be overcome. I’ll return to the machine metaphor in a minute.

Marx’s view of the world and history, as elaborated over several decades, is far more complicated than Stratman admits or is aware of. And he seems to have completely missed the emphasis in Marx on the need for class-consciousness and praxis, conscious action undertaken to achieve revolutionary objectives.

In the latest “Monthly Review” (July-August ’97)—a Marxist Journal—the labor economist Sam Gindin writes:

With the publication of Marx’s Communist Manifesto 150 years ago, came modern socialism. To the many critiques of Capitalism that already existed at the time, one of Marx’s most important contributions was to add the dimension of agency: the emerging working class was placed at the center of a conscious movement to go beyond capitalism. As workers struggled within capitalism, they would, Marxists argued, transform themselves and develop the potential to transform society.

Coming from Monthly Review, I think that this can stand as "fairly representing the Marxist view of the world." Note that this quote can fit well with Cox’s characterization of capitalism as machinelike and it recognizes that overcoming the machine is the task of "a conscious movement" as "workers transform themselves" through praxis and "transform society."

So much for the "paradigm." And for "blind economic forces" without human actors.
The machine metaphor is important here. I don't know of any machines that aren't designed and operated by conscious human actors. So use of the machine metaphor doesn't preclude, in fact it requires that capitalism be understood as a "machine" designed and operated by ruling elites. As Chomsky has noted, ruling business elites are always "waging a bitter class war and are well aware of it." And this is at the heart of Marx's critique of ruling class ideology as well. Of course, in itself, a machine is blind and can escape the control of the designers and operators.

As for history, it may be the case that taken as a whole, as a totality, it can be understood as "blind" in the sense that it unfolds over vast reaches of time and space and so cannot be adequately characterized as the conscious product of anyone in particular. But this is taking history at a high level of abstraction. At each moment history is the product of, at the least, an interaction between a) conscious human actors, b) what is possible, and c) what has already taken place—Marx says something like this when he makes the claim that "human beings make their own history but not exactly as they please."

(To get an idea of some of the complexities of Marx's method, use of levels of abstraction, dialectics, etc., I would highly recommend Bertell Ollman's book *Dialectical Investigations.*

But what Stratman seems to be advocating is a kind of anti-marxist Marxism-without-Marx, since he shares Marx's vision of a liberated society, and, as demonstrated above, even the same paradigm—which includes an emphasis on conscious human agency both in the operation of capitalism as a system and in the revolutionary challenge to that system.

So how to account for this anti-marxist Marxism-without-Marx? I think the answer can be found in Stratman's statement that "Marxism is responsible for the evil outcomes of communist revolutions." Here Stratman is recognizing something important and real, though in a distorted form. Whether or not in reality Marxism is "responsible" for 20th century revolutionary evils matters little since it is a widespread perception of Marxism's responsibility that counts. In fact, the revolutions of the 20th century are far too complex to be blamed on "philosophy"—and if any ism can be held accountable it is Stalinism and its variants, and not Marxism, let alone Marx. Anyway, Marxism is too diverse and internally contentious to be so monolithically held "responsible."

But most people probably do connect Marxism and thus Marx to the revolutionary disasters of the 20th century, and as a result it's more than a little difficult trying to organize on the basis of "Marxism."

There seem to be two main options:

1) defend Marxism and/or Marx against widespread (mis)perceptions

2) use Marx's ideas while maintaining they aren't Marx's ideas and while denouncing him as "responsible" for 20th century crimes.

Sincerely, Gary Boswell
Dear Comrades,

I read with interest the e-mail exchange between Dave Stratman and Adam Buick (DB 84). In it, Dave makes critical reference to an excerpt from an article of mine recently published in the Socialist Standard which I think requires a response.

For the benefit of those who might not have read it I reproduce the excerpt in question:

Capitlism, we argue, operates according to inherent economic laws which are not amenable to political manipulation. What we perceive as very real problems through our human eyes - like unemployment, poverty, homelessness and hunger - are quite invisible from the perspective of the system itself. “The system” is analogous to a machine that has been designed to function according to a built-in programme. The only command it can recognise is the need to realise profit. Without profit, it grinds to a halt. Thus capitalism...continually reproduces the very problems we have to suffer in order to realise that goal (vol 92, No 110, p.5)

Dave argues in response as follows:

The striking thing about this remarkably machine-like view is the absence of human actors. The working class is present in this view only as “quite invisible” victims. It is difficult to imagine how these invisible victims are to organise a revolutionary movement. (It is also difficult to imagine how to top this image for “crude economic determinism”)

and

Cox argues that the working class is invisible to capitalism. This is demonstrably untrue. Capitalism, in the person of capitalists, are well aware that they are in a war with the working class, and they devote enormous resources to planning and executing this war, attempting always to control and suppress the power of workers. Workers are only invisible to Marxists whose machine-like paradigm of human society blinds them to the human drama unfolding before their eyes.

I would like to respond to Dave as follows:

1) Does capitalism operate according to “inherent economic laws”?

I believe that my representation of capitalism above is not an unreasonable one - though Dave reads into it something which is a complete (although no doubt an unwitting) travesty of my position - namely, a “crude economic determinism”. I'll deal with that later. For the moment I think it is necessary to first establish how he thinks capitalism as an economic system operates.

What I was saying in the above excerpt is that the way in which capitalism operates - and indeed must operate - has certain unavoidable consequences. The profit motive I argued is the fundamental cause of the social problems we face today - like unemployment, poverty, homelessness and hunger. That being so, such problems cannot be rectified within capitalism; the system is simply not geared to recognise and act upon them. All that it can respond to is “effective demand” - that is the ability of “consumers” to purchase goods at a price that will enable capitalist enterprises to realise a profit. So people starve not because society lacks the technological capacity to feed everyone but because they lack the purchasing power to acquire the food they need on the market.
I am at a loss to know what Dave finds wrong with such an analysis. Is he saying that capitalism is indeed capable of solving a problem like world hunger? If so I should like him to explain why such a problem exists in the first place given the technological capacity to eliminate it? If he is agrees with me that it cannot be solved under capitalism then what on earth is the point at issue? To say that it cannot be solved under capitalism is to effectively say that capitalism operates on the basis of certain economic laws (eg. no profit = no production) which are not amenable to political manipulation (reformism) and give rise to such problems.

