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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The first three major articles in this issue are expositions of revolutionary thought that differs from that of most groups in our portion of the political spectrum although the proponents share our belief in the revolutionary goal of immediate abolition of capitalism and the state. In the first of these David Stratman explains the central ideas of New Democracy, a political grouping that rejects Marxian explanation for the class struggle and sees its cause in an inherent difference in basic moral values between the capitalist class and the working class.

Sam Moss's article, written over fifty years ago, presents the rationale of the Council.
WHAT IS MISSING FROM THE WORLD?
by Dave Strain

New Democracy held a retreat recently in Madison, Wisconsin where 19 people discussed building a revolutionary movement. Dave addressed these remarks to the retreat.

Retreats let us step back from the pressures of our everyday life and get an overall view of the situation. I'd like to make a few comments on the historical situation we are in and what I believe we can do about it.

What's our situation? The ruling elite, the capitalist class—whatever you want to call them—have been on the attack against working people for the last 25 years in a brutal class war. But this attack has a specific history.

From the end of WWII until the early '70s, the world elite tried to control people through prosperity. Give people more money, steady jobs, two cars in the garage, a chance to send their kids to college, they thought, and people will buy into the system and be content. Well, it didn't work out that way. Instead of being more content, people became more rebellious. They demonstrated for Civil Rights. They fought against the Vietnam War. They went on strike. They fought against their union leaders and demanded democracy in their unions. 1970 saw more strikes than at any other time in US history except 1946 and more wildcat strikes than any other year. In 1968 revolutionary movements swept the world: China and Poland and Vietnam and Czechoslovakia, Mexico and Italy—virtually everywhere on the globe. In May, 1968 ten million workers in France occupied their factories and offices for ten days and came near to making a revolution.

The global elite had to respond to this situation. To cope with the worldwide "revolution of rising expectations," capitalist and communist elites embarked on a strategy of lowering people's expectations. In every area of life they attacked people's sense of economic and psychological security. Beginning with the wage-price freeze in 1971, they put the brakes on economic growth and promoted unemployment. After a decade of intense efforts, they delivered a series of deadly blows to working people: the defeats we know as PATCO, Hormel, Staley, Caterpillar, Detroit News, and others too numerous to name.

They prepared the ground carefully. They slashed government programs and repealed the Great Society and the New Deal in the name of balancing the budget, creating millions of homeless and poor desperate for jobs. They told working people loud and clear, "Stay in line or you'll be on the streets with them." They waged tireless campaigns telling people that "We live in a global market," and we have to compete with foreign workers and even with each other. They told us in a million ways that we have to fear each other: whites are racists, blacks are criminals, men are brutes, women are mindless bimbos, your coworkers are fools.

The unions worked closely with their corporate masters in bringing about these defeats. The union leadership relentlessly
repeated the corporate message, "Join the Company Team" to compete with other workers and attacked solidarity among working people. The major defeats suffered by workers were a result not of corporate power but of union betrayal: the Machinists forced to cross picket lines at airports to defeat PATCO; the entire Hormel chain continuing to work during the P-9 strike; the "selective strike" strategy imposed on the Cat workers by the International in 1991, and other examples that we're all aware of. In these and other situations, the problem was not that the union leadership did not know how to fight but that it was fighting for the other side.

The government and corporate war hasn't just been against workers in the workplace but against people in every area of our lives. The corporate-led campaign for education reform, for example, is really an attack on our children and grandchildren, to make the schools "lean and mean." Kids are told to run faster and faster, work harder and harder to make the grade set by the corporations. To get them to fit into a more unequal and undemocratic society, the aspirations and self-confidence of our children must be crushed.

There's one final point I want to make about the situation and that is the utter failure of communism and socialism as revolutionary alternatives to capitalism. This is crucially important for us. For one thing, the working class movement of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was profoundly influenced by Marxism; many of the activists in the CIO organizing drives of the '30s were communists or socialists, and many labor activists now still subscribe to these ideas. For another, the failure of communism has made it appear that there is no possible alternative to the capitalist system.

The lack of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism has had a very negative effect on people's ability to organize a new movement for change. If there is no alternative to capitalism, then it seems we will forever have to give in to the companies' demands for jointness or pay cuts or two-tier systems and all the other claims made in the name of "competitiveness." With no alternative to capitalism, we cannot oppose its logic.

What strategy makes sense in the face of this situation?

Well, an electoral strategy doesn't make sense, because the real powers pulling the strings are behind the scenes. The politicians are just front men, and changing them doesn't matter.

A reform strategy—like the reform of the unions, for example—doesn't work, because the unions are part of the corporate system and they can't be reformed. Other reforms—like, say, reforming the schools—can't work, because the schools reflect the relations of power in society. And it's the relations of power in society that are the real problem. If we haven't changed the relations of power, we haven't really changed anything.

So what strategy does make sense? To figure this out, let's look more closely at the nature of the class war.

What is class struggle and the class war all about? I was talking a few months ago with Larry Solomon, and he said something very important about the Cat workers. He said, "We knew we were fighting for everyone. That's why we held on for so long." The Staley workers were locked out for 27 months, but they fought on at great sacrifice to their families and themselves until their final betrayal by the AFL-CIO and the International Paperworkers Union, because they knew that

With no alternative to capitalism, we cannot oppose its logic.
their struggle was about more than just the families involved. There are many strikes and working class struggles where the sacrifice is all out of proportion to any possible gain. What does this show us?

Though strikes and lockouts and other class struggles usually involve specific issues, these issues are just the occasions for class struggles. Under the surface the struggles are over two different sets of values, two different ideas of what society should be like, two different ideas of what it means to be a human being. On the one side stands the owning class. The corporate class values competition and inequality and top-down control. On the other side stands the working class, which values solidarity and equality and control from the bottom-up. The class war is only partially about economics. At its core it is about the goals and direction of society and the values that should shape it. Each class in this war is trying to impose its view of humanity, its values, its power over society. I made a speech in 1965 to Local P-9 at Hormel. At one point I said, "Your strike isn't just about safety and wages. Your strike is about what it means to be a human being." Everybody in the local stood and cheered.

Now, as you all know by now, New Democracy proposes that our strategy should be to win the class war. What makes me think that we can win? To explain this, let me explain our most basic insight.

Part of the problem with Marxism and the way we've all been trained to see class struggle is that we view the struggle too narrowly. If people aren't out demonstrating or on strike, we think nothing's going on. But that's not true. Everywhere we look, and at every point in our lives and in other people's lives, people are engaged in a struggle against capitalism to assert their values against capitalist values. This is why we can win.

Think for a minute about the capitalist system. We know that capitalism is the most dynamic social system that has ever existed. It has penetrated every part of the globe, and it works its way into every area of our lives. We also know that the basic principal of capitalism is the principle of competition, the idea of dog-eat-dog. The logic of capitalist culture is that we should each of us being trying to screw each other all the time. The logic of capitalism, in other words, is that this world should be a savage and loveless place. But we can look around and see that this is not so. We can see that most people in their everyday lives—with their wife or husband or their co-workers or students or patients—most people in the little piece of the world they think they can control struggle against capitalist relations to create relationships based on love and trust and solidarity. I'm not saying any of us is perfect. But to the extent that we have any mutual and loving relationships in our lives, we have created them by struggle against a culture that is profoundly hostile to them.

This means, I think, that most people are already engaged in a struggle against capitalism to create a new world. The smallest acts of kindness and solidarity on the shop floor or in our classrooms or in our neighborhoods or in our homes and the most public and collective acts of class struggle are all part of a struggle to humanize the world and make it conform to our idea of what it should be. The moral values present in people's everyday lives—values of solidarity and commitment to each other—are the real basis of every great movement for social change.
We don't have to invent the revolutionary movement. The movement already exists. It exists in the little things that people do for each other everyday; it exists in the help people give each other on the shop floor and their resistance to the company and the union; it exists in the love of husband and wife for each other and the support they give their children; it exists in the efforts of teachers to teach, and in the resistance of students to much of what they are taught. It exists in this room, in our efforts to figure out the world and how we can help change it.

Are all these relationships of human solidarity perfect? Does friendship and equality and resistance to capitalism shape everything in society or everything we do? Of course not. That's why we need a revolution—because everything that we value is under attack. But the revolutionary movement that we are part of is already a powerful force for change which the ruling class spends its every waking minute trying to control.

Our job as self-conscious revolutionaries is to make this already-existing movement aware of its earth-shaking significance, more confident of its power and more clear in the tasks that confront it, so that it can succeed.

By declaring revolution as our goal, we will not be isolated. Far from it. Instead we will be giving legitimacy to feelings and aspirations and values that millions of people share and know in their hearts to be right, but are constantly told are wrong. By declaring revolution our goal, we can build a movement that reaches into people's deepest feelings and expresses their strongest desires. By declaring revolution our goal, we can build a movement engaging the great majority of humanity.

How do we put this strategy into effect? This is one of the questions we will want to answer this weekend. But I think that certain things follow from this analysis. One is that spreading our message—this new understanding of working people and the possibilities of revolution and real democracy—is crucial. A second is that we cannot rely on politicians or union officials or structures to build this movement; we have to rely on the people. A third is that we have to think big. We have to reach out to the whole world. We have to think of the whole world, not just our little corner of it, when we are trying to figure out the connections among people and issues. We have to think not in terms of some crummy compromise or "lesser evil." We're for the world as it should be and as it can be.

Let me return to the historical significance of what we're doing. Marxism provided the underpinnings for the working class movement of the late 19th and 20th centuries, and Marxism has failed. It failed because it accepted the capitalist view of human motivation, which led it into an anti-democratic and anti-people nightmare in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. The effect of that failure has been to undermine the possibility of working class movements ever since. The revolutionary aspirations of the twentieth century have been trapped beneath the dead weight of Marxism. No new and successful revolutionary movement is possible except on the basis of a new way of seeing the world.

Great social movements are founded on great social visions. We in New Democracy are proposing a new social vision to replace capitalism and to replace the failed vision of Marxism. We are proposing a vision of ordinary people as the source not only of the material wealth that labor creates, but also of the positive values in this society and the values and social relations on which we can base a new one. We are proposing a democratic vision of a new society in which the goal is not mindless economic growth or greed or personal aggrandizement, but our shared fulfillment as human beings.

