DB116 begins with a exchange on unionism taken from the internet discussion forum *Insidious*, which differs from the other forums in the non-market socialist sector of the political spectrum in that it seems to be politically independent and its beginnings at least—so far as the “anglophone” portion is concerned—involved a democratic meeting that laid down the rules. Frequent participants include several left communists, mostly supporters of *Internationalist Perspectives*, the journal of a breakaway group from the International Communist Current (ICC), as well as council communists, world socialists, and others.

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

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

In the DB the often antagonistic groups that make up this sector can debate and discuss the issues that divide them and gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities. Among the latter might be movement toward at least limited co-operation.

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

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Summary: This is an argument for a more nuanced approach to dealing with unions and the left than left-communists have traditionally had.

Dear list,

(...) 

For years I have held, and continue to adhere - but theoretically - to a position that comes down to the crude formula common to left communists that "the left is the left wing of capital," and that "unions are capitalist organizations." And I believe we're mostly in agreement here about that except when it comes to the IWW and maybe other alternative unions (the Italian Cobas, anyone?).

For a long time now I have felt that, while true, this is a far from adequate position, but I haven't really overcome it. In its vulgar sense, the sense in which I first took it, this position conceives of the left and the unions as institutions outside of a working class that is somehow "innocent." I thought of the working class as having only its needs (which can only be realized in communism), and being either passive (acted upon by institutions either of the right or left of capital, i.e., the boss or the union), or active (by which I meant acting for itself, in other words, in a communist way). Eventually I decided that no, the working class is continually active, only "in itself" as a part of capital and not "for itself" against capital. (Of course, this is one of Marx's basic ideas, but I came to it by trying to think practically rather than to assimilate his theory.) So, inasmuch as it acts in support of capital, the working class is therefore just as "guilty" as capital (in fact they are part of capital). Revolution will be the deed of people who changed from supporting capital (either actively or passively) to attacking it. My point here is that we must realize that leftism and unionism (and also right-wing reformism) are not alien ideologies and practices separate from the revolutionary class, but rather part of the working class. The working class must overcome problems within itself. Leftism and unionism are among those problems.

Workers' needs are inherently in conflict with capital because capital reduces workers' lives through its organization of life into wage labor (work), while workers, being human, always prefer more freedom than is allowable under capitalism. Workers, therefore, find themselves at odds with capital simply because capital wants them to work more for less pay. The class conflict inherent in this society continually gives rise to ideologies and related institutions that mediate the class conflict: generally speaking, leftism/the left and unionism/unions. The goal of mediation is social peace. Fundamental change cannot happen without increased class conflict, so this mediation is inherently counter-revolutionary.

Without a belief in (I don't say "consciousness of") the need for and possibility of fundamental social change (i.e., our understanding of communism), all working class struggle is limited to struggles
that are happy to end in mediation if capital (including leftists/unionists) can accommodate them or make them believe that it can. And this means virtually every struggle that has ever happened, because most have not been motivated by revolutionary belief and even those that were have usually had social democratic, stalinist or other left-capitalist inspirations, so they don't count either.

The question is this: how can limited, reformist struggle be made revolutionary? And the answer I've been leaning toward for a long time is that it is necessary for revolutionaries to have some relationship with leftist and unionism beyond blanket denunciation. The fact is that we agree with reformists on the need to struggle for reforms. Only we believe that to even win the reforms we have to enlarge the struggle, make it revolutionary by increasing the autonomy/separateness/antagonism of the working class from/to capital. The crux of our relationship with all non-revolutionary struggling workers (leftists and unionists included), then, is to convince them of the need to widen the struggle. Leftist and unionist workers are mainly just organized groups that tend for their own (ultimately capitalist) reasons to try to limit the struggle, but I now believe that by no means are they the only elements that do this.

"Non-ideological" workers themselves are perfectly capable of limiting their own struggles. But to the extent that there are elements who want to struggle effectively, there is a basis of solidarity/common action because if the two parties (revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries) agree and do manage to enlarge the struggle, then both of their goals are achieved: reform and revolution, at least that will be their hopes. They hope to get their raise, and we hope to abolish wage labor. (Of course, these two interests may exist within a single person also, as in: my mind wants communism/freedom, my body wants to survive more easily.)

The precondition for revolutionary struggle, then, is not a belief in the need for revolution, but rather a belief in the need to widen the struggle and the willingness to take the risks that entails. This is the basis for the action of revolutionary workers. Just because we "believe in revolution" doesn't really give us any advantage over anyone else who simply wants to achieve a reform in the most effective way. We just believe in advance that to do so requires expanding/widening the struggle (which if it continues in an ongoing domino effect will lead to worker's power over and against capital). But this event will never occur by a majority first converting to revolutionary belief. Rather, such belief will always follow an expanding struggle.

What does this have to do with leftism and unionism? I'd say that we need to focus any intervention not on ideology ("hey workers - the left and the unions are really capitalist!") but on practice ("hey workers - the left and the unions are ineffective for getting you anything!")

But I've missed another thing I'm thinking about: unions especially -- though I wouldn't rule out the left in general -- are the immediate forms and channels of struggle for many workers. This is just a fact. Unions, we all should know, will limit and stop struggles (even before workers begin them, if you will, by not doing anything to encourage or inspire struggle, or by actively discouraging it). But, lacking consciousness of this tendency, workers who decide to begin acting for their desires (for more pay, less work, etc.) against capital's current imperatives, workers will usually either come to (or through) the union or try to get unionized. The latter virtually always represents a significant reform, an improvement in their lives under capital.

If a job is already unionized, conditions generally won't get any better through union activity, because of unions' tendency to limit any struggle out of their need to maintain legality and their general culture of reformism* (see footnote, below.) The point for us to get workers to do what is most effective for them to increase their wages, etc (same principle for non-workplace struggles). Is it most effective, for example to say, "don't go to union meetings, meet outside the unions instead"? It could happen, but generally I think that would be ineffective. Generally, if people are going to struggle in a unionized job (please correct me if I'm wrong here - I would love to be wrong), they're going to start by going to a union
meeting. Sure, there might be other forms of struggle, sabotage, self-organized actions such as petitioning, etc. But sooner or later, if there's a union, especially one of the more democratic ones, people who want to struggle are going to go to the union. Of course, there's a lot of abstentionism, as in state politics - people don't vote, and they don't go to union meetings. And that's the extent of their communist activity! I think that politicization (voting, going to union meetings) is a natural tendency when people begin thinking about actively changing things but don't have any better theory to apply. That's what happens in the workplace. They not only go to meetings, but do the other union activities — they act as union members, go to rallies, etc. These are channeled forms of struggle. If they don't break out of the channelization, they will fail. Our job is to help them succeed, which requires going beyond the union form.

So, what should a worker with a critique of unions do? I think we/they should "use and abuse the unions." I think this is a much more practical slogan than the common one heard in left-commie circles, "outside and against the unions." The latter exists on a rarefied moral high ground without direct connection to lived reality. I'm not saying change it to "inside and against the unions," but more of a free floating spirit of acting within them (because it is necessary and inevitable) until the point when you can act without them (because it is necessary).

I believe that the same idea can apply for the non-workplace leftist movement generally - not particular parties or organizations for the most part, mind you, but the left as a diffuse segment of the population. Substitute demonstration for union meeting, and you get the idea.