If Dave disagrees with the notion that capitalism is subject to its own inherent economic laws which rule out the prospect of a solution to such problems within capitalism, then it seems to me that we are left with only one or two possible explanations for the existence of such problems. (Incidentally, if capitalism is not the cause of such problems why bother trying to get rid of the system?)

Firstly, we could say that such problems are the fault of those who are its prime victims. According to this view people starve because in effect they chose to, because they do not have the gumption to take the necessary steps to improve their lot. Indeed, this was how the ruling class tended to explain away the poverty and slums of the Victorian era. It went along with notions about the "degeneration of the European race" which led to a growth of interest in eugenics as a pseudo-science. I do not for one moment suspect that Dave subscribes to such balderdash so this option need not detain us any longer.

Secondly, we could say that such problems arise because in effect society allows them to - because it does not exert the necessary willpower and determination to remedy them. But if that is what Dave believes I should like him to explain why it is that according to him "we in ND assume that most people already want what the (World Socialist Movement) calls socialism and we call revolutionary democracy". What kind of people is it who apparently want revolutionary democracy yet are prepared to acquiesce in a state of affairs where people starve while food rots? So by reductio ad absurdum this argument too cannot provide an adequate explanation and we are left with the only possible explanation which is that it is the system itself which is the root cause of such an obscene contradiction like the above. And if you are talking about the system you are talking about its mode of operation, the economic laws that regulate its behaviour.

(Incidentally while we are on the subject could Dave perhaps tells us why he is so certain that most people already "want" socialism or revolutionary democracy? Forgive me for saying so but I rather thought that people today overwhelmingly voted for capitalist political parties. I can appreciate abstaining from voting but millions upon millions of them actually bother to vote and to vote not for socialism but, in effect, capitalism. Also, why is the movement for socialism/revolutionary democracy so small if most people want what we want? It is not simply of them not having heard of us; most people who have in effect reject us. I will develop this further.)

2) Does the fact that capitalism is subject to "inherent economic laws" equate with "crude economic determinism"?

The short answer is absolutely not! This however is the real problem with Dave's argument. I don't believe he actually disagrees with our analysis of how capitalism operates yet at the same he thinks that to talk about a system that operates according to its own built-in imperatives is to eliminate human beings from the picture. So it offends his deep-seated humanism. However, he is reading into my "machine-like" representation of capitalism
something which is not there. If my representation of capitalism is machine-like that is only because, like it or not, that is the way actually capitalism operates - like a machine - which is why I want to establish whether Dave believes it can operate in some other fashion.

If I appear to be eliminating human beings from the picture that is because I am only looking at one small part of the picture; the impersonal machinations of market forces is not and can never be, the whole picture. Yet Dave thinks this makes me a "crude economic determinist"

Sorry, Dave, but I have to disagree. I do not think you have properly thought through what the notion of economic determinism entails. In a nutshell it means the wholesale reduction of human consciousness to economic factors. In this context we are referring to the role of human actors in bringing about social change. An economic determinist position would be one that postulated history as the working out of vast impersonal economic forces acting upon and through such actors who in their thoughts and actions simply "reflect" a pre-programmed sequence of cause and effect. This would lead one to argue, for example, that socialism/communism was the inevitable consequence of capitalism’s contradictions.

I emphatically reject this point of view and have done so on more than one occasion in past contributions to DB. Indeed, I believe I stated quite explicitly in the article Dave refers to that socialism was NOT inevitable, anymore than the continuation of capitalism was. We ALWAYS have a choice about what kind of future we want even though we do not make that choice in a social vacuum. I stand by my contention and that of the SPGB that socialism can only come about through socialist consciousness. A majority of workers have to want and understand what socialism means for it to happen.

Saying that capitalism operates in machine-like fashion is most certainly not tantamount to reducing human beings to little cogs in an unfolding drama not of their making. On the contrary it is because we are human beings with our human needs and desires, because we are able RE-ACT against a system that constantly seeks to dehumanise us, that socialism is possible and without which it would be impossible. Its is utterly absurd to argue as Dave does that the view I espouse - the Marxian paradigm - as he puts it - sees the working class as the "quite invisible" victims of capitalism. On the contrary, the working class is very visible to me; I belong to it and am involved in the struggles of my fellow workers.

He seems to have completely missed the point about what he calls the "Marxist paradigm" that it is capitalism which attempts to make the working class invisible, which ignores our real needs, which seeks to draw a veil over the class basis of our struggles and to divert us from their ultimate goal - our emancipation as human beings through socialism. In fact, you cannot separate those struggles and that goal. The latter would not arise, would be rendered meaningless, without the former; the former could not lead to anything different without the latter - that is, we would be perpetually stuck in the treadmill of capitalism.

Indeed this is what worries about Dave's whole approach to politics. He seems to think that struggle per se AUTOMATICALLY leads to socialism - otherwise why distinguish his approach from our's in the World Socialist Movement which he characterises as "persuading people that socialism would be a good solution to our problems"? In fact Dave's approach is rather closer (at least potentially) to the "crude economic determinism" he accuses the WSM of. I don't say he actually adopts a crude economic determinism because elsewhere he (somewhat confusingly) argues that "we show that class struggle is implicitly revolutionary and the way forward is to make the implicit underlying revolutionary goals of struggle explicit". Well what on earth is the difference between THAT and "persuading people that socialism would be a good solution to our problems". Frankly, there is none.
So let us have none of this nonsense about reifying the nature of "class struggle". In fact, this is what the Leninists and Trotskyists do when they tell us that workers are too stupid to comprehend socialism. Therefore, instead of trying to persuade workers that socialism is a good thing, they see their role as one of "entering" the class struggle (as if the class struggle was a matter of choice for workers) to encourage workers to become more militant in the belief that when their demands are not met they will turn to the "professional revolutionaries" to lead them to Valhalla (even though they, "the workers", are not required to know what this socialist Valhalla would be like). This is a recipe for banging one's head against a brick wall in the expectation that it will bring enlightenment. It won't. A far more likely outcome as history painfully demonstrates would be to move towards authoritarian statism.