What is missing from the world
now? Not the need for revolution: there are millions hungry in the midst of plenty; there are millions suffering from overwork and millions more without work; there is a planet being raped by an economic system run amok; there is a whole world of human beings whose relations of solidarity are under attack by a ruling elite that cannot survive without undermining the human bonds between us.

What is missing from the world? Not the desire for revolution. There are many millions of people in the U.S. and billions worldwide who yearn for, work for, struggle for a better world, who will gladly be part of a revolutionary movement.

What is missing from the world? What’s missing is a vision of ordinary human beings that can free us from the dead weight of the past and make democracy and revolution possible. This is the vision that I am proposing to you, and this is what we together can offer the world. Thank you.

(from p. 2)

Communists, a revolutionary strand that has its roots in the Dutch/German left communist opposition to Lenin in the early twenties. Collective Action Notes from which this article came is the first U.S. manifestation of this thinking in many years. Unfortunately Moss’s pessimistic view of the effectiveness of revolutionary groups appears to have history on its side.

The Platform seems to have arisen as a result of the analysis by anarchist refugees from the Soviet Union who blamed the ineffectiveness of the anarchists in the Russian Revolution and its aftermath on the inchoate nature of their movement. I’m not sure whether The Platform, written in 1926, has ever had the support of a U.S. group. Actually anarchists in the U.S. who feel the need for organization generally drift into the IWW or WSA. The only other significant organizational expression of anarchists’ need for organization was the recently dissolved Love and Rage, a sort of vanguardist anarchist periodical and group.

Next Adam Buick responds to Neil C.’s interpretation of the famous statement by Marx that our class can’t simply use the existing state to build the new society. This is followed by this issue’s “Chomsky section,” which begins with a review from Libertarian Labor Review of two new books on Chomsky. The uncritical nature of the review may be the result of Chomsky’s public expression of his political sympathies with anarcho-syndicalism and—we learn from the review—his membership in the IWW. The author makes no effort to explain how Chomsky reconciles his anarcho-syndicalism with membership in the New Party and its reformist political agenda. The article from the Socialist Standard, on the other hand, points out Chomsky’s failure to come out four-square as an advocate of revolutionary change. Paul Siegel’s Trotskyist critique of Chomsky, reviewed next, is much more concerned about Chomsky’s anti-Leninism than his shortcomings as a revolutionary anti-capitalist.

Beginning with the March-April 1998 issue, the De Leonist Review has published a series of articles on the Y2K (Year 2000) computer problem that are well worth reading. Here we reprint the fourth of these from the September-October issue. As usual we end with some notes, announcements, and short reviews.

Finances

DB’s income remained about the same during the last months of the year, bolstered by subscribers who pay for two, three, and—in a few cases—seven or eight-year subs and a large order for back issues. Had it not been for the $85 to renew our bulk mailing fee, we would have held our own financially. Actually, compared to many years in the past, the DB is in excellent financial health.
THE IMPOTENCE OF REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS

By Sam Moss

(The following essay was taken from the current issue of Collective Action Notes which obtained it from a later 1930's issue of International Council Correspondence. Paul Mattick's U.S. council communist journal. Sam Moss was a U.S. worker; a member of the Groups of Council Communists in the U.S.)

The difference between the radical organizations and the broad masses appears as a difference of objectives. The former apparently seek to overthrow capitalism; the masses seek only to maintain their living standards within capitalism. The revolutionary groups agitate for the abolition of private property; the people, called the masses, either own bits of private property or hope some day to own them. The communist-minded struggle for the eradication of the profit system; the masses, capitalist minded, speak of the bosses' right to a "fair profit." As long as a relatively large majority of the American working class maintain the living conditions to which they are accustomed, and have the leisure to follow their pursuits, such as baseball and movies, they are generally well content, and they are grateful to the system that makes these things possible. The radical, who opposes this system and thereby jeopardizes their position within it, is far more dangerous to them than the bosses who pay them, and they do not hesitate to make a martyr of him. As long as the system satisfies their basic needs in the accustomed manner, they are well satisfied with it and whatever evils they behold in society, they attribute to "unfair bosses," "bad administrators" or other individuals.

The small radical groups - "intellectuals" who have "raised themselves to the level of comprehending historical movements as a whole," and who trace the social ills to the system rather than to individuals - see beyond the objectives of the workers, and realize that the basic needs of the working class can not be satisfied for more than a temporary period under capitalism, and that every concession that Capital grants Labour serves only to postpone the death struggle between these adversaries. They therefore - at least in theory - strive continually to turn the struggle for immediate demands into a struggle against the system. But beside the realities of bread and butter which capitalism can still offer a majority of the workers, the radicals can submit only hopes and ideas, and the workers abandon their struggles the moment their demands are met.

The reason for the apparent difference of objectives between the revolutionary groups and the working class is easy to understand. The working class, concerned only with the needs of the moment and in general content with its social status, reflects the level of capitalist culture - a culture that is "for the enormous majority a mere training to act as a machine." The revolutionists, however, are so to speak deviations from the working class; they are the by-products of capitalism; they represent isolated cases of workers who, because of unique circumstances in their individual lives, have diverged from the usual course of development in that, though born of wage slaves, they have acquired an intellectual interest that has availed itself of the existing educational possibilities. Though of these, many have succeeded in rising into the petty-bourgeoisie, others, whose careers in this direction were blocked by circumstances, have remained within the working class as intellectual workers. Dissatisfied with their social status as appendages to machines, they, unable to rise within the system, rise against it. Quite frequently cut off from association with their fellow workers on the job who do not share their radical views, they unite with other rebellious intellectual workers and with other unsuccessful carreerists of other strata of society, into organizations for changing society. If, in their struggle to liberate the masses from wage slavery, they seem to be acting from the noblest of motives, certainly it doesn't take much to see that when one suffers for another he has only identified that other's sorrow with his own. But whenever they have the chance to rise within the existing society they, with rare exceptions, do not hesitate to abandon their revolutionary objectives. And when they do so, they offer sincers and sound
logic for their apostasy, for, "Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas change with every change in his material existence?" Sports in the development of capitalism, the revolutionary organizations, small ineffectual, buzzing along the flanks of the broad masses, have done nothing to affect the course of history either for good or ill. Their occasional periods of activity can be explained only by their temporary or permanent forsaking of their revolutionary aims in order to unite with the workers immediate demands and then it was not their own revolutionary role that they played, but the conservative role of the working class. When the workers achieved their objectives, the radical groups lapsed again into impotence. Their role was always a supplementary, and never a deciding one.

It is the writer's conviction that the day of the revolutionary party is over; the revolutionary groups under present conditions are tolerated, or rather ignored, only as long as they are impotent. Nothing is so symptomatic of their powerlessness as the fact that they are permitted to exist. We have often stated that the working class which will endure while capitalism lasts, and which cannot be obliterated under this system can alone wage a successful struggle against capitalism and that the initiative can not be taken out of its hands. We may add here that, after all, the conservatism of the working class today only reflects the still massive strength of capitalism, and that this material power cannot be cast out of existence by propaganda but by a material power greater than that of capital.

Yet from time to time members of our own group take to task the group's inactivity. They declare that, isolated as we are from the class struggle as it is waged today, we are essentially mere study groups that will be completely out of touch with events when social upheavals do occur. They state that since the class struggle is omnipresent in capitalism it behooves us as a revolutionary organization to deepen the class war. But they do not suggest any specific course of action. The fact that all other radical organizations in the field, though striving to overcome the isolation, are nonetheless insignificant. Moreover, like ourselves, does not convince our critics of the futility of any action that small groups can take.

The very general statement that the class war is ever-present and that we should deepen it, is made first of all in the assumption that the class struggle is a revolutionary struggle, but the fact is that the workers as a mass are conservative. It is assumed that the class war aims directly at the weakening of capitalism, but the fact is that, though it serves this ultimate purpose, it is directly aimed at the position of the workers within the society. Furthermore, the actual class struggle is not waged through revolutionary organizations. It is waged in the factories and through the unions.

In America today it is being waged by such organizations as the A.F. Of L. and the C.I.O., and though here and there across the continent arise sporadic strikes that are outlawed by all the existing conservative organizations and that indicate the form the class war may take when all these organizations are completely emasculated by the State, these workers' movements are infrequent and isolated today. True, the leadership of both the C.I.O. and the A.F. of L. is conservative, but then so is the membership of both unions. In order to retain their membership and attract more workers, the unions must wrest concessions from the capitalist class for them; the workers remain in the unions only because they obtain such concessions through them; and to the extent that they do obtain such concessions for the workers, the unions are waging the class struggle. If, therefore, we are to plunge into the class struggle, we must go where the struggle is being waged. We must concentrate on either the factories or the unions or both. If we do so, we must abandon, at least overtly, our revolutionary principles, for if we give them expression, we shall swiftly be discharged from the job and expelled from the union and, in a word, cut off from the class struggle and returned precipitously to our former impotent state. To become active in the class struggle means, then, to become as conservative as the large body of workers. In other words, as soon as we enter the class struggle we can contribute nothing special to it. The only alternative to this course is to continue as we are, clinging impotently to our principles.
Regardless of which course we pursue, it is obvious that we cannot affect the course of events. Our impotence illustrates what should be obvious to all: That history is made by the broad masses alone.