What I'm saying here may not be a major innovation -- I'm sure many of us have thought along the same lines -- but I am writing against what I see as historically the left-communist attitude: unions and left bad, autonomous struggle good. This attitude is partially true, but leads to impractical activity like preaching. We must realize that autonomy doesn't happen in a vacuum, it happens wherever the struggling part of the class is, and part of it is in unions and the left.

I look forward to your responses.

Paul

* Footnote: I would like to have comprehensive empirical knowledge of this tendency, but instead I have only a belief. I think it would be great to have a study group to learn the evidence that supports this prejudice. This would serve as a weapon to spread consciousness of unions' tendency to defeat reforms. A book title could be "Unions against Workers" rather than "Unions Against Revolution" (the Munis book). Non-revolutionary workers don't care if unions are against revolution, but they might care if unions are against getting what they really want - which is reducible to "less work and more pay."

Date: Fri, 13 Sep 2002 16:57:58 +0200
Subject: RE: [intsdiscnet] Responses on unions

I've just re-read Chapter X of Capital (for a coming meeting of a Capital study group) and have been moved to write a belated contribution to this debate. It will be recalled that this is the chapter where Marx describes the "class struggle" (his words) between the capitalist employers and workers over the limitation of the working day (a manifestly non-revolutionary demand).

Basically, I would say that unions, in their original basic form of groups formed by workers to resist downward pressures from employers, are not and can never be revolutionary organisations. They are essentially organisations to negotiate with employers over the terms and conditions for the sale and use of workers' labour-power. OK, they represent the workers as mere variable capital, but are not to be snuffed
at for that. We have to live under capitalism even when we're not revolutionary! In other words, I support the principle of "unionism" in the sense of workers getting together to get the best deal they can over the sale of their labour power and to resist downward pressures from employers. There's a class struggle going on out there, initiated by employers. Even if we (as a class) are not revolutionary we can't just let them get away with whatever they want to do. We've got to resist them. In fact, such basic resistance is built-in to capitalism, as it has been to all previous class societies, anyway. This doesn't mean that I necessarily support all existing unions. Far from it, in fact, since they commit all sorts of faults (corporatism, collaboration with employers, political parties and the state, not organised democratically, etc, etc). What I'm supporting is unionism (non-revolutionary workers getting together in a permanent organisation to resist downward pressures and arbitrary actions from employers) as a principle, not existing unions. This said (in my view) these are still better than nothing. Which is why I'm in one (without any illusions) and as a worker selling my labour-power not as a revolutionary. For me something like the IWW would be an "ideal" union but in practice not enough workers join it to make it effective (so it ends up tending to be a mere extra-parliamentary reformist political group), so I make the best of a bad job and join an existing union which can at least have some influence, thanking to many of my fellow workers being in it too, in countering what my employer might like to get away with. Because I don't think the unions are or can be revolutionary, for me the criticism that they are not revolutionary is not relevant. But I wouldn't go so far as to describe them as "counter-revolutionary" as has been done.

Normally they are not, though some have been and could be. They are not supposed to be revolutionary, but just to represent us as variable capital, to try to ensure that we get the full value of our labour-power within capitalism and its wages system. For me, the weakest point of the "ultra-left" anti-union position is that which opposes not just existing unions (which is understandable enough) but also the very principle of unionism, ie of workers forming a PERMANENT organisation to negotiate over wages and conditions and that all they need to form are temporary, ephemeral committees during strikes. This just doesn't make sense to me (or in fact to most workers): a permanent organisation must be better than a temporary one, if only because the downward pressures of employers are permanent even outside of strikes. It's like saying "the working class only exists when it's on strike". Which is manifestly not true. Strikes are comparatively rare and we exist all the time! But we still need to protect ourselves and fight back against employers.

Even though it's not revolutionary, I can't see how revolutionaries can dismiss workers forming permanent bodies to do this as irrelevant or worse.

Adam

[Intdisnet] Unions  17 Sep 2002

Said Adam Buick, on 13 September:
"What I'm supporting is unionism (non-revolutionary workers getting together in a permanent organisation to resist downward pressures and arbitrary actions from employers) as a principle, not existing unions. This said (in my view) these are still better than nothing."

Adam seems to believe that trade unions are formed by workers, that they belong to workers, and that they actually represent the interests of workers. But such beliefs do not correspond to today's reality, nor the reality of at least the past fifty years in the economically most advanced countries. Workers are, rather, faced with already existing, old, mammoth, thoroughly bureaucratized, in fact, thoroughly statified trade unions, over which they have no control. In the nineteenth century, workers did indeed get together to
form unions to defend their interests. But over time, as these unions got bigger and bigger, and as they came to require a vast hierarchical, bureaucratic organizational structure to maintain their permanent functioning, and as they came to wield more and more influence within capitalist society, these unions developed permanent separate interests of their own (that is, of the bureaucracy) distinct from the shared economic interests of the workers that they were supposed to represent.

As the trade unions never were -- as Adam says -- revolutionary, nor were they meant to be, when they were faced by a situation of revolution or war, they all chose the side of the capitalist state, against the interests of the working class. The first major such test for the "classical" unions was the First World War. In that instance, all of the existing trade unions and national trade union federations clearly acted in a COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY manner, and have done nothing since that time to change that characterization of them; at the time of the Second World War, they acted in an equally counter-revolutionary manner.

As the trade unions came to wield more and more power within capitalist society, they came to represent -- potentially, at least -- a greater threat to the interests of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie had to decide whether to crush the unions or to co-opt them. Crushing them was too risky, and potentially too costly, so they chose to go the co-optation route. As the transition to the real domination of capital was developing, and as the capitalist state was taking over control of more and more of social functions in order to maintain social stability in the face of increasing social crises arising out of the contradictions of developing capitalist society, the unions came under increasing pressure to subordinate themselves to the state, to its system of legal and bureaucratic control. The only alternative to such subordination to, and integration within, the state was all-out social war against the state and the ruling class, i.e., revolutionary struggle. Of course -- as was noted above, and as Adam pointed out -- the unions were never meant for such struggle. It was then that workers lost any remaining control they had had over the unions. It was then that the unions were definitively transformed into organs of the state for the purpose of controlling the working class, of waging the class struggle AGAINST the proletariat.

Unionism today is not "...non-revolutionary workers getting together in a permanent organisation to resist downward pressures and arbitrary actions from employers...." Workers today are (except in very rare instances) not getting together to create new unions separate from the old ones. Workers are, rather, organized into, and by, the old existing unions. From a revolutionary perspective -- and that is our perspective here, not that of "living under capitalism", getting the most we can within the system -- there is NOTHING positive in workers being organized by these statist power organizations. That is why it is so dangerous to say that the existing unions "...are still better than nothing." Normally, it is the most militant, and the most economically essential, sections of the working class that are organized in unions. That reflects the fact that the ruling capitalist class recognizes the necessity to have unions organizing and controlling these workers. If that wasn't the case, the ruling class would have long ago crushed those unions. The choice is thus not between the existing unions and NOTHING, but between existing unions and NEW forms of workers' self-organization.

Adam seems not to understand very well the "ultra-left" critique of unions. He claims that for ultra-leftists "... all they [i.e., workers] need to form are temporary, ephemeral committees during strikes." I don't know which ultra-leftists make this argument. But for myself, and others coming from the left-communist tradition -- and on the union question, it was the German/Dutch left which had a far clearer understanding than the Italian left -- workers are to organize themselves through general assemblies and elected struggle committees, not just during strikes, but during and for every instance of class struggle they find themselves forced to engage in.