That is not what any of us want. Indeed, it is the very last thing any of us could want. Let us face the fact that we have an enormous task ahead of us. Let us not delude ourselves with silly notions that "most people already want (socialism or revolutionary democracy)". They don't - even if they potentially want it. And mass socialist consciousness is not going to come automatically as a crude economic determinist position would have it. We have to be active agents in this process of revolutionary change, persuading our fellow workers by the conviction and logic of our case that such a change would be good for all of us. In short, we have to make our own history. We can no longer allow ourselves to remain spectators in the "unfolding drama" of history which is unfortunately what most workers allow themselves to be - whatever Dave may think.

In the end what Dave wants and what we in the World Socialist Movement amounts to the same thing. Let us agree to differ where genuine differences exists but, for heavens sakes, let us not allow ill-founded obstacles to prevent us - and I include here representatives from other organisations contributing to DS - from building on what we have in common. And let's face it what we have in common - our rejection of the market ans the state - is far more important than what divides us.

If Marxism is just another swearword in Dave's political lexicon then so be it - Marx himself was supposed to have wryly remarked that he was no Marxist. After all, it's not the label on the bottle that really counts but the quality of its contents.

Fraternally

Robin Cox
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Dear DB

You weren't exaggerating in your blurb of DB 83 when you said that The De Leonist Review's updating of the Socialist Industrial Union program "comes under heavy fire". Therefore while we do not wish to prolong the debate ad nauseam, it seems that we must at least respond to this fire.

As regards the polemic, DELEONIST POLITICAL GOVERNMENT: It should be noted that the DDEC (The Daniel De Leon Election Committee) made a bad error by asserting that "Briefly, for the record, The DeLeonist Society of Canada claims that after Daniel De Leon's death in 1914 the Socialist Labor Party changed its concept of the future socialist society by taking the vote away from the people and transferring it to those who were useful producers." Where did we claim this? For the rest, we regret that although we, "like the Energizer bunny, kept going and going" with our new idea, the DDEC has nevertheless still been unable to grasp it. We can only hope that our following response to Irving Silvey's latest offering, AN SIU RE-VISTA'D, will help clarify the matter for the DDEC as well as for any other Discussion Bulletin readers who may be having difficulty with it.

*  

Well then, as regards AN SIU RE-VISTA'D: Since Mr. Silvey had latterly appeared more interested in "natural lore" than in a socialist program, we concluded that we had come to a parting of the ways--he to go his way, we to go ours. But how wrong we were can be measured by the sheer length of this, his renewed attack on our thesis, DEMOCRACY--POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL--an attack which we cannot very well ignore.

Our position was, and remains, that a near century of demographic change since De Leon's formulation of the Socialist Industrial Union has produced a shortfall of democracy serious enough to necessitate an updating of the De Leonist program being projected by the Socialist Labor Party. Nor were we alone in sensing that something should be done! Indeed, as is crystal clear from the minutes of the proceedings of the SLP's 1978 National Executive Committee session, there was even then an element within the SLP itself who felt that this "sea change" should not be ignored. Quoting as follows from the report of the Weekly People Staff:

"Furthermore, how would we resolve the broader political questions that will surely come up in a new society? Certainly, it can be expected that like-minded individuals will try to band together into organizations to express their viewpoints. What will these organizations be if not political organizations?"

"Are we to interpret the party's program to mean that workers can express their viewpoints as isolated individuals in an SIU, but not as an organized group? And what would happen to them if they did organize a political group to espouse a viewpoint? Would we support their forcible repression? In short, how would diverse views find an outlet in a socialist industrial union setup? These are not idle questions.

"The last point that we would like to raise at this time concerns the functioning of the democratic setup under socialism. Our party rightfully claims that our program, if enacted, would lead to a flowering of democracy--that it would be far more encompassing and would involve every worker on the job. But what about those not working?"

"According to some of our propaganda, they apparently would have no vote--"
no way to express their viewpoints. For example, in our questions and answers pamphlet, the party says, 'Under socialism, all authority will be exercised by the useful producers.'

"With that comment, we have just excluded millions of members of our class who are not actively engaged in production from expressing their opinion under socialism. What about workers who are retired, or who are not working for one reason or another, or who are students? Are these persons not going to have any voice at all in the new society? And if so, how is it to be exercised, and how do they fit into the outline of socialist industrial unionism that appears on the chart? We think that these questions deserve serious consideration.

"Then, too, what about questions and viewpoints that cut across industrial lines--questions involving women, racial minorities and a host of others. Granted, many of these questions will be inherited from capitalism and will, in time, be largely negated by the full flowering of socialist society. But they will not evaporate on the day of the revolution. Socialist society will have to deal with them, but how is this allowed for in our program of socialist industrial unionism?...."

Obviously, the SLP took no action to rectify the aforesaid deficiency—a deficiency which, growing worse with the years, finally impelled us to launch our thesis recommending that socialist democracy be a composite of both political and industrial democracy.

In our opinion, Silvey’s contributions to the debate have had a Tower of Babel quality about them. Thus now, his performance vis-a-vis the phrase political democracy seems to confront the issue as willingly as a cat takes to water. To get at the issue we will have to steer a course away from Babel toward the dictionary. True, when it comes to socialist terms the dictionary must be used with caution. However, with that qualification we will continue to use it as an invaluable aid in our effort to make ourselves understood. For example, we captioned our thesis DEMOCRACY--POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL but what do we mean by these terms? From our Webster we select the following definitions that most clearly express the particular usages that are germane to our argument:

Democracy: 1b: "a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usu. involving periodically held free elections."

Political: la: "of or relating to government, a government, or the conduct of government."

Industrial: 2: "characterized by highly developed industries [an -- nation]."

Industry: 2d: "manufacturing activity as a whole [the nation's -- ]."