The Groups of Council Communists distinguish themselves from all the other revolutionary groups in that they do not consider themselves vanguards of the workers, nor leaders of the workers, but as being one with the workers' movement. But this difference between our organization and others is only an ideological difference, and reflects no corresponding material difference. In practice we are actually like all the other groups. Like them, we function outside the spheres of production, where the class struggle is fought; like them, we are isolated from the large mass of workers. We differ only in ideology from all the other groups, but then it is only in ideology on which all the other groups differ. Practically there is no difference between all groups. And if we were to follow the suggestion of our critics and "deepen the class struggle," our "Leninistic" character would become quite evident. Let us assume, for example, that it is possible for us as an independent group to organize the workers of some industrial area. The fact that they have not risen up without our aid means that they are dependent upon us for their initiative. By supplying the initiative, we are taking it out of their hands. If they discover that we are capable of giving them the initial impulse, they will depend on us for the subsequent impulses, and we shall soon find ourselves leading them step by step. Thus, those who advocate that we "intensify" the class war are not merely ignoring the objective conditions that make such an act questionable, but are advocating also our leadership over the masses. Of course, they may argue that, realizing the evils of such a course, we can guard against them. But this argument is again on an ideological level. Practically, we shall be compelled to adjust ourselves to circumstances. Thus it becomes obvious that by such a practice we would function like a Leninist group, and could at best produce only the results of Leninism. However, the impotence of the existing Leninist groups shows the improbability of the success of even such a course, and points once more to the obsolescence of small revolutionary groups in regard to real proletarian needs, a condition perhaps forecasting the approaching day when it shall be objectively impossible for any small group to assume leadership of the masses only to be forced in the end to exploit them to its own ends. The working class alone can wage the revolutionary struggle even as it is today waging alone the non-revolutionary class struggle, and the reason that the rebellious class conscious workers band into groups outside the spheres of the real class struggle is only that there is as yet no revolutionary movement within them. Their existence as small groups, therefore, reflects, not a situation for revolution, but rather a non-revolutionary situation. When the revolution does come, their numbers will be submerged within it, not as functioning organizations, but as individual workers.

But though no practical differences between us and other revolutionary organizations is permitted by the objective conditions, we can at least maintain our ideological difference. Therefore, where all groups see revolution in the most impossible situations and believe that all that is lacking for revolution is a group with the "correct Marxist line"; where, in a word, they exaggerate the importance of ideas, and incidentally of themselves as carriers of those ideas - an attitude that reflects their careerist proclivities - we wish to see the truth of each situation. We see that the class struggle is today still conservative; that society is characterized not simply by this single struggle but by a multiplicity of struggles, which varies with the multiplicity of strata within the system, and which so far has affected the struggle between Capital and Labour in the interest of the former.

But because we see not merely the immediate situation but also the trends therein, we realize that the difficulties of capitalism are progressively increasing and that the means of satisfying even the immediate wants of the working class are continuously diminishing. We recognize that as a concomitant of the increasing non-profitability of capitalism, is the progressive levelling out of the divisions within the two classes, as capitalists expropriate capitalists in the upper class, and, in the lower class, as the means of subsistence, the better to extend them,
is apportioned more and more uniformly among the masses, for the sake of averting the social catastrophe attendant upon the inability to satisfy them. As these developments are taking place, the divided objectives of the upper class are converging toward one objective; the preservation of the capitalist exploitative system; and the divided objectives of the workers are, despite the increasing ideological confusion, converging toward one objective: a fundamental change of present socio-economic forms of life. Then will we, only another strata of the working class now, or more correctly an offshoot, really merge with the entire working class as our objectives merge with theirs and we shall lose ourselves in the revolutionary struggle.

But this question may be raised: Why, then, realizing the futility of the act, do you band together into groups? The answer is simply that the act serves a personal need. It is inevitable that men sharing a common feeling of rebellion against a society that lives by exploitation and war should seek out their own kind in society, and in whatever weapons fall to their command. Unable to rebel against the system with the rest of the population, they will oppose it alone. The fact that they engage in such action however futile it may appear establishes the basis for the prediction that when the large masses, reacting to the compulsives of the objectively revolutionary situation, feel similarly affected, they too will band together out of the same urgency and they too will use whatever weapons fall to their disposal. When they do so, they will not rise from ideological factors but from necessity, and their ideologies will only reflect the necessities then, as do their current bourgeois ideologies reflect the necessity today.

The view of the revolutionary ineffectiveness of small groups is accounted a pessimistic one by all the revolutionary organizations. What if this view does indicate the inevitability of revolution? What if it points to the objective end of a pre-established leadership of the masses, and to the eventual end of all exploitation? The radical groups are not happy with this picture. They derive no pleasure from the prospect of a future where they have no more significance than their fellow human beings, and they condemn a view of such a future as a philosophy of defeatism. But, actually we have spoken only of the futility of small radical groups; we have been quite optimistic as to the future of the workers. But to all radical organizations, if their groups are defeated, and if their groups are dying, then all is dying. In such pronouncements therefore they reveal the true motivation for their rebellion and the true character of their organizations. We, however, should find no cause for despair in the impotence of these groups. Rather we should behold in it reason for optimism regarding the future of the workers. For in this very atrophy of all groups that would lead the masses out of capitalism into another society we are seeing for the first time in history the objective end to all political leadership and to the division of society into economic and political categories.

(from p. 7)

Contributions: Carlos Otero $1; Joe Tupper $20; John Sears III $2. Total $23.00. Thank you, comrades.

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(to p. 18)
Anarchists are constantly thinking about how society is and how it could be. We strive towards the ideal of a free and democratic society. We know that, in order to get there, it will be necessary to tear down the present authoritarian system of government. Our struggle for freedom throws up many areas of controversy and debate. One of these has always been, and always will be, how do we get to a revolution? How do we organize for change? An important contribution to this debate was the *Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, a document which was written in 1926 by a group of exiled Russian and Ukrainian anarchists, and which still has much to offer to today's debates around the question of organisation.

The authors had participated in the Russian revolution and saw all their work, their hopes and dreams fail as an authoritarian Bolshevik state triumphed and destroyed real workers' power. They wrote the pamphlet in order to examine why the anarchist movement had failed to build on the success of the factory committees, where workers organizing in their own work forces began to build a society based on both freedom and equality. In the first paragraph they state

"It is very significant that, in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas, and in spite of the facing up to the social revolution, and finally the heroism and innumerable sacrifices borne by the anarchists in the struggle for anarchist communism, the anarchist movement remains weak despite everything, and has appeared, very often, in the history of working class struggles as a small event, an episode, and not an important factor."

This is strong stuff, a wake up call for the anarchist movement. It is a call that we still need to hear. Despite the virtual collapse of almost all other left wing tendencies anarchism is still not in a position of strength. Even though the Trotskyist organisations have either evaporated into thin air, shrunk drastically in size or moved to social democracy, it is a sad fact, that were there a revolution tomorrow, they still would be in a better position to have their arguments heard and listened to than we would. This fact alone should give us pause for thought. We cannot be complacent, and rely on the hope that the obvious shine through and win the day. The world we live in is the product of struggles between competing ideas of how society should be organized. If the anarchist voice is weak and quiet, it won't be heard, and other arguments, other perspectives will win the day.

It is not my intention to go through *The Platform* with a fine-tooth comb. It was never intended to provide all the answers; in the introduction they make this clear.

We have no doubts that there are gaps in the present platform. It has gaps, as do all new, practical steps of any importance. It is possible that certain important positions have been missed, or that others are inadequately treated, or that still others are too detailed or repetitive.

It was hoped, however, that it would form the beginning of a debate about how anarchists could escape from the doldrums they were in.

Instead I will look at some of the document's underlying principles, in particular the problems which they identify in anarchist organisations, which they describe as follows.

In all countries, the anarchist movement is advocated by several local organisations advocating contradictory theories and practices, leaving no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually
disappearing hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them. (my emphasis).

Their solution is the creation of certain type of anarchist organisation. Firstly the members of these organisations are in theoretical agreement with each other. Secondly they agree that if a certain type of work is prioritised, all should take part. Even today within the anarchist movement these are contentious ideas so it is worth exploring them in a little more detail.

The Platform's basic assumption is that there is a link between coherency and efficiency. Those who oppose the Platform argue that this link does not exist. To them efficiency has nothing to do with how coherent an organisation is; rather it is a function of size. This position argues that the Platform, in its search for theoretical agreement, excludes those not in absolute agreement, and thus will always be smaller than a looser organisation. As size is of more importance than theory, practically these organisations will not be as effective.

This debate takes us to the centre of one of the most important debates within anarchism. How does a revolutionary change of society occur? What can anarchists do to assist in the process of bringing such change about?

Capitalism is an organized economic system. Its authority is promoted by many voices, including the parliamentary political parties, the media and education system (to name but a few). A successful revolution depends on the rejection of those voices by the majority of people in society. Not only do we have to reject capitalism, but we also need to have a vision of an alternative society. What is needed is an understanding both that capitalism should be defeated and that it can be replaced. For an anarchist revolution there has to be the recognition that we alone have the power and the ability to create that new world.

The role of an anarchist organisation is to spread these ideas. Not only do we need to highlight the negative and injurious aspects of capitalism (which is obvious to many anyway), we also need to develop explanations of how the system operates. This is what is meant by theory, simply it is the answer to the question 'why are things as they are?'. And we need to do one more thing, we need to be able to put our theory into practice, our understanding of how things work will inform how we struggle.

Returning to the Platform, the key problem with anarchist organisations as they existed is that they were not only incapable of developing such an approach, but didn't even see it as necessary. Because there was no agreement on theoretical issues, they could not provide answers to the working class. They could agree that women's oppression was wrong, but not explain why women were oppressed. They could agree that World War One was going to lead to death and destruction, but not why it had occurred. Such agreement is important because without it cooperation on activity, agreement on what to do, is unlikely. This is how the Platform's authors described such an organisation.

"Such an organisation having incorporated heterogeneous theoretical and practical elements, would only be a mechanical assembly of individuals, each having a different conception of all the all the questions of the anarchist movement, an assembly which would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality (my emphasis).

By "mechanical assembly of individuals" they mean a group of individuals meeting together, yet not united in mind or in action. This undermines the entire meaning of organisation, which is to maximise the strength of the individuals through cooperation with others. Where there is no agreement, there can be little co-operation. This absence of co-operation only becomes obvious when the group is forced to take a position on a
particular issue, a particular event in the wider world.

At this point, two things happen. Either, the individuals within the group act on their own particular interpretation of events in isolation, which raises the question, what is the point of being in such an organisation? Alternatively the group can decide to ignore the event, thus preventing disagreement.