The problem with PERMANENT ORGANIZATIONS -- and history has shown this over and over -- is that they become separate from those they are supposed to represent. When the workers aren't actively
struggling, the organizations come under the control of the functionaries that manage them on a
day-to-day basis. And it is on that basis that they develop separate organizational interests -- separate, that
is, from those they are supposed to represent -- and come under increasing control of the state. The only
alternative -- given, as we said above, that the workers aren't actively struggling via these organizations --
is for these organizations to "wither away", to die. Then, when the workers are again forced to struggle
collectively, they can again spontaneously organize themselves through general assemblies and elected
committees. History has clearly shown that this is how autonomous class struggle unfolds under the
conditions of the real domination of capital.

Eric

Date: Mon, 16 Sep 2002/ Subject: unions [Intdiscnet]

HOW THE UNIONS BECAME OUR ENEMIES

I agree with Neil that the discussion on unions so far was very interesting, but didn't go far enough.

Most of us agree that the unions are an integral part of the capitalist system. Not just the corrupt ones and
those with a heavy bureaucratic apparatus but also those who profess a belief in "grass roots democracy"
or even in "revolution". The arguments given for that position have been mostly empirical. Indeed, time
and time again, the unions have screwed the workers, contained and defanged their struggle, have spread
capitalist ideology in the working class and acted as capital's police on the shop floor. But empirical
arguments are not enough. Indeed, on the basis of past experience alone, one could very well conclude
that global revolution is impossible, as Paul wrote. Some have argued that it's the union's function within
the capitalist economy to manage the sale of labor power, which inevitably ties it to the system and hence
opposes it to the class whose fundamental interests are irreconcilable with those of that system. That is
ture but it's not sufficient either. One could argue that as long as the goals of the struggle don't go beyond
obtaining better wages and working conditions, or preventing their deterioration, and as long as those
goals are achievable within capitalism, the irreconcilability is not immediate and the existence of
permanent institutions to negotiate a better price for variable capital remains in the interests of the
workers. In short one could argue, as does Adam, that despite the empirical evidence and despite the
integration of the unions in the structure of the capitalist economy, the existing unions are bad but
unionism is good.

Moreover, despite the widespread disillusion, many workers still see the unions as their
(imperfect) organisations, and sometimes the most combative workers are active in them. And sometimes
capitalists fight the unions and try to get rid of them. When they attack a union and the workers rise up to
defend "their" organisation, should revolutionaries who understand the real role of the union tell them not
to wage that fight, even though the attack is clearly meant to defeat the workers and have a free hand to
impose more exploitation? What to do when the workers most willing to fight are shop stewards and
others who ardently defend the unions, not the leadership but the organisation? Should we simply call
upon workers to leave the unions? And what do we offer as alternative, not just in times of open struggle
but also when the conditions for collective struggle aren't ripe while the pressure from capital continues?
Is the 'outside and against' directive more than an empty slogan when the only meetings where workers
gather are those organised by the unions?

I think that, to answer those and many other questions pertaining to the practical aspects of class
struggle and the defense of workers' immediate interests, the question why unions are not just counter-
revolutionary but against the working class in their daily practice, must be answered first.

The answer is not that obvious. After all, it is a logical reaction of workers, who are utterly powerless as individuals towards their employers who seek to exploit them as much as possible, to band together in permanent organisations to defend the price of their labor power. The first unions were clearly created by the working class even though many did bear the corporatist imprints of the guilds (professional organisations from the pre-capitalist era). Their existence as permanent organisations was a necessity, not only because of the permanency of capitalist pressure, but also because of the need of permanent preparation for confrontations with the capitalists, confrontations which often took the form of wars of attrition which the workers were doomed to lose without this preparation (the build-up of strike funds etc). Likewise, the growth of unions into bigger organisations, operating on a national scale, reflected the need of workers to increase their power by extending their class solidarity. So the growth of the unions reflected and stimulated class consciousness. Capitalists feared and loathed them and fought them bitterly.

Yet very soon, the permanency of these large organisations posed a problem. The class struggle goes through ups and downs which reflect the contradictory tendencies to which the workers, as an exploited class, are subjected. The conditions of exploitation push the workers to fight collectively and thereby to assert itself as a class with interests separate and opposed to those of capital; but those same conditions also create competition among workers, atomisation, alienation, passivity, receptiveness to the ideology of the dominant class. Those two tendencies do not neutralize each other but give the class struggle a very non-linear character, with sudden advances and retreats, moments of rising class consciousness and stretches of 'social peace', as one or the other of those tendencies dominate. During those periods of non-collective struggle, when atomisation and alienation prevail, these big permanent organisations cannot express what isn't there, a class collectively fighting. It does not mean they immediately become bourgeois but they inevitably acquire an autonomy from the class they are supposed to represent. As autonomous institutions they inevitably develop hierarchical, authoritarian attitudes and relations and come to have interests which are distinct from those of the class as a whole. Thus the source of conflict of interests between the working class and the unions is already potentially present in the permanence of unions as social institutions.

I write 'potentially' because from this does not yet follow that these institutions must side with capital against the workers. For this to happen, these institutions must first become part of capital, absorbed into the social fabric woven by the law of value. This did not happen immediately because the extension of the law of value throughout society was a slow, gradual process. In the early stages of this process, the domination of capital over society was only 'formal'. The work process itself was at first not yet intrinsically capitalist, capitalism only squeezed as much surplus value as possible from it by making the working day as long as possible and keeping the wages as meagre as possible. It took a long time for a specifically capitalist method of production (based on machinism, which reversed the relation worker-technology: the tool was an extension of the worker's hand but now the worker became an appendage of the machine) to develop and become dominant. The giant leaps in productivity which technology-based production unleashed created mass-production and set the stage for capitalism to transform the totality of society in its own image, which meant that the law of value came to determine social relations not just in the sphere of production but also in distribution, education, entertainment, culture, media and every other aspect of human life.

But before that process (called the transition to real domination of capital) amassed critical weight, there remained a large space within society that was not yet penetrated by the law of value. Therein, not only expressions of pre-capitalist classes survived but organisations of the fledgling working class too could maintain a relative autonomy. Unions were not the only permanent workers organisations that
flourished in that space: there were workers’ cooperatives, mutual aid societies, political mass parties, cultural organisations, newspapers, etc. that were genuine expressions of the working class. The modest size of the bourgeois state apparatus also reflected the merely formal control of capital over society. The fact that the state’s policy towards the unions was largely repressive shows that capital had not yet developed the means to organically integrate them; the unions were still by and large standing outside the state.

As the real domination of capital progressed and the complexity, technification and interwovenness of the capitalist economy developed, the state gradually fused with the economy and its tentacles spread over civil society. It’s striking how this transformation of the economy and the integration of the unions into the structure if capitalist society went hand in hand, in particular towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

The test of that integration came when the interests of capitalism and those of the working class (and humanity) became diametrically opposed as never before. What was at issue was not the price of variable capital but its survival or destruction. In the first world war, many millions of proletarians were slaughtered and it happened with the active collaboration of the unions. This epochal event signaled a new paradigm in which both crisis and war meant something different than before: they became both catastrophic and global in nature as well as essential to the continuation of capitalist accumulation (this is explained in depth in other texts which I can email to those who would like me to).