But political democracy is by no means the only phrase on which Silvey throws dust. Another such is to be found on page 18 of Discussion Bulletin 83, where body politic becomes "a phrase usually alluding to a group of people gathered together for no reason other than to share body heat." Rejecting this Silveyism as drollery we again turn to Webster for authority and there select the definition which is appropriate to our context, viz: "a group of persons politically organized under a single governmental
authority." And so it goes. The foregoing examples appear to be characteristic of Silvey's approach to the subject at hand. They reveal what amounts to recourse to poetic license in the handling of sociologic terms --a license that ethics cannot grant to any who profess Socialism.

What is even more inexcusable is Silvey's penchant for putting words in our mouth that were not of our making. A slip is one thing but how can we regard as a principled debater one who repeatedly misquotes us as Silvey does on page 19 of DB 83? Where did we use the phrase "inactive worker"? --a phrase which in our socialist context is an obvious contradiction of terms! And where did we use "non-useful producer"? Our context being Socialism, we of course do not conceive of any non-useful producers!

But we now come to what must surely be one of the worst misconceptions that ever blocked socialist progress! Rooted in an evident misreading of terms, it has become an erroneous habit of thought dead set against a contrary thought. As an understanding of this matter is crucial to an understanding of our position, we sought time after time from our thesis onward to break through this particular wall which has been standing in the way of reasoned debate.

A lead-in to the question is to be found on page 18 in Silvey's following allegation:

"What confounds some of us who have paid attention to Mr. Anonyspook DeLeoscan's [The Canadian De Leonist Society's] theorizing is his [their] unstated assumption that the SIU would, or could, be an agency that thwarts the satisfaction of social needs ....Anonyspook [The Canadian De Leonist Society] confuses SIU administration with political machinery, which alone is toothed expressly for such purpose."

In the first place it should be obvious that an "SIU administration" that functioned to "thwart the satisfaction of social needs" could be only a bogus SIU administration! But there is also something here that may be less obvious to most readers. This is Silvey's colossal error that political machinery is "toothed expressly for such purpose"--i.e., could forever be nothing else but an instrument of class rule! It is Silvey, not Anonyspook, who is confused. Silvey needs to take up a study of Lewis Henry Morgan, the great American anthropologist whose work was highly praised by both Marx and Engels, as well as by De Leon. He needs to break with the stereotype view of political machinery. He needs to confront the anomaly of his present position that industrial machinery, but not political machinery, is amenable to socialization. He needs to perceive that it is not a question of the intrinsic capability of an industrial or a political machine but, on the contrary, it is a question of who will have control of the machine!

All of which highlights the fallacy of Silvey's page 17 contention: "Do away with proprietary distinctions and the political nucleus falls to bits."

In sum, the State (the class-ruled State) employs political machinery, it by no means follows that abolition of the State must needs signify abolition of political machinery. We think that a Revolutionary Movement could well decide to have this machinery serve Democracy!
So now to proceed. While we of course do not propose to waste valuable time commenting on each of Silvey's veritable cornucopia of snide remarks, there is one insinuation in particular that will serve to characterize the moral caliber of the lot. Thus Silvey's libelous innuendo on page 20 that The De Leonist Society of Canada has "exchanged Socialism's [i.e., the SLP's] cry of 'All power to the SIU' for 'All power to the Party.'" Here, surely, Silvey must know better, must know where we stand! The single fact that as De Leonists we have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Socialist Industrial Union as THE POWER to safeguard the RIGHT of a socialist political victory against possible "Party" machinations—that fact alone brands despicable Silvey's effort to equate us with the Bolsheviks. But that is not all. With what conscience does Silvey rewrite Russia's Bolshevik revolutionary history as a failed experiment in political democracy—and fob off the rewrite as an argument against a fusion of political and industrial democracy? Here again, what are the facts that belie Silvey's "analogous" history concoction—"the collapse of the lengthy Russian attempt at a political administration of 'social issues' within an industrial society..."?

Fact: Russia was not an industrial society in 1917 or for a long time after. (Still isn't in many respects.)
Fact: Nor did the Bolsheviks come to power through a political election but through a coup. The result was what they called a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" which amounted to a State dictatorship by a ruling few.
Fact: By contrast what we are proposing is that the working class organize politically to deliver a ballot mandate for Socialism. This implies a majority in society being politically conscious, prepared not only to vote Capitalism out but to administer social policy through their elected representatives at all levels.
Fact: We also advocate SIU organization to enable the active workers to back up that mandate by taking, holding and operating the industrial means of life in society's interest.
Fact: In short, we hold that a socialist society (in its essential aspects) must be established instantly in order to avoid the pitfalls of the transition period that was necessary in Russia due to a lack of both industrial development and a working-class political majority.

In addition to the foregoing there are numerous loose ends scattered throughout AN SIU RE-VISTA'D that do the author no credit. For instance:

* On page 18, Silvey has it that we "reject DeLeon's assertions regarding the benefits of a Socialist society administered by a working class[!] united in one great Socialist Industrial Union..." This is news! It is news that De Leon would have a working class administer a classless society! But more earthshaking by far is the news that altho we regard a nationwide, integrally organized SIU as an indispensable instrument of socialist production and distribution, we nevertheless "reject" it!
* Again on page 18 we read: "A considerable amount of artful craft was required in the manufacture of Anonyspook's [The Canadian De Leonist Society's] determination to perform major surgery on DeLeonism." Major surgery? We submit that De Leonism would be enhanced by the addition of Political Democracy to Industrial Democracy. Does "major surgery" accurately describe our proposal?
* On page 19 Silvey amuses himself by making sport of demography.
It did not take any "word wizardry" on our part to recognize as a fact of life an ever-changing population distribution, especially as regards age. We do note, however, that in an apparent bid to avoid facing this fact it is Silvey himself who resorts to word wizardry.

* Again on page 19, and again relating to demography, we are mystified why Silvey thinks he has "challenged" us on "this issue." So "retired workers" and "housewives" (housewives!) are "capitalist euphemisms" and "capitalist exemplars," are they? Our question remains: How are these important segments of society to be incorporated in the SIU? To paraphrase Silvey's remark about the Socialist Labor Party: It would be nice if he himself were disposed to clarify his concept of the SIU.