This has a number of unfortunate side effects for anarchist politics. Most seriously, it means that the anarchist interpretation of events still will not be heard. For no matter how large the organisation, if all within it are speaking with different voices, the resulting confusion will result in an unclear and weak anarchist message. Such an organisation can produce a weekly paper, but each issue will argue a different point of view, as the authors producing it change. Our ideas will not be convincing, because we ourselves are not convinced by them. The second side effect is that our ideas will not develop and grow in depth and complexity because they will never be challenged by those within our own organisation. It is only by attempting to reach agreement, by exchanging competing conceptions of society, that we will be forced to consider all alternatives. Unchallenged our ideas will stagnate.

Without agreement on what should be done, the anarchist organisation remains no more than a collection of individuals. The members of that organization don’t see themselves as having any collective identity. Too often the lifetimes of such groups are the lifetimes of those most active individuals. There is no sense of building a body of work that will stretch into the future.

Considering that in these times the revolution is a long term prospect, such short term planning is a tragic waste of energy and effort.

Often the experience of anarchists is that they are energetic and committed activists, but fail to publicize the link between the work they do and the ideas they believe in. One example of this is the successful anti-Poll Tax Campaign in England, Scotland and Wales. Although many anarchists were extremely involved in the struggle against this unjust tax, when victory finally came, anarchists didn’t come out of it, as might be expected, in a strengthened position. We need to ask ourselves why this is so.

It would seem to be because anarchists concentrated their efforts making arguments against the tax, and sidelined arguments in favour of anarchism. Furthermore, though many worked as individuals they couldn’t give any sense that they were part of any bigger movement. They were seen as good heads, and that was all. In contrast, despite the WSM’s extremely small size when a similar campaign - the Anti-Water Charges Campaign - ended, we had heightened the profile of anarchism in Ireland. We emphasised that our opposition to an unjust tax was linked to our opposition to an unjust society and our belief that a better society is possible.

Returning to the question of efficiency and size, organisations in the ‘Platform’ tradition agree that size is important and they all seek to grow so that they are in a position of importance in society. However, they emphasise that all the positive attributes of belonging to a larger organisation, the increased work that can be undertaken, the increased human potential that can be drawn on, are undermined if such an organisation is directionless. The key point is that it is not a case of choosing between size or coherency; rather we should aim for both.

The importance of the Platform is that it clearly highlights the serious problems caused by the disorganised nature of loosely based anarchist organisations. It exposes a problem, it highlights how fatal this flaw in anarchism can be, it emphasises the urgency with which we must deal with it and compels us to come up with some answers.
The Platform: What's in It

The introduction is brief, it describes the poor state of the anarchist movement and explains why they felt it necessary to formulate a new approach to organisation. The authors then describe the following two sections as the "minimum to which it is necessary and urgent to rally all the militants of the anarchist movement". These are the basic issues on which they believe it is important to have agreement, in order to have an organisation which can co-operate and work together in practice.

General Section
This section outlines what they saw as the basic anarchist beliefs. They look at what is meant by class struggle, what is meant by anarchism and libertarian communism. They explain why they oppose the state and centralised authority. The role of the masses and of anarchists in the social struggle and social revolution is also explained. They criticise the Bolshevik strategy of obtaining control of the state. Finally they look at the relationship between anarchism and the trade unions.

The Constructive Section
This outlines how a future anarchist society would be organised, they look at how the factories would operate and how food would be produced. They warn that the revolution will have to be defended, and talk a little about how this might be done.

The Organisational Section
This is the shortest and most contentious section of The Platform. Here the authors sketch their idea of how an anarchist organisation should be structured. They call this the General Union of Anarchists.

By this they seem to mean one umbrella organisation, which is made up of different groups and individuals. Here we would disagree with them. We don't believe there will ever be one organisation which encompasses everything, neither do we see it as necessary. Instead we envisage the existence of a number of organisations, each internally unified, each co-operating with each other where possible. This is what we call the Anarchist movement, it is a much more amorphous and fluid entity than a General Union of Anarchists.

However, what we do agree on are the fundamental principles by which any anarchist organisation should operate.

* Theoretical Unity, that there is a commitment to come to agreement on theory. By theory they don't mean abstract musings on the meaning of life. By theory they mean the knowledge we have about how the world operates. Theory answers the question "why?" for example "why is there poverty?" "why haven't Labour Parties provided a fairer society?" and so on and so on. By theoretical unity they mean that members of the organisation must agree on a certain number of basics. There isn't much an organisation can do if half their members believe in class struggle and the other half in making polite appeals to politicians, or one in which some people believe union struggles are important and others think they are a waste of time. Of course, not everybody is going to agree with everybody else on every single point. If there was total agreement there would be no debate, and our politics would grow stale and sterile. Accepting this however, there is a common recognition that it is important to reach as much agreement as possible, and to translate this agreement into action, to work together, which brings us to ...

* Tactical Unity, that the members of the organisation agree to struggle together as an organisation, rather than struggle as individuals in opposition to each other. So for example in Ireland, the WSM identified the anti-water charges campaign (see R&BR 3 for more details)
as an issue of great importance. Once it was prioritised, all of our members committed themselves to work for the campaign, where possible. The tactics and potential of the campaign were discussed at length at our meetings. It became the major focus of our activity.

* Collective Responsibility, by this they mean that each member will support the decisions made by the collective, and each member will be part of the collective decision making process. Without this, any decisions made will be paper decisions only. Through this the strength of all the individuals that make up the group is magnified and collectively applied. The Platform doesn’t go into detail about how collective responsibility works in practice. There are issues it leaves untouched such as the question of people who oppose the majority view. We would argue that obviously people who oppose the view of the majority have a right to express their own views, however in doing so they must make clear that they don’t represent the view of the organisation. If a group of people within the organisation oppose the majority decision they have the right to organise and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organisation as a whole. Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and openness strengthen both the individual and the group to which she or he belongs.

* Federalism, which they define as "the free agreement of individuals and organisations to work collectively towards common objectives."

Platformist Groups Today

Anarchist organisations that have been influenced by the Platform are well aware that it is no Bible full of absolute truths. There is no grouping anywhere that would be so stupid to treat it as one. Anarchists have no need of such things. It is just one of the signposts pointing us in what we believe is the direction of making anarchism the most realistic and desirable alternative to both the present set-up and the authoritarian alternatives served up by most of the left.

Its ideas have been developed and modified in the light of experience over the years. Two other relatively well known documents are *Towards A Fresh Revolution* by the Friends of Durruti (which arose from the experience of the Spanish revolution) and the Manifesto of Libertarian Communism by Georges Fontenis (which arose from French experiences in the post-World War II years). The WSM stands in this tradition because it is the best one we have found, but it is a continually developing, modifying and growing one. We have no tablets carved in stone, and we don’t want or need any.

Organisations which are influenced, to varying degrees, by this tradition can be found in countries where anarchism has sunk deep roots, like France (Libertarian Alternative), Switzerland (Libertarian Socialist Organisation) and Italy (Federation of Anarchist Communists); and also in countries where anarchism is a fairly new force, like the Lebanon (Al Badil al Taharouri) and South Africa (Workers Solidarity Federation). In the last year new translations of the Platform have appeared in Polish and Turkish.

In the English speaking world, however, many anarchists are either unaware of what is in the Platform, or are hostile to it. Why? The authors drew a distinction between real federalism, the free agreement to work together in a spirit of free
debate for agreed goals; and what they describe as "the right, above all, to manifest one's 'ego' without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation". As they point out, there is no point making decisions if members will not carry them out.

However, when they went on to talk about a General Union of Anarchists they found themselves under attack from prominent anarchists such as Voline, Fabbri, Malatesta and Camilo Berneri who accused them of trying to "Bolshevik anarchism". I believe that this criticism was wrong. On one hand Voline and his fellow thinkers were opposed because they saw no problem with organisations which were a pick 'n' mix of anarcho-syndicalism, anarchist-communism and individualism with all the incoherence and ineffectiveness that implies. On the other hand many anarchists saw the proposed General Union of Anarchists as some sort of monopoly organisation that would incorporate all anarchists. It is a fault of the authors that they did not say explicitly that the General Union would, as all anarchists should, work with others when it is in the interests of the class struggle.

Neither did they spell out that all the decisions, the policies and the direction of the organisation would be taken by the members after full and free debate. It should not have had to be spelled out when addressing other anarchists but seemingly it did, and the 'Platform' was misunderstood by many as a result of this omission. Further signs of authoritarianism were seen in the proposal for an executive committee. Maybe if they had called it a working collective or something similar the same threat would not have been seen.

The tasks of this executive committee were listed as "the execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted, the theoretical and organisational orientation of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and general tactical line of the Union, the monitoring of the general state of the movement, the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the union, and with other organisations. The rights, responsibilities and practical tasks of the executive committee are fixed by the congress of the Union".

The last sentence of the document talks about the aim of the Union to become the "organised vanguard of the emancipating process". It appears that what is being talked about is winning the best militants, the most class conscious and revolutionary workers, to the Union. But it is not clearly spelled out. A doubt could exist. Did they mean a more Leninist type of vanguard? When read as part of the entire pamphlet I don't think so, but even if this is not the case it still does not invalidate the rest of the work. It would be very stupid to throw away the whole document because of one less than clear sentence.

Two arguments get used again and again against the Platform. Firstly we are told that it is Arshinov's 'Platform' as if the other four authors were just dupes, but then it would be far less credible to throw the same accusation at Nestor Makhno. It is done because in 1934 Arshinov returned to Russia, where three years later he was murdered in Stalin's purges. What Arshinov did eight years after helping to write the 'Platform' surely does no more to invalidate what was written in 1926 any more than Kropotkin's support for Allied imperialism in the First World War invalidated all his previous anarchist writings.

The other reason is the experience in Britain where the Anarchist Workers Association in the 1970s and the Anarchist Workers Group of the early 1990s both claimed the 'Platform' as an inspiration. Both groups—after very promising starts—declined, degenerated, died and then saw their remnants disappear into the Leninist milieu. This has been held up as some sort of proof
that the basic ideas of the Platform inevitably lead to the abandonment of anarchism.

Of course even the briefest look at the movement beyond the shores of Britain shows that this is clearly not the case at all. But what did go wrong with both the AWA and the AWG? After all, mistakes that are not understood can easily be repeated.