Today more than ever, there cannot exist any large permanent institution outside of the fabric of capital. That is true not just for unions but also for churches, political parties, cultural institutions and so on. The market either absorbs them, accords them a specialized function within its overall operating structure, a niche according to what they can do for the valorisation of capital, or marginalizes them, makes them disappear. When the class struggle heats up, the market shifts, a demand is created for a company of management of ‘human resources’ that has a more radical market image, which is quickly filled, either by a new union or by a radicalisation of the existing ones. Neither represents a gain for the working class. Today, there are no longer any progressive factions of capital. The unions’ interests are inextricably bound to those of capital, to those of the nation. The logic of capital makes them complicit in trying to impose the worst possible fate on the working class. In the revolutionary struggle, which is a defensive struggle, the working class will have to take on the entire capitalist machinery, including the unions.

It is true that this does not mean that every act or every word of the unions are opposed to the immediate interests of the working class. Influenced by faulty Luxemburgian economics, I used to think that the antagonism of the unions to the interests of the working class was in large part due to an impossibility for capitalism to accord any improvements in the living standards of the workers, so that the union-struggle for ‘reforms’ could only be fake. That was clearly a mistake. The productivity-increases made possible by the progress of capital’s real domination allowed capital to accord improvements of the living standards and to increase exploitation (increase the portion of the labor day that is unpaid) at the same time, at least in periods of expansion. It doesn’t like to do this, of course, since every wage gain is a profit loss, but over time it came to realize that this can be in its own interests. The main reason is that the production process under real domination, with its huge assembly lines and increased specialisation and thus interdependency, became more vulnerable to interruptions, to class struggle. That was a powerful incentive, especially in the post-world war two period, to grant better wages and to give the unions a bigger say in the management of the economy.

The unions have their own particular interests. As companies that manage the sale and the smooth exploitation of variable capital, they compete among themselves and have a market image to defend, both in regard to the workers they seek to represent and in regard to the enterprises with whom they seek to
negociate. Their credibility is their most valuable asset and if it's necessary to protect it, they can
sometimes drive a hard bargain with the buyers of labor power. The most intelligent capitalists realize that
unions can only fulfill their capitalist function if they have some credibility as defenders of the workers
and must do what they have to do to maintain it.

The international waves of class struggle in the '60's and '70's which repeatedly broke through the
dykes of unionism and did great damage to capitalist profits and to the myth of unions as defenders of the
working class, was a powerful stimulant to the restructuring of the capitalist economy that followed it.
The 'post-Fordism' in which it resulted, with its increased automation, the computerization of labor, the
decentralisation of production, the explosion of outsourcing, subcontracting and temp work, the increased
mobility of capital (vastly expanding the use layoffs and closings, and the threat thereof, as social
weapons) decreased the vulnerability of production to industrial action considerably. By decreasing that
vulnerability, capital also decreased its dependence on the unions. This allowed for more anti-unionism
among capitalists, and led to a marked increase of 'union-busting'. But this also helped the unions to shore
up their credibility in the eyes of the workers somewhat, because the enemy of your enemy can seem to be
your friend.

The unions resisted the post-Fordist trend, in part to maintain their credibility in the eyes of the
workers and in part because it was and is a threat to their own power. But since the trend reflected not a
mere policy choice but the direction in which capitalism, of which they are a part, was going, their
resistance was doomed to be ineffective. The alternative of the unions to this trend is conservative, to
resist changes in capitalism. As this is impossible, they end up almost invariably defending 'capitalism
lite', layoffs, but less layoffs than the bosses are demanding, wage cuts, but with a percentage and a half
shaved off. But they need a culprit, a scapegoat for the worker's anger, and since they are tied to national
capital, the scapegoat is usually foreign competition (foreign workers really). That makes the unions the
most ardent defenders of protectionism. As an economic recipe that is plain stupid and sometimes really
annoying to other factions of capital, but politically it is very useful to capital because it makes them work
tirelessly to spread the nationalistic poison into the working class.

* * *

Conclusions that follow from this include that it would be a huge mistake for revolutionaries to
fight for more democratic, more radical or more revolutionary unions or to join solidarity campaigns for
unions under threat such as the ILWU (yes to solidarity with the dockworkers of course, but let's not blur
that line). If we have the opportunity to intervene in open, collective struggles, we should not focus
primarily on the theoretical denunciation of the unions, but on how to make the struggle as effective as
possible. Despite the unions overwhelming advantage in propagandistic means etc, we have the
advantage that there is no contradiction between what is needed to make a struggle for immediate workers'
interests more powerful and what is needed to fight capitalism, while the unions are boxed in the
contradiction that they must pretend to fight something of which they are a part. The strength of a workers
struggle clearly depends on the number of workers that join it and on their active participation. The more
workers do away with all the divisions imposed on them (between union- and non-union workers, workers
of different trades and qualifications, workers of different races, men and women, immigrant- and
non-immigrant workers, blue collar and white collar, workers of different companies, sectors, nations.)
and the more they take the struggle into their own hands instead of passively relying on leaders and
specialists, the more firepower a struggle acquires. It's not necessary that workers understand the true
nature of unions or the need to fight the capitalist system for them to see the need to organize their
struggle effectively, the need for general meetings in which they are not just 'informed' by union-leaders
but in which they discuss collectively on how to push the struggle forward, the need for strike committees
whose members are elected and revocable by all instead of manned by union specialists, the need for
roving pickets, mass delegations to other workplaces, aggressive demonstrations and collective self defense that don’t fold in the face of court orders and other legalistic attacks, instead of the appeals to the media and the Democrats and the left wing of capital and the petitions, boycotts of products, media-campaigns and other ineffective forms of pseudo-struggle the unions usually propose.

Real solidarity rather than theoretical insight is where such tactics and organisation-forms originate from. The expression of real solidarity in struggle implicitly opens the possibility of revolution, because the revolution is nothing else but solidarity taken to its logical conclusion and that is what unions are trying to block. There’s another angle from which to look at this. One can describe the post-revolutionary society in glowing terms and exalt how ‘democratic’ it will be and so on. But the organisational structures of power in that society, whether called workers councils or any other name, will not fall from the sky after capitalism is defeated. They cannot exist if they are not created in the struggle and they cannot arise in the revolutionary phase of the struggle if they are not being developed in the lab of the struggle for more narrow, immediate interests that precedes it. Despite the interruptions, ebbs and flows, it is one process of the proletariat asserting itself as an autonomous class, freeing itself from its shackles, of which unionism is one of the heaviest and most insidious.

As for the question of how to deal with the unions when there is no open struggle, I’m not sure what the problem is. Revolutionaries cannot do much more in their workplaces at such times than having individual discussions, in which of course it’s important to be honest and forthright. Whether they want to be a member of the union so they can use the services it provides or not, is not an issue.

Sander

Maclntosh on the union discussion (Intdiscreet) 9-18

THE ROLE OF UNIONS TODAY: THE DISCIPLINE AND CONTROL OF THE WORKING CLASS

It seems to me that the discussion of unions that is taking place on the Anglophone list is, in fact, two separate, though related discussions. One concerns the role of unions today: are they enemies of the working class; an integral part of the politico-economic and ideological apparatus of capital. The other concerns the problem of how revolutionaries are to forge links with the working class, involve themselves in its struggles, become active factors in the battles waged by workers. These two questions should not be confused. Even if we conclude, as I believe we must, that unions are today formidable obstacles to the unfolding of the class struggle, institutions of the class enemy, the issue of how revolutionaries are to forge links with the working class must be confronted. At the same time, the need to forge links with the working class must not lead revolutionaries to conclude that — in some fashion or other — they must work within the unions, because that is where the workers are. Our conclusion as to the role of unions today, should not be driven by the need - understandable though it is — to physically engage in class struggle. Rather, the mode of our intervention in the class struggle should - in large part - be shaped by the conclusions we draw as to the role that unions play in the present epoch of the real domination of capital.