* And yet again on page 19 as regards the same issue, we collide against the following incredible Silveyan pronouncement: "Scamper through SLP documentation as he wishes [as they wish], the odds are against Mr. Anonymspook DeLeoscan [The Canadian De Leonist Society] stumbling over any[[!] pro-
grammatic representation that either specifically, or otherwise, disquali-
ifies any[[!] member of Socialist society from SIU affiliation." Here Silvey really outdoes himself, leading us to conclude that he is blind in one eye and has a problem seeing out of the other! It's a question of documenta-
tion, is it? We are pleased to oblige with some examples from examples galore. Merely consider: (1) Our reply to Ann Braunstein, early in the de-
bate, in which we cited three examples from SLP literature itself. (See The De Leonist Review of May-June, 1995, also Discussion Bulletin 74.)

(2) We gave another example in The Report of the Weekly People Staff to the SLP of America's 1978 NEC Session. (See page 1 of this document.)

(3) For Silvey's benefit we will give yet another example, to wit: Excerpts from The People's August 22, 1992 QUESTION PERIOD column as follows:

"What role will retired senior citizens, and persons unable to work, play in the administration of socialist society? You keep referring to power in the hands of 'the worker.' Shouldn't these other members of society have some share of the power as well?"

* Since the socialist industrial unions that form the basis of socialist self-government will be working bodies organized and operating at the workplace, and since they will be primarily concerned with the administration of production and distribution, it would seem self-evident that re-
tired workers and persons too incapacitated to work would not be directly involved in governing socialist society.

"However, it must be borne in mind that the socialist industrial union program provides a basic guide for organizing and bringing about a socialist society and a basic framework for administering it--it is not an exact blueprint and it does not presume to determine in advance what workers will or will not decide once socialism is established. Therefore, a so-
cialist society could set up other, auxiliary forms of representation for those not directly participating in the production or distribution of goods or services--if it decided there was a need for such representation. It is also possible that some decisions of a general nature, affecting so-
ciety as a whole, could be made by general referendum vote...."

* Turning now to page 20, we see that Silvey thinks to floor us with the following "wisdom":

"A matter which should be of great importance to such an ardent advo-
cate [such ardent advocates] of "democracy" but ignored by him [by us], is the fact that this plan of his [of ours] still leaves "SIU members" with one more vote than "non-SIU members". "SIU members" get to vote on both 'industrial policy' AND on 'social policy'. Whereas, "non-SIU members" vote ONLY on 'social policy'. May not this give 'the people as a whole' cause to complain about a possible inequality in the process? Will it not make for an unbalanced distribution of power? After all, two against one does seem a bit unfair." (Our emphasis.)

First as regards Silvey's misreading of our thesis, namely that "non-SIU members" will "get to vote" "ONLY on 'social policy'." We refer him back to Webster and our usage of political to mean "of, relating to, or concerned with the making as distinguished from the administration of government policy." (Our emphasis.) Next we refer him to our thesis, where-in we submit that industrial policy is one of the quintessential issues that should be decided by society rather than by the work force alone! At the same time we think it should go without saying that voting on questions of industrial administration is, necessarily, the prerogative of the SIU members. And here, Silvey to the contrary, we did in fact acknowledge this "imbalance" with the comment that under our plan SIU members would be "doubly blessed." (See The De Leonist Review of May-June, 1995, also Discussion Bulletin 74.)

So who has ignored what? Not only has Silvey ignored our careful distinction between policy making and policy administration but he has ignored the serious concern to which we have repeatedly drawn attention—that as it stands, the SLP plan would unavoidably disfranchise all but the work force, all but the SIU members, all but those actively engaged in social production!

Silvey wants to be "fair," he wants to be "democratic." There is a choice to be made between the plan advocated by The Socialist Labor Party and the plan advocated by The De Leonist Society of Canada. Under the former, non-SIU members will surrender their right to vote on government policy. Under the latter, non-SIU members together with SIU members will enjoy a universal political vote. Which plan does Silvey think more fair, more democratic?

* Nor are we disposed to overlook the aspersions and prejudicial forays against us which Silvey lets fly on pages 20-22 inclusive concerning our involvement in your "Einstein issue." For one thing, we are puzzled why, if Silvey grants as he does that the question at issue "is of great moment," does he then suggest that our "answer to the question no longer bore repeating." For another thing, in view of what we believe was our clip and clear anti-revisionist, revolutionary stance (a posture that we think can be easily recognized as such by any who are even slightly acquainted with De Leonism), Silvey's scurrilous attempt to here tar us with the reformist brush of Social Democracy (his allegation that we have a "social democratic paternity") must be seen to be as slanderous as was his earlier slanderous implication that our program was comparable to the Bolshevik program. That aside, at this juncture it again becomes evident that Silvey is either unwilling or unable to grasp the truth that the political field will be either democratic or otherwise depending on WHO has control of the economic field! At the same time, Silvey's accusation that we "perpetrate a scam" in separating "social" concerns from "industrial" concerns is, to say the very least, ill-considered. We think that even he could comprehend, if he tried, the world of difference that exists between matters of management per se, of an industrial complex, and the
matter of POLICIES under which the industrial complex is to be managed!

Let's have no more babolism or backbiting! The point we made as regards Einstein's query was simply that while a combination of political and industrial democracy appeared to us to afford the fullest attainable measure of democracy, we were not prepared to suggest that it could be sustained without the exercise of constant vigilance. Was our meaning not clear? If Silvey has a better plan for democracy, we have yet to hear it.

* As to "Louis Morgan's opinion" (Lewis Henry Morgan's opinion): It would no doubt surprise Silvey to learn that Morgan—a former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and widely regarded as the founder of the science of Anthropology—was "personally acquainted" with a "way of life" that not only predated ancient Greece but did so by eons! That personal acquaintance arose from the fact that Morgan was adopted by the Hawk gens of the Iroquois Seneca tribe! Indeed, Morgan lived among the Iroquois for some time and this close association provided the basis for his exhaustive study of the gentle society of our remote ancestors and of what became the first great plan of government in human existence. Moreover it was that first-hand acquaintance that helped him produce his authoritative explanation of the evolution of tribal society into political society. Painstakingly, Morgan not only revealed the roots of political democracy but produced evidence (corroborated by Chicago University's W. H. McNeill in his The Rise of the West, 1963) that contrary to the opinion of John L. McKenzie of Loyola University, the ancient Greeks did in fact over an extended period of time display a remarkable capacity for self-government! Quoting from Morgan's masterwork, Ancient Society, as follows:

"Cleisthenes...placed the Athenian political system upon the foundation on which it remained to the close of the independent existence of the commonwealth." (Our emphasis.)