One factor shared by both organisations was that they were formed by people who were already anarchists and who saw the need for an alternative to the loose organisation and lack of theoretical clarity so prevalent in British anarchism. Or to put it simply: they saw a movement with great ideas but a very poor ability to promote them. They started off by concentrating too much on what was wrong with the movement; they lost sight of all that is sensible and inspiring, and increasingly only saw the problems.

In so far as there was regular internal education and discussion it tended to be about strategies and tactics. New members were recruited on the basis of activity in strikes and campaigns, and often had little understanding of basic anarchist ideas. These people had, however, come from a background where anarchists were presented as a group of clowns without two ideas to rub together or as dropouts, incapable of dealing with modern society and wishing for a return to living on the land. There were no formal educational on the anarchist tradition but a fair few slagging

(From Red & Black Revolution: A Magazine of Libertarian Communism, Number 4, PO Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland)

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BALANCE

December 22, 1998

$378.83

Fraternally submitted, Frank Girard for the DB
Marx and the Ballot Box

Neil C started off by claiming (DB90) that Marx's statement in 1871 that "the working class cannot merely lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it to its own purpose" meant that groups like the SLP, the SPGB and the NUP were guilty of "parliamentary cretinism" for arguing that the ballot box could be used to win control of political power.

Actually, he could only make out any sort of a case for this by dropping the "merely" and making these groups argue not only that the workers can take control of the "ready-made state machinery" but also that they could wield it to abolish capitalism. But, while these groups do indeed argue that the workers can take control of the ready-made state machinery via the ballot box, none of them argue that the state in its unreconstructed, capitalist form can be wielded to abolish capitalism. All of them envisage it being altered first, in particular by lopping off (or "smashing", if you prefer, in any event, breaking up, dismantling, dissolving) its "bureaucratic-military" features.

That Marx's did not regard the experience of the Paris Commune as meaning that the working class could not, and should not, use the ballot box as a means of trying to win control of political power can be seen from, among other things, his statement in a speech at The Hague, Holland, on 8 September 1872 (i.e. only a year or so after the Commune) that "we do not deny that there are countries such as America and England, and if I was familiar with its institutions, I might include Holland, where the workers may attain their goal by peaceful means" and from his 1880 advice to French workers (i.e. to workers in the very country where only nine years previously the Commune had been savagely suppressed) to turn universal suffrage into "an instrument of emancipation".

What Marx meant by his 1871 statement was well explained by Engels in his 1891 Introduction to a reprint of Marx's pamphlet on the Commune, The Civil War in France:

"From the very outset the Commune was compelled to recognise that the working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine; that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy, this working class must, on the one hand, do away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against it itself, and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment", and "the state is . . . at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once".

Faced with the overwhelming mass of historical evidence that Marx did not take up an "abstentionist" or "anti-parliamentary" attitude towards the ballot box (that was Bakunin), Neil tries a different tack. "Workers voting in bourgeois elections for workers' parties in Marx and Engels' day was necessary" (DB92), he says, but it isn't now and hasn't been since 1914.

This is a generous concession. Thank you. Will he now take the next step and state that the position the SLP and the SPGB took up regarding the ballot box was right, if only until 1914? Once this has been recognised, we can go on to examine the strange proposition of "insurrectionary cretinism" that changed conditions in the US, Britain, Holland, etc since 1914 have made a peaceful capture of power less likely than in Marx's time.

--Adam Buick, Brussels, Belgium.

30 November 1998.
Two New Books on Chomsky

Review essay by Mike Long

Chomsky for Beginners by David Cogswell, illustrated by Paul Gordon. Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc. (P.O. Box 461 Village Station, New York NY 10014), 1996. 153 pp., $11.00.


Noam Chomsky, Professor of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT, is undoubtedly the best known anarcho-syndicalist (and Wobbly) alive today. He is the most cited living author, ranking eighth on the all-time list, just behind Plato and Freud. Even one of the most frequent targets of his wrath, the New York Times, called him “arguably the most important intellectual alive.”

While often controversial, Chomsky’s work has provided the core for many of the dominant theories in linguistics, psychology, and more generally, cognitive science, for close to 40 years. His publication record in those fields and on philosophy, politics, social activism and the media has been prolific – some 70 books and over 1,000 articles to date – and shows no signs of slowing down. The work ranges from scholarly tomes, through articles in coffee table progressive glossies, like Z Magazine, and mainstream newspapers, which (outside the USA, at least) increasingly publish articles by and about Chomsky, to audio-taped conversations and books based on them (1), and interviews, articles and columns in leftist and anarcho-syndicalist publications, such as Workers Solidarity, Black Flag and Libertarian Labor Review. Originally in English, much of this output, the academic and the political activist alike, is translated and reprinted many times over in other languages, often reaching wider audiences in Europe, Asia or Latin America than in the U.S.A. In his own country, Chomsky’s meticulously researched, devastating criticisms of American domestic and foreign policy have led to his marginalization by the mass media, whose corporate owners and editorial lackeys strangely seem more comfortable giving air-time to such noted intellectuals as Ronald Reagan and Dan Quayle.

Chomsky declines numerous lecture invitations in order properly to discharge his professorial responsibilities to colleagues and students at what his remained his home institution since 1955, but maintains a hectic globe-trotting speaking schedule nonetheless. He is deservedly respected for giving considerable amounts of time and energy to student audiences, town meetings, alternative radio stations, small-circulation newspapers, political magazines and progressive presses, for his tireless support for liberation struggles and oppressed peoples around the world, often at considerable risk to his academic reputation and personal safety, and like countless good anarchist militants before him, for not seeking the limelight or the guru status which, perhaps inevitably, is increasingly thrust upon him. He is more interested in the powerless than the powerful, and reportedly spends a staggering 20 hours a week writing personal letters to the numerous individuals, famous and completely unknown, who write to him, often inspired by something of his they have read.

The intellectual excitement and controversy surrounding Chomsky’s ideas, whether about language or social justice, have created a flourishing “Chomsky industry,” a veritable international jobs program. Academics in several disciplines, writers, journalists, publishers (AK, South End, Black Rose, etc., in North America alone), booksellers, interviewers, broadcasters, educational video producers (2), and even film-makers and rock musicians (3), earn varying, often large, proportions of their income by selling Chomsky’s work or repackaging his theories in one form or another for specialist and non-specialist consumers alike. Countless graduate students around the world write theses and dissertations motivated by some aspect of his work. With the exception of some of the academics, most are sympathetic to Chomsky’s ideas, and that is certainly the case with the authors of these two recent books.

Chomsky for Beginners is very good. And that is a relief, for it is aimed at a mass, popular audience, and likely to reach one. In the U.K. and U.S.A., at least, and probably elsewhere, the Beginners Documentary Comic Books series, of which it is part, is widely distributed through mainstream booksellers and chains, meaning that it is likely to be widely read. Unlike most introductory level treatments of
(From Libertarian Labor Review
#22, Winter 1997-98; $3.50 from
PO Box 2824, Champaign, IL 61825)

his work, after a brief biographical sketch, this one covers both the linguistic and the political Chomsky, and manages to handle each quite well. David Cogswell, the author, understandably seems more at ease with the politics than the linguistics, which he discusses, more complex, but while inevitably simplifying and cutting corners due to space limitations and intended audience, he deals with many substantive issues in each area successfully, and has the good sense throughout to let the man speak for himself, quotations from Chomsky's own work making up a considerable portion of the text. (Sources are always cited, but, unfortunately, never page numbers.)

Chomsky's anarchistic views are implicit in many places, dealt with explicitly once (p. 42), and mentioned a couple of other times. While brief, the treatment is always positive, as is the case with his radical ideas (on U.S. foreign policy, the media, and so on), in general. Cogswell even seems anxious to sweeten the pill. Beside a drawing of a large, three-dimensional "circle A," for example, he writes (p. 30): "Chomsky's political stand is often classified as "leftist" or "socialist" or "anarchist" and as such he is foolishly dismissed by many who have come to associate those words with the darkest evil. But the principles that he champions most are freedom and democracy." This is hardly news or exciting stuff for anarchists, of course, but what needs to be remembered is that this consistently sympathetic portrayal will be read by large numbers of people, and people whose prior understanding with the A word will usually have come courtesy of the mass media.

The book begins with a biographical sketch of Chomsky's early years, up through publication in The New York Review of Books in 1966 of his internationally acclaimed piece, "The responsibility of intellectuals," and his brief jailing for active participation in demonstrations against the Vietnam War. Based mostly on his published writings, the ensuing sections are devoted to Chomsky's intellectual roots; his theories of language and mind; his enduring critique of mass media; his indictments of colonialism, monopoly capitalism and non-participatory "democracy," especially as all three are practiced by the USA; and finally, what individuals can do to fight back.

In each case, Cogswell succeeds in conveying to a popular audience what are often complex ideas succinctly, simply and directly. He has three advantages in all this. First, Chomsky himself writes clearly and directly (except, inevitably, when dealing with technical issues in theoretical linguistics), meaning that the Chomsky quotes which Cogswell uses themselves tend to be straight-ahead, hard-hitting and memorable. Second, Paul Gordon's illustrations, which adorn every page and take up about half the book's total space, are superb - humorous, relevant to the topic at hand, however abstruse, and often not just decorative, but an alternative means of explaining the issues. Third, the comic book layout is excellent. (Gordon was also the designer.) Open Chomsky for Beginners at any page, and instead of the potential wasteland of small print and unbroken text, one finds plenty of what publishers call "air," constant variety, and visual surprise. Like all titles in the "For Beginners" Series, this helps make the contents accessible not just to the proverbial college-educated lay reader, but to your average working stiff, perhaps even to an inquisitive MTV-generation teen-ager.

The book's last 10 pages - the only ones without illustrations - are devoted to the text of an interview Cogswell conducted in September 1993. In it, Chomsky expresses his radical views in the modulated, matter-of-fact style that disappoints some professional radicals more used to the in-your-face rhetoric of many class-struggle anarchist publications. It is the style, it should not be forgotten, which allows him (but rarely them) to engage huge audiences and readerships around the world, including millions of the "unconverted" outside anarchist ghettos, with the very ideas they seek to spread. At one point (p.150), for example, Cogswell asks: "How do you get from discussion groups to, say, anarcho-syndicalism?" "Just a more democratic society," Chomsky replies. "Let's not give it any fancy words. A world that's under the thumb of huge transnational corporations and the institutions that cater to them, that is not a democratic world, even if you have elections." Then it's back to the slaughter of native Americans, U.S. atrocities in Vietnam and
the Gulf Massacre, the struggle in East Timor, and importation of the third world model to the USA.