One more point before I turn to the issue of the role of unions today; I am deliberately not using the language of the class "nature" of unions, or speaking of their "essence." That is because I believe that the role of determinate institutions, such as unions, is shaped by historical development, and is not reducible to a fixed nature or essence. Marxism is a genetic or genealogical theory; it analyzes and explains the historical role of determinate institutions, the historical trajectory of social relations - with a view to revolutionary intervention. Thus, in the case of unions, for example, the focus must be on the role they play in the historical unfolding of the class struggle, and their relation to the reproduction of the
dominant social relations; a role that changes as capitalism undergoes its transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labor to capital. While such a genealogy of the unions is necessary, this text can do no more than indicate the broad outlines of the development of unions over the past century; a more thorough genetic account remains to be written.

If we turn back to the first decade of the twentieth century, the social landscape included two distinct types of unions - each of them organs of the working class, instruments of its struggle. There were the trade unions, exemplified by the AFL in the US, which limited themselves to the struggle for reforms (higher wages, shorter hours, better working conditions) within the capitalist system. And there were the revolutionary syndicalist unions, exemplified by the IWW in the US, the CGT in France, the CNT in Spain, which waged the class struggle to overthrow the capitalist state and the social relations determined by the system of wage labor. While the trade unions were not revolutionary, in contrast to the revolutionary syndicalist organizations, they were organs of class struggle, expressions of the working class, not yet an integral part of the apparatus of capital. Over the course of the first three decades of the twentieth century, both types of unions were incorporated into the politico-economic and ideological apparatus of capital - a process integrally linked to the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital (see the text of Sander, "How The Unions Became Our Enemies," for a more thorough analysis of this process). This transformation of the unions did not occur from one day to the next (with the outbreak of World War I), but filled an era that spanned several decades. In the case of revolutionary syndicalism, the IWW, for example, played a vital role in the Seattle general strike of 1919, probably the high point of the revolutionary wave in the US. And even in 1923 with the Centralia strike, or in the coal miners strikes of 1926 in Colorado and in "bloody Harlan," the IWW could still be the instrument of class struggle - albeit a class struggle in its ebb phase. To take one more example of the vitality of revolutionary syndicalism beyond 1914, the AAUD and the AAUD-E in Germany (the former linked to the KAPD) numbered tens of thousands of revolutionary workers and engaged in massive struggles throughout the early 1920's.

However, by the end of the 1920's (with perhaps a last gasp in Spain with the decision of the CNT to support the Republic in the civil war in Spain in 1936) syndicalist unions either became revolutionary political organizations, as opposed to mass unions (this was the case with the KAUD in Germany in the early 1930's with its few hundred members), or became mass industrial unions, like the French CGT, in which case they were incorporated into the apparatus of capital (in the case of the CGT, as the organ of the Stalinist party). The quintessential industrial union of this epoch, the CIO, in the US, the model for industrial unions in the Fordist era of capitalism, was from its very inception an organ of capital - and this despite the bitter opposition of a part of the capitalist class to the unionization of the industrial working class that the organizing struggles of the CIO produced. If Henry Ford and the steel barons originally fought the CIO, the Roosevelt administration recognized that industrial unions were a necessity for capitalism as it sought a way out of the depression, and as it prepared for war. It was this latter tendency that prevailed, just as Keynesianism prevailed over the doctrines of laissez-faire in economic theory and policy.

The result was the emergence of industrial unions whose role was the discipline and control of the working class. That is the reality of unions in the present epoch, whether their origins are to be found in the craft unions of the AFL, the revolutionary syndicalist unions of the CGT, or the mass industrial unions of the CIO; a reality that manifests itself in a multiplicity of ways, economic, political, and ideological.

The need to discipline and control the working class has of course always been a problem for capital. In the epoch of its formal domination, capital could rely on traditional means of ideological control, such as the church and patriarchal social relations, together with the brutal violence of its Pinkerton's and company police to control its labor force. In the epoch of its real domination, with the
dramatic shift in the organic composition of capital attendant on the growing weight of technology in the productive process, more sophisticated means of discipline and control have become necessary. External forces (Church or goons) cannot be depended on to assure the needed level of discipline and control; instead, internal means, the way the worker is "constructed" as a subject, ideologically interpellated (subjectivized by capital), become the veritable basis for capital to discipline and control the working class. The unions have become vital factors in this process, the arm of capital within the physical ranks of the working class. This can be seen in the economic, political, juridical, and ideological domains. Economically, unions have become an important factor in the management of capitalist enterprises (co-management, for example, in Germany, where union representatives sit on the boards of the largest corporations), and important shareholders in the firms that employ "their" members (in Sweden, for example, the unions are among the biggest shareholders in the largest companies, thanks to legally mandated investments by the union pension funds). Politically, the unions, through the political parties of the left in which they play a preponderant role, have entered the government in most liberal-democratic regimes, thereby shaping policy, especially with respect to labor issues (imposition of austerity on the working class during periods of economic crisis; mobilization for the army during war). Juridically, the labor contract, negotiated and enforced by the unions, has become the guarantee of "labor peace" for its duration, incorporating the unions directly into the legal apparatus of the capitalist state. Ideologically, the unions have become a privileged vehicle for the subjectivation of the worker as citizen of the democratic state, loyal to its constitution, devoted to the nation. Indeed, the unions, as institutions, are congenitally tied to the nation, and to nationalism, the two most formidable obstacles to the class struggle.

In an epoch where the perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production, threatens the whole of the human species with catastrophe, the unions must be judged on the basis of their incorporation into the apparatus of capital, the role they play in the discipline and control of the working class, not on the basis of their capacity to deliver a better contract to a diminishing portion of the global working class - and that in exchange for the "labor peace" that permits capital to continue to ravage the planet. In an epoch when only autonomous class struggle, with the potential for extension, constitutes the basis for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, the unions must be recognized for what they have historically - though now irretrievably - become: organs of capital, enemies of the working class. Without clarity on this point, it seems to me that revolutionaries have nothing to offer workers by way of intervention in the class struggle - and therein lies the enormous importance of the present discussion of the role of unions.

MACINTOSH
(from p. 2)

industrial unionists (IWW). The discussion begins with a posting by Paul in which he raises a question about the standard left communist rejection of unions as "capitalist organizations." (Note: On the assumption that the name signed to postings is the extent of identification each writer prefers, surnames are not necessarily included here.) As a former member of the Socialist Labor Party, I recognized what he describes as the "standard left communist" stance as almost identical to the DeLeonist position that capitalist unions are indeed capitalist institutions and that the leaders of such unions are capitalism's "labor lieutenants" in the phrase of Mark Hanna, a nineteenth century steel baron. We (SLP members) could not join unions unless membership was a condition for employment, and under no circumstances could we hold office in capitalist unions. This held true from 1900 until the late seventies and the "let a thousand flowers bloom" era in SLP history.