"The classes...both those instituted by Theseus and those afterwards created by Solon, disappeared after the time of Cleisthenes."

"Usurpations not unlikely occurred, followed by controversies...but they [the Athenians] never lost their liberties, or those ideas of freedom and of the right of self-government which had been their inheritance in all ages."

No, Morgan's monumental research is not to be dismissed by any supporter of the socialist cause! Through Morgan we learn of one of the greatest advances ever made in human history—now in a final breakthrough to the concept of the geographic constituency, the unit of political democracy, Cleisthenes made what was unquestionably a priceless bequest to humanity. Cleansed of class rule, shall political democracy not now be added to De Leon's equally precious legacy of industrial democracy?

* Silvey's conclusion to Part One of his AN SIU RE-VISTA'D appears as perplexing to us as did his conclusion to his THE NITTY AND THE GROSSY, which you reproduced in DB 7. Then we were left wondering how "natural lore" would point the way to "a genuine socialist society." Now we are left won-
dering at Silvey's suggestion that whereas Einstein sought "a unification of the various laws of nature under a single over-arching theory of the universe. In testimony to his scientific acumen what better than to ob-
erve a like goal for Socialism?"

Silvey is far ahead, yet far behind! There seems little doubt that Socialism, IF IT IS WON, would in due course and in addition to its many other concerns, provide ample means for the advancement of the physical sci-
ences. At this time, however, we ourselves are wholly concerned with the question of how society can WIN Socialism--how society can win the greatest measure of democracy that is winnable. It is here that Silvey has time after time disappointed us. We are still waiting for him to show us how, if not through political democracy, ALL segments of society will be enabled to join in the determination of government policy.

Sincerely,
THE DE LEONIST SOCIETY OF CANADA

(from p. 12)

Contributions: Eddie Tews $70; Anonymous $100; Joe Tupper $32; Tom Tully $15; Frank Girard $22;
Steve Hoyle $60; Dick Weideman $60; Anthony King $100; Paula Jones $5; Phillip Colligan $22;
Harry Siitonen $12, Harvey Coble $.50; Heinrich Fleischer $2; Mario Petrelli $6; Anonymous $5. Total
$509.50. Thank you, comrades.

BALANCE June 24, 1997 Deficit $23.45

RECEIPTS
Contributions $ 509.50
Subs and sales 129.00
Total $ 638.50

DISBURSEMENTS
Postage $ 90.00
Printing 44.35
Copier repair (1/2) 106.73
Bank charges 4.00
Canadian check disc 4.49
Postage due 8.00
Total $357.98

BALANCE August 24, 1997 $357.98

Fraternally submitted,

Frank Girard
for the DB
C.A.L. Press did not "set Black the job of refuting" Murray Bookchin; it was very nearly the other way around -- the felt urgency of a comprehensive and timely critique of *Social Anarchism* or *Lifestyle Anarchism* catalyzed the formation of this new publishing collective (consisting of Paul Z. Simon, John Zerzan, and *Anarchy*’s Jason McQuinn). I wrote the book before I sought out a publisher. No one-shot or vanity press, C.A.L. Press intends to be a permanent post-leftist revolutionary presence, its future books to include a reprint of Zerzan’s *Elements of Refusal* and Fredy Perlman’s *Festschrift* edited by John Moore.

Frank Girard professes not to understand what I mean by (since I never define the term) leftism: "Among revolutionary socialists leftism is a term of reproach, used as a synonym for reformism." That is hardly a satisfactory definition of leftism, since reformism is not necessarily left-wing by any standard (welfare reform, privatization, deregulation, etc.) unless you make it a definition flat -- in which case Girard’s definition is circular and empty. I am well aware how the ultra left uses the term. I use it that way myself, except that leftism-qua-reformism has for me a somewhat broader extension -- it refers of course to Leninists and social democrats as Girard uses the word, but it also refers to the ideologies of men like Murray Bookchin and Frank Girard. If I have never offered a necessary-and-sufficient conditions, dictionary-style definition of leftism, neither has Bookchin (who explicitly affirms it) or Girard. Whatever the sense (meaning), the reference (extension) is clear enough: Frank Girard knows very well what I am talking about. And he knows I’m talking about, among others, him.

Girard quotes me to suggest I equate leftism with Marxism, based on my early (p.16) characterization of anarchism as "anarchism minus Marxism." That was an introductory approximation -- appearing in the "introduction," which wears that label for a reason -- which was meant to be nuanced by the following 144 pages. On p. 144 I relate that "In some particulars, -- as I’ve come to appreciate, somewhat to my surprise, in writing this essay, -- traditional anarchist themes and practices are more attuned to popular predilections than ever before." I’d even stated that the retention by anarchists of vestiges of leftism was "not always a bad thing" (p. 141). I do not, in principle, either privilege or prescribe any source of insight even Marxism or Christianity. Girard is making the intellectual’s cardinal mistake of quibbling over words as an end in itself, unrelated to their purpose, which is to arrive at understanding.

Lest I be misunderstood, I do not define leftism as Marxism or vice versa, and I regret it if I have left that impression. But here again the distinction between meaning and reference is useful. There have been non-Marxist leftisms, such as those of Owen, St.-Simon, Blanc, the Fabian Socialists, and such anarchists as Proudhon and Kropotkin. Non-Marxist leftism is theoretically possible, but in fact no longer exists. Marxism may not mean leftism exactly, but in practice all leftists are more or less Marxists, no matter how stridently they fulminate against the apostasy of other leftists. Let’s test my theory. Frank Girard, are you a Marxist? Yes or no?