As always, what comes across is a man who, unlike your average guru or left-wing politician, is focused on the issues, not his or her own image. When asked about "Manufacturing Consent," the feature documentary about him that in 1993 had already packed movie houses and been shown on prime-time TV in several countries (not, needless to say, had barely been seen in the USA), Chomsky replied that he had looked at the transcript, but had not seen the film. A question about Jefferson and the seeming absence of positive role models (on the winning side) in U.S. history elicited this response (p.151): "We shouldn't be looking for heroes, we should be looking for good ideas." Amen.

Noam Chomsky: A life of dissent is an altogether different book. An MIT Press hardback, it reads more like an academic text, sports glowing recommendations from other academics on its cover, and comes in at over twice the price and several times the informational density. The author, Robert Barsky, is an assistant professor in the English department at the University of Western Ontario. He maintained an active personal correspondence with Chomsky in the early 1990s, and bases much of his book on information and lengthy quotes from the letters he received during that period, as well as his research on individuals and some radical Jewish organizations that influenced Chomsky in his early years.

Chapter 1 deals with Chomsky's youth - his Russian Jewish immigrant family, growing up in Philadelphia, Hebrew school, grade school, and just as important, the informal education he received through frequent solo trips to New York City starting at age 13. Chomsky spent hours browsing the second-hand bookstores on Fourth Avenue, listened to the conversations of the old Jewish radicals who patronized his uncle's news-stand on Seventy-Second Street, frequented the office of the anarchist journal, Frei Arbeiter Stimme, and read everything by Rudolph Rocker he could lay his hands on, as well as Orwell's Homage to Catalonia and the anarchist Diego Abad de Santillan's After the Revolution (4). He was fascinated by the struggle of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists in 1936, and his first published article, at age 10, had been an editorial in his school newspaper on the fall of Barcelona. Chapter 2 covers Chomsky's life as a linguistics undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was greatly influenced in his studies of both linguistics and politics by one of his principal faculty mentors, the late Zellig Harris, and by some of the radical Jewish organizations with which he worked, notably the left wing of Avukah, and Hashomer Hatzair. Chapter 3 focuses on the roots and varied of his Cartesian and rationalist approach to linguistics and philosophy. Chapter 4 details his university career and achievements, including the huge influence he has had on just about every branch of cognitive science, and lays out Chomsky's views on the role and social responsibilities of the modern intellectual. Chapter 5 recounts the story of his adult political activist life as a major dissenting voice in U.S. domestic politics, and as a supporter of oppressed peoples in numerous struggles around the world - Vietnam, Cambodia, Palestine, Central America, East Timor and elsewhere - as well as inside the USA itself. The concluding chapter surveys Chomsky's achievements and current importance, and identifies some personal qualities that characterize the man and his work.

Barsky's book has been criticized by one reviewer (a leading proponent of a rival linguistic theory) for an over-reliance on secondary sources, for verging on the hagiographic, and for being especially lightweight and uninformed when it comes to Chomsky's career in linguistics (5). There is an element of truth to all three complaints, especially the last. Moreover, the dust-jacket blurb almost invites a negative reaction when it announces pretentiously: "Because Chomsky is given ample space to articulate his views on the major issues relating to his work, both linguistic and political, [i.e., there are extensive quotes from his letters to Barsky] this book can also be seen as the autobiography that Chomsky says he will never write." For the vast majority of potential readers, however, it will indeed be the political activist Chomsky in which they will be more interested, and where, in my view, they will not be disappointed, especially if beyond the Chomsky for Beginners stage and already familiar with some of his writing.

Barsky's book trots out some well-known facts about his subject, to be sure - many of the public events included in the "Manufacturing Consent" film, for example - but also provides a good deal of background information that I believe is seeing the light of day for the first time. (There are some
The book is especially strong on how forces in Chomsky’s early years helped shape many of the political beliefs and interests that have stayed with him ever since. It is also very good (see chapter 5) at correcting the record on some notorious long-running attempts to diminish Chomsky’s reputation, including alleged anti-Semitism and support for fascism (!) in the so-called Faurisson affair (really a defense of free speech, as distinct from licensed speech), and Chomsky and Herman’s alleged apologia for Pol Pot (really a documentation of the hypocrisy and covert political agenda of Western media in their incessant coverage of Cambodia’s killing fields while simultaneously ignoring proportionally worse Western-supported Indonesian atrocities in East Timor). Barsky and Chomsky together expose the devious roles of the likes of Harvard’s Alan Dershowitz (a legend in his own mind, and big with O.J. Simpson, too), Werner Cohn, and England’s Steven Lukes in perpetrating the calumnies, as well as that of the mainstream media in several countries in helping them do so while denying Chomsky opportunities to set the record straight – part of an orchestrated international campaign to discredit him, according to Carlos Otero, and thereby blunt the force of his onslaught on Western policy in Indochina.

Using plenty of direct quotes from Chomsky himself throughout is a winning recipe, just as it is in Cogswell’s book. In both cases, one is reading Chomsky as much as the authors, and that is always a pleasure. Numerous passages resonated with me, not least his well-deserved, withering attack on self-styled French intellectuals, whom he suggests should, among other things, learn “how to tell the truth, to pay attention to facts, and to reach standards of minimal rationality,” and in particular, on post-modernism, a disease currently affecting many hitherto scientific fields throughout the English-speaking world, not just in France.

With only a few exceptions where he has been forced to expose the motives, paymasters and underhand methods of some of his persistent vilifiers, Chomsky again comes across as a generous, courageous individual, someone focused firmly on the issues, not the personalities involved, and certainly not on his own image. In a letter to Barsky, dated 18 Feb. 1993 (quoted on p. 5), he writes:

I’m not happy with the personalized framework. Things happen in the world because of the efforts of dedicated and courageous people whose names no one has heard, and who disappear from history. I can give talks and write because of their organizing efforts, to which I’m able to contribute in my own ways ...

In this respect, as in so many others, Chomsky is a conscious part of the great anarchist tradition, a tradition so very different from the notorious personality cults and lust for power of statist politicians, whether capitalist or authoritarian socialist. While anarchist values are not the only ones to have shaped him, Noam Chomsky is an anarcho-syndicalist in so many of his intellectual allegiances, in his vision of what a just society might look like, and in the principles that have guided his personal life. In different ways, and to different audiences, these two books will help spread those ideas, that vision, and the principles. As such, they should both be welcomed by readers of Libertarian Labor Review.

Notes:

(1) See, e.g., Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian, Secrets, Lies, and Democracy (Odyssey Press, Box 32375, Tucson AZ 85731), 1994. The editor informs readers that Barsamian’s Alternative Radio series, heard on 100 stations in the USA, Canada, Europe and Australia, has tapes and transcripts of hundreds of other Chomsky interviews and talks (for a free catalog call 303-444-8788, or write to 2129 Mapleton, Boulder CO 80304).


(3) See, e.g., Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick’s two-part documentary, “Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media” (Necessary Illusions, 10 Pine Avenue West #315, Montreal, Quebec H2W IP9 Canada – also available from some Blockbusters video rental stores in the USA), 1992; and the double CD, Noam Chomsky: Capital Rules, and Chumbawamba: Showbusiness (Mutual Aid Recordings, P.O.Box 262, Berkeley CA 94701, email: cburn@vdn.com,http://www.adnc.com//web/mutual), 1997.

(4) Originally appearing in 1937, and long out of print, a facsimile edition of After the Revolution (dedicated to the memory of the late FW Charlie Safo) was published by Jura Media in May 1996, on the 60th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. Copies can be purchased from Jura Books, 440 Paramatta Road, Petersham, NSW 2049, Australia.

Chomsky's Weakness

(From the Socialist Standard, August 1998. £1.00/ $1.50 from 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN England)

Noam Chomsky has been celebrated as one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century. His popularity cannot be doubted. Books and lectures are bought and attended in the thousands and he has a strong influence amongst the left and anarchists. But mere anti-capitalism is not enough as it encourages reformism.

Chomsky's analysis of capitalist society broadly hits the mark and socialists could find little to disagree with generally. However, the leftist and anarchist supporters who look to Chomsky for inspiration miss the wider point. While Chomsky blames capitalism for poverty, human rights abuse, limited democracy and so on, his ranks of supporters support anarchist sects and fruitless reformist campaigns banging the capitalist table with a begging bowl, waiting for some new "right" like a dog barking for a crumb from his master's plate.

To blame Chomsky for his supporters may seem a touch harsh, especially as he has consistently spoken out against the following of leaders (in fact opposing a documentary for raising him up like an icon and personalising political issues), but Chomsky fails to come to the conclusion that his analysis deserves. Knowledge of how capitalism works and oppresses is not enough. Without an alternative, opposition to capitalism leads nowhere. A "right" here or there in capitalism has the unerring habit of suddenly disappearing when profit is hindered.

Granted, many who read or hear Chomsky will arrive at something close to anti-capitalist conclusions but without the aim of abolishing capitalism itself this means relatively little. Chomsky does little to redress this.

Although consistently stating the limitations of legal and other changes to capitalism, he does not oppose reformism as such and so unfortunately his analysis serves to assist futile reformism, however much this may not be his aim. While Chomsky's anti-leadership, anti-capitalism stance is sincere it runs counter to the adoring boards of trendy leftists who persist in quoting his analysis while campaigning for minimal gains (e.g. pro-drugs, human rights, Law Society and other assorted moralists) and not for the abolition of the system which creates the need for such demands that seek to address problems which capitalism inevitably cannot solve. Capitalism subverts human need to profit and this is at the heart of the problems Chomsky so ably denounces. No amount of tinkering within capitalism can change this essential characteristic.

In general, Chomsky traces the origin of the abuses prevalent in modern capitalism to property, land and trade and the interests of a small commercial and industrial class (capitalists, i.e. those parasites who live by extracting surplus value from the working population) which run counter to those of the majority of the people (the working class).