Paul's reservations about the anti-unionism of the communist left reveal the same critique of the anti-union stance that led the SLP to ditch the more isolating aspects of the anti-unionism that had marked
September 27, 2002

Dear Frank:

Thank you for reprinting my article in its entirety. The most I had hoped for was a mention of its appearance in the Anarchos-Syndicalist Review. I was surprised, though, at being mistaken for a liberal reformist. In trying to make a non-sectarian statement about anarchist-primitivism, I did not allow a lot of space for any program of my own. Yet I did describe the goal of authentic leftism as—"Equalization, to the extent possible, of the ownership and control of major property." I also opposed private property to property that is "collective," "limited," "mass" and "shared." I could have just as easily spoken of communal or socialized property. If there is a big difference between this terminology and the phrase you used—"social ownership of the means of production"—please say what it is.

Maybe in a future letter I will elaborate on my own political opinions. For the moment, however, I'd only like to reply to some of the things I read in the Bulletin's #114 issue:

1) My original distinguished clearly between Camus's words about progress and my own. Your reprint makes it appear that I quoted him without attribution.

2) The IWW adage an injury to one is an injury to all deserves better than being equated with "niceness." The longshoremen's union borrowed it as a slogan during the 1934 West Coast strike, in which seven workers were killed and hundreds more injured. Teamsters, in defiance of their union bosses, helped the maritime workers by refusing to move any scab cargo. A merchant seaman who was on the spot later recalled:

The waterfront strike in San Francisco became general five days after the funeral. Nobody called it that I can remember. It was just that working people all over town were out joining us. There was a machine shop on The Embarcadero near Mission Street. A [Sailors' Union of the Pacific] sailor got shot on the sidewalk in front of its door. He was saved because some machinists ran out and pulled him inside by his legs. I've always believed that the machinists in the shop were among the people who joined us!

All of the workers in the 1934 strike may not have committed the IWW adage to memory, but in many cases—like the ones above—they put it into practice.

3) Post-left is not the "political extension" of postmodern. The two are unrelated except for sharing a common prefix and being (diverse) responses to the tide of conservatism that set in after 1968. I enjoyed John Zerzan's post-leftist critique of postmodernism.
4) No post-leftist anarchist-primitivist that I know of has called for “mass suicide” or said we should “vacate the planet.” While that may or may not be the logical conclusion of their thought, no one so far has publicly proposed it.

5) I do not claim that the primitivists are irrelevant. They are correct in saying that a radical critique of technology is needed. Of course, they owe something to such predecessors as Murray Bookchin, whom some of them ungraciously regard as the Great Satan. But unlike Bookchin, the primitivists may be able to attract a large following—one overlapping with Earth First!—and thus have an influence on events, especially as damage to the environment increases.

On the other hand, a lot of what they’ve said needs to be rethought. Their “revolt against work,” for example, has revolutionary possibilities—but is expressed (as Bookchin noted) in tones that could be perceived as elitist. Thus my reference to the Italian syndicalists who reacted against the leftist failures of their day—and ended up with Mussolini.3

6) The L word may be unavoidable. It appears in the Bulletin’s page 2 notice, which refers to “a great divide in the ‘left’”—and not to a split with all of the leftists on one side and “the real revolutionaries of our era” on the other. Indeed, among the latter I note that the “left communists” are included. If you believe that the L word is reformist and pink, why not say it differently?

The Nazis, in naming their Party, shrewdly juxtaposed “national” with “socialist,” thus fostering the lie that socialism is compatible with racism. The meaning of “Communism” too has been corrupted, so that for two generations it’s been the synonym for a Bolshevik Party dictatorship. So if the term left should be thrown out, then why shouldn’t we also abandon socialist and communist as well?

It would be interesting to see what you would replace them with. Post-leftist but non-primitivist? For the sake of argument, let’s imagine a hypothetical new term I’ll designate X. Will X become so distorted that someday our grandchildren will complain it “has created more confusion” and “is essentially meaningless”? Will there be a future outcry to discard X and replace it with post-X? Why not instead begin to defend our own vocabulary right now?

To recapitulate, the left is a long arc with many gradations. It encompasses both sides of the “divide” that is spelled out in the Bulletin notice. Not because I say so, but because of general usage. I can understand wanting to get rid of the term because it has become diluted. But to do so risks losing the values of the revolutionary side. If Stalin, Trotsky and Mao are the left, and if no other accessible language suggests an alternative, it will be easier for workers and others to be fooled again. They will be more likely to conclude either that the present conditions of society can never be changed, or that the only other choice is an authoritarian one.
Gore Vidal wrote the following (his emphasis):

When Confucius was asked what would be the first thing he would do if he were to lead the state ... he said to rectify the language. This is wise. This is subtle. As societies grow decadent, the language grows decadent, too. Words are used to disguise, not to illuminate action: You liberate a city by destroying it. Words are used to confuse, so that at election time people will vote solemnly against their own interests.

I would add that words are used also to make people fear and hate the idea that could help them. That idea is leftwing socialism, or, if you prefer, the position of the "non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists." Is there a shorter and catchier way of describing that position? A way that is up-to-date for the 21st century, and yet is also in sync with more than 200 years of socialist tradition? Until such a way is found, I will not be ready to tear off my leftist label.

For free speech and solidarity,

Louis Prisco


Reply to Louis Prisco

The real problem with my comment on the article by Louis Prisco’s reprinted in DB114 is that it was the first draft of the comment I intended to write. Consider the many xxxxxxxx that mark places where I was grasping for words and not finding them. And there are the clumsy sentences, an unfinished sentence, and unclear sentences—all evidence of unfinished writing. How, you may ask, did this abomination find its way into the DB? The answer is that I was trying to meet my usual self-imposed deadline of having each issue ready to mail on the first of the month and managed to paste up this unfinished draft. Before continuing, I want to beg Louis’s pardon for my carelessness.

Having said this, though, I’d like take up the points Louis makes in his letter.

For one thing I do think there is a “big difference” between the terms “social ownership of the means of production” and the terms he mentions. The former is a well defined term in revolutionary literature and while “collective” is precise, the others are much less so. Also, I do not believe Louis Prisco is a
reformist, nor did I say so, although I think his article gave aid and comfort to the enemy. My problem was with his use of "left" and "leftism." To describe the goal of "authentic leftism" as "Equalization, to the extent possible, of the ownership and control of major property" raises some questions. For one thing, what is authentic leftism? Is the Green Party "authentically" leftist? And what is meant by "to the extent possible"? And what is "major" property? The expression "social ownership of the means of production" doesn't raise these questions.

Now to the numbered points:

1. My failure to distinguish between Louis's words and those of Camus result from the use of a scanner to format the text of magazine articles so that they fit the DB. Quotation marks sometimes get lost and I don't find them.

2. Niceness was indeed a poor word choice. I wish I had replaced it with human decency.

3. Louis may disagree that post-left is the political expression of post-modernism, but in the absence of any clear definition of post-leftism, wouldn't it be logical to agree that it describes the politics of leftwing modernism's post-modernist children?

4. True, primitivists don't call for the abolition of the human race; rather they call for the abolition of the technology that makes human life as we know it possible.

5. I said that primitivism is irrelevant, not primitivists. Any ideology that calls for the destruction of the means of human life is irrelevant, in my opinion, because it is unlikely to win any large numbers of adherents.