I find it hard to believe that Comrade Girard in good faith believes, as he writes, that I disparage as leftism and Marxism "any anarchist tendency whose goal is a new social system." That simply buys into Murray Bookchin’s incoherent definitions of, and
distinction between “social anarchism” (good) and lifestyle anarchism” (bad). The main arguments of my book are two: (1) “lifestyle anarchism” is an incoherent construct, and (2) the usual suspects Bookchin lumps together as lifestyle anarchists are generally revolutionary anarchists, whereas Bookchin, a municipal statist, is neither a revolutionary nor an anarchist. By any reasonable use of the words, most “lifestyle anarchists” are social anarchists whereas Bookchin is not. Anybody who finds this conclusion astounding should read my book, I daresay damned near nobody will disagree. Certainly my goal is a new social system and one a lot more radically new than anything Bookchin calls for.

My rude “personal attacks” — the pretext by which Girard long ago banned me from these pages — are only payback. I haven’t read Comrade Girard’s review of the Bookchin diatribe, but if he failed to notice that Bookchin is the premiere gutter-mouth personal attacker of our epoch, this must have been as a courtesy extended to a fellow septuagenarian leftist who has perhaps as much difficulty controlling his mouth as his bowels. Did the Comrade report that Bookchin referred to his self-appointed enemies as decadent, Fascist, lumpen, irrational, petit-bourgeois, Yuppie, mystical, degenerate, reactionary, etc. — the entire content-free Stalinist arsenal of abuse? Never (I am happy to say) have I had stronger justification for integrating personal and political attacks. If he can dish it out he can fucking well take it, or take a hike.

We real revolutionaries will be forwarding the revolutionary project long after the leftist Grumpy Old Men have taken their dirt naps. For what you gave us that was useful, thanks. For the rest (too much of it), we will bury that with you. Life belongs to the living.

Bob Black

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RE THE REVIEW OF BOB BLACK’S BOOK

Let me begin by thanking Bob Black for setting me and DB readers straight: C.A.L. Press didn’t commission Black to write Anarchy After Leftism, rather his book “catalyzed its formation.”

It strikes me that a book titled Anarchism After Leftism owes its readers a working definition of leftism. In three paragraphs of his letter Black wrestles with a definition and arrives nowhere. Paragraph one, instead of attempting to define leftism concentrates on a criticism of the way I said the term is understood among revolutionary socialists. It ends with the assertion that Bookchin and I are leftists, an interesting game play, but not to the point.

Paragraph two consists of an elaborate verbal dance around the statement in his book that anarchy after leftism means anarchism minus Marxism, from which I inferred that he identified leftism with Marxism. After informing us that “That was an introductory approximation,” he thrashes around for a couple of sentences and fetches up by stating that I quibble over words “as an end in itself.” But aren’t words the means by which understanding arises? In a book titled Anarchy after Leftism what word is more important to that end than “leftism”?

In paragraph three he begins, “Lest I be misunderstood, I do not define leftism as Marxism or
vice versa..." Then a couple of sentence later, "Marxism may not mean leftism exactly but in practice all leftists are more or less Marxists...." The paragraph ends in Black style with a non sequitur asking whether I am a Marxist.

Next he provides us with a couple of unsupported—except by emphasis—contentions: 1) "Lifestyle anarchism is an incoherent construct" and 2) "lifestyle anarchists are generally revolutionary anarchists" and "most lifestyle anarchists are social anarchists whereas Bookchin is not." As to the "new social system" Black claims as his goal, I think most of us would like to see an outline.

I'll break the page 2 rule about personal attacks and leave the last two paragraphs for readers as samples of the civility level of Black's discourse. I also wish to add that he was never "banned" from the Discussion Bulletin. Some years ago I returned a letter containing a vile—not "rude"—attack on his opponent of the moment and asked him to clean it up for publication. He didn't do so. Finally I see Bookchin's sometimes forceful attacks on an ideology he opposes as fundamentally different from the mean-spirited personal attacks Black specializes in.

The DB also heard from a reader who notes that my review of Bob Black's Anarchy After Leftism contains a sentence incorrectly asserting that such leftists in the U.S. as Leninists, social democrats, and radicals associated with that range of periodicals that begins with Z Magazine and ends with The Nation--as well as the Green Party, New Party, Labor Party, and the like advocate—among other things—state ownership and control of the means of production. Except for Leninists, as the reader pointed out, none of the above are proponents of 100 percent state ownership as in the old USSR. In my defense I would like to say that the statement was a sort of unconscious exaggeration of their statist orientation rather than a deliberate falsification. It and other blunders in the past show that I need an editor. I'll try to do better in the future. Readers can correct the mistake by inserting the words "varying levels of" between "mean" and "state ownership" in the fifth sentence in the second paragraph on page 29. The sentence then reads, "Some leftists will argue that the cumulative effect of reforms can be revolutionary, that is that we can reform capitalism until it becomes what they see as socialism, by which they mean varying levels of state ownership and control of the means of production."

---Frank Girard

(from p. 32)

Bookchin's paranoid response to what he regards as a conspiracy to thwart his plans for a libertarian social movement. Sixty-six pages, $5 ($16 per year) from C.A.L. Press, PO Box 1446, Columbia, MO 65205.

International Communist, Number 15, 1997 is the review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP), of which the Communist Workers Organization is the British section. This group, like the ICC and the ICG, describes itself as a part of the "communist left" with roots in a 1920s split in the Italian Communist Party. This issue contains articles on the class struggle in Korea, the Albanian financial swindle, "The Two-Dimensional State: Globalisation of the Economy and the State," the holocaust, and a polemic against the ICC. Twenty-eight pages, L2 $4 from CWO, PO Box 338, Sheffield, S3 9YX England.

--fg
Frank: The following is a letter I sent to Stoughton Lynd, editor of IMPACT, a monthly out of Youngstown, OH focused on labor issues. If you think DB readers would find it interesting, please feel free to print it.

To the Editor:

It’s great that the Workers Solidarity Club and so many others have endorsed the call for a Solidarity III march in Detroit, but to make the march depend on "Brother" Sweeney leading it is dead wrong. If John Sweeney has shown us anything by his actions since becoming president of the AFL-CIO, it is that he is not our brother.