Big business and the interests of a corporate elite feature strongly in Chomsky's analysis. For example, he highlights numerous cases of US foreign policy which are clearly followed in the interests of profit and plunder but which are mysteriously absent or fudged over in the world media. Haiti is an obvious example where workers were plainly inconsequential and dispensable pawns in the capitalist pursuit of profit, policy being chopped and changed according to what would be likely to create the most conducive environment for profit-making. Harris governments are regarded as eminently suitable for investment because of the strong control they exercise over the population and the absence of trade unions, while broadly progressive governments which offer basic rights to workers are regarded as bad investment areas.
due to higher costs in terms of wages, taxes, tariffs etc.

Elite Control

Chomsky has stated his opposition to the "renting" of workers for their abilities in return for survival. He also opposes the state as a form of social organisation and suggests that alternatives may exist that are greatly preferable to the present system of organised robbery. Although he puts poverty, hunger, human "rights" abuses and the rest down to capitalism and its organisation, he does not see reformism and moralistic campaigns as a damaging side-track to the conclusion that capitalism itself is the problem and as such attracts the adulation of single-issue reformists.

This is not to deny Chomsky's, at times, outstanding analysis of capitalism and of the motives of its leaders and their sidekicks. In a pamphlet Media Control he discusses the nature of democracy under capitalism, coming to the conclusion that, in the capitalist state, democracy is devoid of any meaning as far as popular participation is concerned. This Chomsky puts down to the various "democratic" theoreticians who justify control by a Leninist-type elitism whereby the ruling elite are assumed to know what is best for the majority (over jobs, investment, welfare cuts, etc); under capitalism there is an unconscious movement towards policies which benefit the capitalists and keep the majority enslaved to interests which do not serve them but which are nonetheless applied in the "national interest".

Chomsky goes on to discuss the highly efficient elite control of the media and the role of education and other institutions in maintaining capitalism, citing the billions of pounds spent on public relations every year.

Chomsky himself has often been the victim of the capitalist propaganda effort as he has commented in interviews with David Barsaman. In capitalism, propaganda is not carried out by central state institutions but by exclusion from mass media which is monopolised by the owning class:

"Our system differs strikingly from say, [the former] Soviet Union, where the propaganda system literally is controlled by the state ... Our system [western capitalism] works much differently and much more effectively. It's a privatised system of propaganda, including the media, the journals of opinion and in general including the broad opinion of the intelligentsia, the educated part of the population" (Chronicles of Destiny).

However, on how to halt the tide of capitalism, Chomsky is incredibly weak:

"[on the] issue of human freedom, if you assume there is no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, there are opportunities to change things, etc., there's a chance you may contribute to making a better world" (Chronicles of Dissent).

Hope is not, however, enough. A century of hope has produced nothing but more capitalist misery and failed reformist efforts. Only organisation for socialism will do. The working class must organise not to reform capitalism but to abolish it and establish a society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of productive wealth. A society of free access and real democracy and an end to classes, states, governments, frontiers, leaders and coercion. A world without vested "interests" and freed from the constraints of profit.

—Colin Skelly
Like Colin Skelly, whose essay precedes this review, Paul Siegel sees “Chomsky’s weakness” as his unwillingness to take the next logical step from his devastating critique of capitalism as the destructive system eating away at society and the environment. As Siegel puts it, “His weakness, however, is that although he is a superb critic of capitalism, he offers no revolutionary strategy or alternative to challenge it.” Unlike Skelly, though, who goes on to analyze Chomsky’s dereliction from what many of us consider his duty to join the fight against capital and work for the abolition of the wages-market-money system and the state that supports it, Siegel’s major concern is purely sectarian: Chomsky’s failure to realize the value of Leninism and Trotskyism in the struggle to build a better society.

Siegel’s 36-page pamphlet (including 86 footnotes) begins with an approving survey of Chomsky’s erudition and style. After noting Chomsky’s appeal to youth, Siegel mounts the horse that will take him to the ideological destination of his pamphlet: the explanation of how someone as smart as Chomsky could be so hostile to Bolshevism (Marxism-Leninism-Trotskyism). He blames this hostility on the unfortunate fact that Chomsky was exposed at an early age to the thinking of anarchists and syndicalists. He also notes Chomsky’s admitted failure to read deeply in Marx as well as his preference for the “left Marxists” like Mattick, Pannekoek, and Korsch.

The essay continues with Siegel defending the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution from attacks made by Chomsky in various writings: The October revolution, contrary to Chomsky, was not a Bolshevik coup, Marx and the Bolsheviks were not “incorrigible authoritarians,” the anti-Bolshevik revolutionaries of Kronstadt were not the same people as the heroes of the October revolution but were supported by the Whites; Malikno’s Ukrainian anarchist revolutionaries were anti-semitic peasants, etc. Siegel’s primary point, though, is that Chomsky’s analysis of Lenin’s and Trotsky’s post-revolutionary actions and words fails to consider the extreme economic distress of the USSR in the decade following the revolution.

Siegel also sees Chomsky’s “anti-Bolshevik/anti-Trotskyist bias” as the reason for his opposition to a vanguard party and his support for reformist parties like the New Party and for lesser-evil Democratic Party candidates. He doesn’t seem to realize the inconsistency of this criticism with the calls of Trotskyist vanguardists for a Labor Party, which would function as a reformist political grouping just like the New Party. Ex-members of Leninist parties will be interested in Siegel’s claim that vanguard parties are characterized by “a team leadership based on internal democracy ....” like Burger King or McDonalds perhaps.

Worthy of note is the documentation. Siegel’s 86 footnotes provide sources for much of Chomsky’s criticism of Leninism as well as for the Leninist sources Siegel uses in its defense. — Worthy of note and worth the two bucks.

---Frank Girard
THE YEAR 2000 (Y2K) COMPUTER PROBLEM (IV)
CAPITALISM'S CULPABILITY

Socialists have long maintained that Capitalism is bad for society's health. In fact, Capitalism now threatens humanity's very existence—in more ways than one!

A case in point is the "millennium bug" or Y2K computer problem. For several issues we have presented evidence to show that this problem is indeed real and has the potential to disrupt government, industry and commerce throughout the industrialized world—with all that this implies. Evidence continues to mount not only of the immensity of the problem but, also, of the improbability of Capitalism being able to fix it in time.

What caused this problem in the first place and why has it been allowed to reach such critical—perhaps socially—terminal—portions? Back when computers (mainframes) were beginning to make significant inroads into social affairs (around the early '60s) memory space was at a premium. In order to save space and expense for their customers or employers, programmers began using only 2 digits for year dates—61 for 1961 and so on. This worked/works fine—until we reach the year 2000 which will apparently read 00 and be taken for 1900 by computers thus programmed. This in turn will apparently cause all kinds of problems, particularly in date-sensitive applications. This seemingly insignificant decision then will apparently have cataclysmic consequences in the year 2000, and even before, unless these programs are rewritten to make them year 2000 compliant. As we have previously noted, this is a time-consuming and very expensive task and both factors increasingly militate against a capitalist solution.

Now, the obvious question—the question that literally leaps out at us here is: "Didn't these programmers know the possible consequences of their actions and, if so, why did they continue to pursue such a course?"

This was essentially the question asked of Ontario computer consultant, Peter De Jager, during a CBC radio interview on the Y2K problem Nov. 26, 1997. Thus:

Moderator: "Why, in the beginning of the computer era, didn't somebody sit down and say: 'Wait a minute! If the thing can only read 19 before two zeros, we might have a problem!'"

De Jager: "Thousands of programmers pointed that out to management...Myself and hundreds of thousands of other programmers knew this. We said 'This will not work in the year 2000.' We said this in the 1960s. And management's response [was]: 'You're worrying about a problem that isn't going to affect us for 40 years? Go away!"

De Jager later added: "Now I'm not placing the blame entirely on management. We, as professionals, should have stood our ground and said: 'No! If we're going to write systems, we're going to write them properly so that they'll work into the future.' To our defence, no one thought that when we wrote programs in the 1960s or 1970s that those programs would still be around 30 years in the future."
While "standing their ground" was no doubt what these programmers should have done, the fact that they didn't is not surprising. Workers, even those who don't consider themselves in that light, soon learn what to expect when they buck their capitalist employer, or his "managers," especially on matters that bear directly on said Capitalist's profit margins. This truth was eloquently expressed in an August 7 letter to The Toronto Star, by Brian W. Kirby, as follows:

"Re Combatting the millennium bug (Your Business, July 18). In the tiny window, What's the millennium bug, you state, 'What caused it?' Shortsighted computer programmers in the 1960s and '70s are the cause of all the angst. To save space on their big, bulky, memory-poor computers, they dropped the 19 from number sequences denoting years...

"If you looked at the history of the computer industry, you would very soon realize that way back then there were generally only mainframe computers and they may have been big and bulky but, as to memory, one megabyte of memory cost at that time and place in history $10,000 American.

"Memory was very, very, very expensive. Thus, all programmers were forced into writing very tight code and the faster it ran on the system using the minimal level of resources the better.

"Any programmer who decided to, shall we say, 'capture the 2000 vision' and calmly informed his boss or bosses back in the '60s and '70s that he was going to use four-digit year dates when all others were using two-digit year dates, and when one meg of memory would cost the company $10,000 U.S., would rapidly discover the joys of being what in those days was correctly called fired. He would have lost his job quickly.

"If anyone is to blame, may I suggest that it be the shortsightedness and greed, if not incompetence, of the American business elite.

"The millennium bug may end up costing billions of dollars to fix and demand major efforts and commitments from businesses around the globe, but it is totally wrong to blame it on the programmers back then who, at the orders of their business leaders, tried their very best to achieve efficient coding at a time when memory inside computers was so very costly."

BRIAN W. KIRBY
Toronto.