6. I do see a divide in what is commonly called the left between those who call for the immediate abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the state that makes the system possible and the reformists who advocate reforms of the system to make it endurable. Like Louis I have problems with the terminology and can't think of a catchy word to use. In the meantime I'll stick with the mouthful, "non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialism," until something better comes along. —Frank Girard

(From p. 14)

its history. The SLP position had always been complicated by the belief that workers could organize revolutionary unions. Such unions could combine the class-struggle for a larger part of the pie with an educational function that would develop class consciousness. One sees the same position in the IWW's revolutionary unionism with its emphasis on education. In addition both the SLP and the IWW saw the revolutionary union as the framework of the post-revolutionary socialist society: a stateless, moneyless, wageless society in which the unions would democratically organize production.

Adam, while asserting that unions are not and cannot be revolutionary organizations "in their original basic form" would join a revolutionary union if it could get a working class following that would make it effective. For some reason or other Adam seems to favor a permanent organization, in other words an institutionalized union that would negotiate contracts, mediate strikes, and become a warm moist nesting place for what the IWW called the pie card parasites that crawl on labor's back. One would think that the record of unions engaged in the business of merchandising labor would turn off anyone who claims to be a revolutionary socialist.

Eric's critique of Adam's position is rather similar to that of the IWW and SLP: that capitalist unions are not relatively neutral in the class struggle but are allies of the capitalist class except that he seems to see a role for unions as temporary, on the spot organizers of worker resistance to oppression. This was the reality of revolutionary unionism in the U.S. Neither the Chicago nor the Detroit IWWs had permanent mass organizations in the industries where they led great strikes although they had small local groups that would rise to the occasion when conditions called for it. Then they furnished the speakers for strike meetings, and their membership multiplied.
In a recent issue of the Discussion Bulletin a writer said that he would like the DB "to discuss ways to develop class consciousness among workers when the ideas of the ruling classes have such power and control over your society." Frank Girard responded, after listing four proposals for the present, the he would "like very much to see a discussion of more optimistic and detailed ideas than I have presented." He said that they had distributed nearly four million leaflets in the Detroit area. Probably that many have been distributed in New York and Los Angeles. Why did they get so little response in the way of members or paper subs? It is a very important question. Some writers have written on the subject of class consciousness, including Wilhelm Reich, Ralph Miliband, Bertell Ollman and A. Gramsci. A few of their ideas.

1. Our job at present is to make revolutionaries, no revolutionaries, no revolution. It is not the time to foster revolution without preparation in the mind of workers. Before every revolution a period of agitation occurred. Voltaire and others before the French revolution. Lenin and Trotsky before the Russian revolution. Here is John Adams of the American revolution: "What do we mean by revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution. It was only the effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760 to 1775, In the course of 15 years this happened before a single drop of blood was shed at Lexington."

2. Hard times alone do no translate into revolution despite the belief in spontaneity. If it did, we would have a large group of militant unions and parties worldwide. But hard times do create unrest that could be directed elsewhere by the ruling class.

3. Logic alone doesn't convince. If it did, we would not have so many people believing in the devil, reincarnation, special creation two thousand years ago, etc. Ellul, in his book Propaganda, wrote that logic alone was worse than useless during World War II. Still, combined with other factors, it is a big plus for convincing workers.

4. Ideas can be a strong material force, even stronger than poverty. If this were not so, we would find it easy to convince workers that capitalism doesn't work for them. We have workers, because of indoctrination of capitalist ideas, voting for politicians who don't even pretend to be pro-labor. We act on our beliefs.

5. Reich says that we need to know just what progressive ideas workers hold so that we can build on them and what ideas are blocking the knowledge of their own interests. For example, he says we need to say "take back the industries" not just "take over the industries," since they have been conditioned the respect ownership.

6. Reich points out that the vast majority of workers are not political and that they are only interested in how they can get ahead personally. This is the case worldwide. The book, Public Opinion, says the same. "The problems of the world and the nation simply do not rate high in the personal priorities of the vast majority." Then we may note the words of an official of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, 500,000 strong, on leaving the AFL-CIO, "The AFL-CIO has strayed to social and environmental issues that have nothing to do with getting better wages and working conditions for working people." In the US, then, we face workers who are for themselves only and are highly indoctrinated to favor individualism.

7 During 1995 the AFL-CIO commissioned a study by Peter D. Hart Research Associates to determine how Organized labor
can best strengthen its political efforts. Among other findings, the study found that while people
know the times are tough economically, not many can say clearly what's gone wrong, who is
responsible or what can be done about it. Because they lack such information, the study says
"their substantial economical grievances do not lead them to the progressive political
conclusions we might expect." The study concludes that "In the long run Organized Labor at
every level will have to engage in a massive campaign to educate trade-unionists about their
class interests if unions are to have any chance of convincing their members to effectively
challenge corporate power in the political arena."

What is to be done?
Some urge more study classes. The SLP and the Communist party had success along this
line, some of their most dedicated members attended study classes. This is based on the idea
that to understand a science is to accept it, other things being equal.

A number of radicals say that a more detailed picture of what the future society would
be like is necessary. This is based on the idea that workers associate socialism with the Soviet
Union and other countries and do not see them as desirable.

Some radicals insist that workers must realize that they are indoctrinated and why so that
they can transcend the capitalist hold on their minds. Bertell Ollman says: "Paradoxically, it is
when one understands the degree to which an individual is a social product and how and why
this has occurred, that he or she can transcend the conditions and become the potential creator of
a new and better future." In Calif. it was found that exposing the tactics of the tobacco
companies in selling their product was much more effective than arguing about the health
benefits of nonsmoking.

Some radicals argue that getting the working class into protests, demonstrations and
strikes leads to consciousness. Some evidence exists that it does at least lead to a
willingness to listen.

Many argue that we won't get a hearing until we can get on mainstream TV
Some suggestions from the Age of Propaganda. People accept an argument easier if it
comes from someone they respect, as shown numerous times when the president takes a stand
for some action. On the other hand, they will reject an argument out of hand if it is made by an
organization or individual demonized. When Reagan debated Carter he effectively undercut
Carter by his constant "There you go again", shifting the debate to Carter's objectiveness,
making his arguments suspect.

Experiments have shown that once a person accepts a belief, they are not interested in
listening to anything that might undermine it. The difficult part, then, for those like us is to get
their attention.

The constant repetition that workers are being indoctrinated and why is probably a good
strategy at present. To engage in arguments on their terms is to face great odds. They have
billions of dollars to try to distort reality. Framing the debate is necessary. Production for use not
for profit. Planning, not the market. Revolution, not reforms. and so forth.

Capitalist ideology is very clever but actually supported by evasions, falsehoods and
unsound reasoning. But in the main it goes unchallenged because they own the means of mental
production. Still, out of the millions of workers out there we can somehow reach more than we
do. That is the challenge.
ANARQUIST CONFUSION OVER ARGENTINA

The article entitled "Argentina in Revolt" in Discussion Bulletin Number 113 taken from Rebel Worker was clearly written by someone who has not been to Argentina.

The article features the central role of anarchists as if they were playing a central role in Argentina today. Anyone who has been to Argentina recently knows the anarchists are on the periphery. Anarchists have a right to insert commercials for anarchism in their articles, but that's scarcely objective reporting. But anarchists are not the only group that advocates Peoples Assemblies and the take over of factories. Most Marxists in Argentina concur with anarchists on these issues.