"Brother" Sweeney abandoned the Staley workers in their 27-month long struggle. He did nothing for the CAT workers in their watershed strike. For five months in the first year of the newspaper strike he refused the plea from the six striking newspaper locals and their supporters to call a Labor Day march on Detroit. Instead Sweeney and a handful of labor and religious and political bigshots arranged their own staged arrest at the plant gates, substituting their own pitiful symbolic action for the mass action of the hundreds of thousands of workers who would gladly have marched on Detroit.

"Brother" Sweeney is not "timid and fearful," as David Sole’s speech in the same issue implies. HE IS ON THE OTHER SIDE. His goals are not our goals. Sweeney has shown that he is no different from the other AFL-CIO leaders. His job is to manage workers on behalf of the companies, not to lead them. He did not call a Labor Day march on Detroit because he was afraid it would succeed—succeed in mobilizing and giving renewed self-confidence to millions of working people.

David Sole is right, we are in the midst of a class war. But John Sweeney and the AFL-CIO leadership are part of the class enemy. Working people would never have suffered the defeats that we have in these past two decades, from PATCO to Hormel to Staley, if not for the treacherous role played by the AFL-CIO leadership.

Why did they betray all these struggles? Because labor officials function as an arm of management, and because they are as threatened by an active rank-and-file as are the corporations. The powerful strike movement of the late 1960s and early ’70s was a wildcat movement, beyond the control of union officials and often directly against them. The AFL-CIO leadership have cooperated with the companies in the past 20 years to attack the rank-and-file because that is the only way they can keep control.

The Workers’ Solidarity Club’s letter concluded, "Like other workers around the country, we’re waiting for a call to action...." Well, we’ve been waiting for 19 months. As David Sole explains in his speech, at the beginning of the newspaper strike thousands of workers stood shoulder to shoulder, ready to fight alongside the strikers. Ten union locals, including some of the biggest in the UAW, as well as the striking locals, even voted to support a general strike in support of the newspaper strikers. This is the kind of working class potential that "Brother" Sweeney is anxious to undermine and destroy. He has nearly succeeded at his waiting game, by convincing us to wait on a call from him that never comes.

The striking locals have the moral standing and the resources to call the march themselves. The leaders of the striking locals are shirking their own responsibility by waiting on Sweeney; it’s just their way of kicking the ball upstairs.

If Sweeney does respond to the pressure and call a march, it will be because he fears that his true role will be too exposed if he doesn’t, or because he fears that the march would go on without him and he’d better try to get in front of the parade. If he doesn’t directly sabotage the
march, he will try to limit the speakers and the content, to defuse the movement as much as possible. In either case, we're better off without him.

A good friend of mine tells me that "Millions of workers have too many illusions about Sweeney to march unless he gives the go-ahead." I think that's untrue, and underestimates what rank-and-filers understand about Sweeney and the class war.

But even if it is true, the only way to shatter illusions is to speak the truth. Rebuilding the labor movement will be a hard and bitter struggle. We can win it, but only by being clear and honest about the real situation.

The first thing we have to be clear about is who are our friends and who are our enemies. The purpose of the AFL-CIO structure is precisely to prevent a real working class movement from emerging. Until we openly acknowledge this fact, we will never move forward. We can't rely on Sweeney to build a movement that he is determined to oppose. We have to rely instead on ordinary working people.

We encourage the Detroit strikers to call a National Labor Mobilization on Detroit themselves and lead it themselves, and to use their strike as the beginning of a working class movement to take back the country from the corporate rulers.

Dave Stratman

NOTES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHORT REVIEWS

Collective Action Notes now has a Web Page.

URL: http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379
Among the documents on the site are texts from Anton Pannekoek, ECHANGES, Paul Mattick, Henri Simon plus the full 80 page text of Kamunist Kranti's "Ballad Against Work". Also links to many other relevant Web sites.

Communism Number 10, May 1997 is the "Central Review in English of the Internationalist Communist Group," which also publishes reviews in French, Spanish, Arabic, German, Kurdish, and Hungarian. The topic of the lead article (12 pages of this issue), "Capitalism at Work: The Bombing of Dresden - February 1945," will be familiar to anyone who has read Slaughterhouse Five, but the author here deals generally with the role of war in capitalism's economy. Other articles discuss repression in Italy, the Mexican section of the International Communist Current (ICC), and the origin of AIDS. Forty-four pages, L2 or S3 from BP 54, BXL 31, 1060 Bruxelles, Belgium. Do not include the name of the journal nor the organization in the address.

Ideas & Action Number 17, Winter 1997. "is the twice yearly publication of the Workers Solidarity Alliance [WSA], the U.S. Section of the International Workers Association [IWA]." It
comes to us after a hiatus of some years. Included in this thirty-page issue are articles on the new AFL-CIO leadership, IWA news, efforts of WSA members to organize unions among temps in San Francisco and education workers in Lansing, Michigan and San Antonio, as well as an interesting section on the theory and practice of both the WSA and IWA. $2.50 ($7.50 for a three-issue sub) from WSA/IWA, Ideas & Action, 339 Lafayette St. #202, New York, NY 10012.

_Bread & Roses_, Issue 1, Summer 1997 is the new publication of the British Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Two articles in this issue deal with a British college where the IWW has a presence and a branch of the IWW’s Education Workers Union. Indeed the “IWW Directory” lists incipient organizing efforts in several industries in different localities. In “Working-On-A-Chain-Gang,” the author describes what he terms “Labour’s Welfare to (slave) Work programme,” the British twin apparently of American “Workfare.” The two-page article includes a section entitled “How to Make ‘Project Work’ Unworkable.” In “Can Unions Transform Society?”—another longer article (three pages)—the author surveys thinking on this question. Twenty pages, L1 (about $2) from IWW, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 4WB England.

_Alternative Press Review_, Spring/Summer 1997 according to the cover runs the gamut of topics dear to us all: “Culture * Community * Critique * Ecology * Sexuality * Humor.” In a review of the latest issue of its companion journal _Anarchy_ in DB84, I noted the absence of any reverence to APR, but not to worry, it is back and better than ever with eleven pages of alternative press magazine reviews and six pages of short book reviews including a somewhat restrained—by comparison with others—review by editor Jason McQuinn of Bookchin’s _Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism_. McQuinn, like some other reviewers, sees the book as