So much for the sly attempt (pretty much the norm in the capitalist media) to foist the blame for this fiasco onto "the programmers" or "the Managers"—anyone or anything but the capitalist system! Some have even gone so far as to blame us all for the problem. "We" placed too much faith in science and technology and now "we" may have to pay for our indiscretion. As if the working class, the great majority, was ever asked if we should sell our souls to the computer.
No! The culprit here is Capitalism! Capitalism, with its private ownership of the industrial means of life and production for sale and profit through the wages system of exploitation, inevitably rides roughshod over any social considerations that pose a danger to that profit. The fierce competitive struggle that Capitalism engenders drives each capitalist corporation, on pain of extinction, to continually find ways to cheapen its commodities, thus gain the competitive edge on its rivals. It was in the heat of this competitive struggle that the "millennium bug" was spawned—the result of an incredibly shortsighted and profit-motivated decision that has now exposed society to the possibility of a complete functional breakdown.

When asked by the CBC moderator: "Do we have enough time to fix stuff, however we do it?" De Jager replied: "I remain optimistic. It's becoming more and more difficult to remain optimistic due to the denial that's out there. There's still a tremendous amount of denial. We have the tools, we have the people, we have the intelligence and we have the skill necessary to fix this. But we seem to lack management will. We seem to lack the will to act and to treat this problem with the respect it deserves. If we did then we have time to fix this."

De Jager's guarded optimism can perhaps be explained by the fact that, as a computer consultant whose business it is to advise companies on the Y2K problem, he could hardly be expected to publicly take too pessimistic a view. However, while some action has been taken by business and governments in the interim, evidence to date tends to belittle such optimism. For example, an article by Robert Cribb in The Toronto Star of July 7 notes that:

"Canadian companies are finally preparing themselves for the impending millennium computer glitch—but it could be too late for many, says a federal task force report.

"The national supply chain remains vulnerable,' Jean Monty, chair of Task Force Year 2000, said yesterday as the federal government-appointed group...issued its final report on Canadian industry's preparedness for the so-called 'millennium bug.'

"With only 18 months left before Year 2000, it is critical that firms—particularly those who started late—catch up. In many cases, it could already be too late."

"A Statistics Canada study also released yesterday indicates two-thirds of companies have taken steps to prepare themselves for the Year 2000 computer problem...That 66 per cent figure is up from 45 per cent in October when a similar survey was taken...."

"While large businesses such as banks, telecommunications companies and air carriers have co-operated in a formal way in their own sectors to address the Year 2000 problem, we have found that this is not yet the case, unfortunately, for providers of other essential services such as electrical power, oil and gas, food and water supplies."

"Despite heightened awareness around the problem across all industries, there is still evidence of private sector footdragging in the StatsCan numbers. Most striking is the fact 30 per cent of company respondents had not taken any action on the problem as of May...."
"Joe Boivin, a Y2K consultant in Ottawa and manager of a Y2K Web site (www.glob-almf.org), said the 2000 glitch will trigger a flood of bankruptcies among companies that ignore the dangers. "Very few organizations have grasped the extent of the problem," he said. "All the evidence we have says we're losing this race. The sooner we recognize that and put better plans in place, the better chance we have."

While the above evidence deals with the Canadian situation, similar evidence abounds to indicate that the U.S., Europe and Asia are also way behind in their Y2K repair efforts, as well as in organizing contingency plans to put into effect in the event of failure.

To place our hopes and our trust for the solving of this problem in capitalist hands—the very hands that created the problem and the class that now exhibits a "lack of will" in solving it—is the ultimate folly.

Only Socialism, by instituting social ownership and democratic control of the means of life and production for human need, can muster the collective will and the social organization to meet such a problem. Organize for Socialist Reconstruction!

—George Shand

(From the De Leonist Review, Sept.-Oct. 1998; No price, from P.O. Box 94, Station F, Toronto Ontario, Canada M4Y 2N9)

Notes, Announcements, and Short Reviews

**El Nuevo Topo** (The New Mole) is a Spanish language Marxist Discussion Bulletin brought to our attention by a DB reader in San Francisco. Any reader wanting a sample copy should request it from El Nuevo Topo, PO Box 424725, San Francisco, CA 94142. San Francisco readers interested in attending Spanish language discussion meetings on "Alternativas Para Una Epoca de Crisis Economica can call (415) 285-9564 for information.

**Subversion** has sent out an statement headed "Subversion - the Party's Over" announcing the recent demise of the group and the journal. Under the heading "A Balance Sheet of Our Activities" they list an impressive amount of agitational work in the ten years of their existence including 24 issues of their journal, public meetings, participation in demonstrations, etc. "Most importantly we have been a part of a process that has reshaped those politics that are often labeled communist, anarchist communist, council communist or libertarian communist. We would like to have had more influence; unfortunately by choosing to distance ourselves from both the Marxist and anarchist labels, we have bred some suspicion amongst those who preferred their cozy comforts." For interested readers Subversion still has a website http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8195 E-mail will reach them at knightrose@geocities.com.

**Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice** is the title of a pamphlet by Emma Goldman published recently by the Workers Solidarity Alliance. The essay first appeared in Goldman's journal *Mother Earth* in 1913. It was published as a pamphlet soon afterward and presumably has been out of print for decades. Citing the total defeat of Leninist communism and social democracy with the result that "capitalism has
returned to the free-wheeling ways of its past. The publishers believe conditions are ripe for the direct action methods of syndicalism. As nearly as I can see, syndicalism as Goldman envisioned seems to omit the idea of an industrially organized society. Rather it is simply revolutionary unionism characterized by three tactics: 1) Direct Action, by which she means the use of workers economic power; 2) Sabotage, which she defends as ethical given the circumstances of workers’ lives; and 3) the General Strike, that is, the stoppage of work. In addition she praises the positive activities of syndicalism, including what must have been something like a hiring hall run by the syndicalists in France as well as cooperative factories in Italy. She is less than enthusiastic about U.S. syndicalists including IWW members—presumably Bill Haywood and others—who remained politically active as members of the Socialist Party. No price given from WSA, 339 Lafayette St. #202, New York, NY 10012.

Workers Solidarity, Newsletter of the Workers Solidarity Alliance, November/December 1998. This is the first issue I’ve seen of this eight-page publication of the WSA. It contains articles on the 1999 International Solidarity Conference announced in this space in an earlier DB as well as articles on Mumia Abu Jamal’s appeal, a report on an anarchist East-West gathering in Prague, an article headed “Anarchist Candidates Sweep Elections,” which finds encouragement in the fact that “three times as many American citizens prefer Nobody over the Republican and Democratic candidates.” “The WSA is the U.S. section of the International Workers Association (IWA); the world-wide federation of revolutionary syndicalist organizations and unions. The IWA includes organizations in every continent of the globe, with new sections being welcomed constantly.”

Kronstadt in the Russian Revolution by Efim Yarchuk is a 36-page A4 pamphlet published by the Kate Sharp Library in 1994. It was translated from the French pamphlet written in 1923. Yarchuk was a Russian revolutionary who was exiled to Siberia for his part in the 1905 revolution, emigrated to the U.S. in 1913, and then returned to Russia after the revolution in 1917. He went to Kronstadt, the naval base near St. Petersburg and participated in the activities of the revolutionary Kronstadt sailors from April 1917 until the Bolsheviks under Trotsky took the fort in 1921, defeating, according to Yarchuk, the genuine revolutionists. Much of the pamphlet deals with the struggle of the Kronstaders against the counter-revolutionary strategies of the Bolsheviks, beginning already in July and continuing through the October revolution where, says Yarchuk, the single-minded revolutionary fervor of the Kronstadt sailors prevailed against the delaying tactics of the Bolshevik high command. Of course the zeal of this revolutionary element, the ACS (anarchist-communist-syndicalist) majority in Kronstadt could not prevail against the resources of the Bolsheviks. Yarchuk ends by chronicling the downfall of Kronstadt in 1921. This is an excellent account by a prominent participant in the proletarian opposition to the Bolsheviks in the very early days of the revolution. L3.00 (about $5) from KSL, BM Hurricane, London WC1n 3XX.

The Communist Manifesto in the 21st Century celebrates the 150th anniversary of the publication of this best known of the works of Marx and Engels. Published by the Socialist Party of Great Britain, it takes up such questions as the reason the Manifesto is called “Communist” rather than “Socialist” and why Marx and Engels called for reforms of capitalism like a graduated income tax in Part II. Much of the 21 page pamphlet summarizes important ideas in the Manifesto and relates them to present day capitalism and to the positions of the SPGB. Readers can obtain a copy for 50p ($1) from the SPGB, 71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB, England.
Collective Action Notes #14/15 is the most recent issue of the major council communist journal in the U.S. Its 36 tabloid-size pages contain a 4-page article on "The Jobless Movement in France," where the effects of the global depression have reached levels serious enough to generate a mass response in the form of demonstrations and organizations of the unemployed. Along with a three-part article titled "Libertarian Socialism," apparently for readers interested in Marxian-Hegelian theory, this issue also contains material by and about Kaminist Kranti/Collectivities. Included is an earlier version of KK/C's pamphlet "Self-Activity ...", a seven-page article "Revolutionary Termites in Faridabad" by Loren Goldner who spent a month in Faridabad observing and interviewing KK/C activists, and a two-page article by KK/C answering Goldner's criticisms and comments. All of this available for $2/ $1.50 from CAN, PO Box 22962, Baltimore, MD 21203.

Charles H. Kerr and Co. was the major source of Marxist literature in the U.S. from 1900 on into the twenties--roughly the era of the Socialist Party of America's glory days. Many readers may have copies of the first English language version of the threevolumes of Capital which it published around 1906. It fell onto bad times after the rise of the CP and International Publishers but never completely died. Its new catalog reflects its more recent political and cultural orientation: new paperback editions of Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology and 500 Years of Revolution by Charles H. George as well as Paul Buhle's 1000+ page Encyclopedia of the American Left, an historically interesting pamphlet by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in her Socialist Party days and one by William Z. Foster when he was the chief proponent of syndicalism in the U.S. And much more. Free from Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1740 West Greenleaf Ave., Chicago IL 60626.

The Discussion Bulletin will close its editorial office and printing plant for eight weeks beginning January 11 so the entire staff can take a much needed vacation. We expect to have DB94 in the mail in March with a minimum of delay. Please send articles and letters for publication via both e-mail and snail mail. They will be held for us.

--fg