The article states there are "30 assemblies in Buenos Aires". Actually, there are more than 200 Peoples Assemblies meeting in neighborhoods every week. The workers who occupied the Brukman clothes factory and the Zanon ceramics factory have called for nationalization of their factories under workers control. They reject turning their factories into co-ops, which would force them to pay back loans to the banks.

But the article from "Rebel Worker" says the opposite: "Any attempt to nationalize them (as the Marxist left proposes) must be opposed in favor of socialization..." But what does "socialization" mean in the situation the workers face? In practice, it means turning workers' controlled factories into co-ops. The workers wisely have rejected the anarchist advice. They have carried out a de facto expropriation, but without access to capital to buy raw materials and imminent police attack, their situation is extremely tenuous.

Genuine "socialization" of the means of production requires that the workers take power.

Rebel Worker fudges the issue of power with phrases like "...to create a possible framework to socialize the means of life..." The "possible framework" that is powerlessness will only be co-opted, which the Argentinian government is already trying to do.

More fudging: "Only when the working class organizes itself from below upwards will it be able to dispense once and for all with bosses and politicians." "Dispense"??? Is it possible the capitalists will just go away in their yachts when the workers wave them goodbye? Not likely! The article correctly says: "There is a need to coordinate struggle." But "struggle" for what? Marches, demonstrations, picketlines are all necessary in the struggle, but they have to lead somewhere or they will dissipate because the capitalists will sit it out as they do every crisis and the unemployed will fall into crime and hopelessness when they realize that endless demonstrations will not change their lives.

In Argentina the revolutionary Left is looking at our own future. In that sense, the debate over Argentina is also about the struggle for a socialist society in the U.S.

EARL GILMAN

(from p. 18)

Sander ("How the Unions Became Our Enemies") takes the position that all unions, including revolutionary unions, are simply a part of capitalism's control mechanism just by being involved in the system. After a overview of the recent history of unionism, he argues that the role of revolutionaries is not to organize revolutionary unions nor union support groups but rather to advocate actions through which workers go around the unions and act independently of them. As for the present decline of unionism, Sander favors letting them expire so that workers can form new organizations that will embrace

(to p. 25)
How well this state, now complete in its main features, suited the new social condition of the Athenians was apparent from the rapid flourishing of wealth, commerce and industry. The class antagonism on which the social and political institutions rested was no longer that between the nobles and the common people, but that between slaves and freemen, wards and citizens. When Athens was in its heyday the total number of free Athenian citizens, women and children included, amounted to about 90,000; the slaves of both sexes numbered 365,000, and the wards—immigrants and freed men—45,000. Thus, for every adult male citizen there were at least eighteen slaves and more than two wards. The large number of slaves is explained by the fact that many of them worked together in manufactories, large rooms, under overseers. But with the development of commerce and industry came the accumulation and concentration of wealth in few hands; the mass of the free citizens were impoverished and had to choose between competing with slave labour by going into handicrafts themselves, which was considered ignoble and base and, moreover, promised little success—and complete pauperisation. Under the prevailing circumstances what inevitably happened was the latter, and, being in the majority, they dragged the whole Athenian state down with them. It was not democracy that caused the downfall of Athens, as the European schoolmasters who fawn upon royalty would have us believe, but slavery, which brought the labour of the free citizen into contempt.

The emergence of the state among the Athenians represents a very typical model of state building in general; because, on the one hand, it took place in an entirely pure form, without the interference of violence, external or internal (the short period of usurpation by Pisistratus left no trace behind it); because, on the other hand, it gave rise to a highly developed form of state, the democratic republic, directly from gentile society; and lastly, because we are sufficiently acquainted with all the essential details.
Dear friend,

The enclosed document, *AN ECOSOCIALIST MANIFESTO*, is being circulated by Michael Lowy and Joel Kovel to a group of friends and associates, in the belief that the global crisis is reaching a stage that calls forth a new level of radical resistance. We have framed this in terms of an emerging order of socialism, *ecosocialism*, which reflects resistance to the domination of capital over the sphere of nature along with that of labor. We have tried, further, to phrase this in a way that is uncompromising in terms of radicality of goal, without foreclosing the wealth of possible avenues of the development of the theme.

Thus we would hope that you would endorse the reasoning and objectives of this manifesto as a way to begin drawing together an international body of resistance. Moreover, we hope that you would join us in thinking of ways to amplify and extend the document, and to extend its meaning into new forms of practice. In sum, let us know whether you would support this statement, and please add any suggestions as to publicity, programmatic development, and other potential supporters. >The Manifesto will be published in the March, 2002, issue of *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, as a way of launching this new endeavour.

With best wishes, Joel Kovel: <jkovel@prodigy.net> Michael Lowy: <mlowy@free.fr>

AN ECOSOCIALIST MANIFESTO

The twenty-first century opens on a catastrophic note, with an unprecedented degree of ecological breakdown and a chaotic world order beset with terror and clusters of low-grade, disintegrative warfare that spread like gangrene across great swathes of the planet—viz., central Africa, the Middle East, Northwestern South America—and reverberate throughout the nations.

In our view, the crises of ecology and those of societal breakdown are profoundly interrelated and should be seen as different manifestations of the same structural forces. The former broadly stems from rampant industrialization that overwhelms the earth's capacity to buffer and contain ecological destabilization. The latter stems from the form of imperialism known as globalization, with its disintegrative effects on societies that stand in its path. Moreover, these underlying forces are essentially different aspects of the same drive, which must be identified as the central dynamic that moves the whole: the expansion of the world capitalist system.

We reject all euphemisms or propagandistic softening of the brutality of this regime: all greenwashing of its ecological costs, all mystification of the human costs under the names of democracy and human rights. We insist instead upon looking at capital from the standpoint of what it has really done.

Acting on nature and its ecological balance, the regime, with its imperative to constantly expand profitability, exposes ecosystems to destabilizing pollutants, fragments habitats that have evolved over aeons to allow the flourishing of organisms, squanders resources, and reduces the sensuous vitality of nature to the cold exchangeability required for the accumulation of capital.

From the side of humanity, with its requirements for self-determination, community, and a meaningful existence, capital reduces the majority of the world's people to a mere reservoir of labor power while discarding much of the remainder as useless nuisances. It has invaded and undermined the integrity of communities through its global mass culture of consumerism and depoliticization. It has expanded disparities in wealth and power to levels unprecedented in human history. It has worked hand in glove with a network of corrupt and subservient client states whose local elites carry out the work of repression while sparing the center of its opprobrium. And it has set going a network of transnational organizations under the overall supervision of the Western powers and the superpower United States, to undermine the autonomy of the periphery and bind it into indebtedness while maintaining a huge military apparatus to enforce compliance to the capitalist center.
We believe that the present capitalist system cannot regulate, much less overcome, the crises it has set going. It cannot solve the ecological crisis because to do so requires setting limits upon accumulation - an unacceptable option for a system predicated upon the rule: Grow or Die! And it cannot solve the crisis posed by terror and other forms of violent rebellion because to do so would mean abandoning the logic of empire, which would impose unacceptable limits on growth and the whole *way of life* sustained by empire. Its only remaining option is to resort to brutal force, thereby increasing alienation and sowing the seed of further terrorism ... and further counter-terrorism, evolving into a new and malignant variation of fascism.

In sum, the capitalist world system is historically bankrupt. It has become an empire unable to adapt, whose very gigantism exposes its underlying weakness. It is, in the language of ecology, profoundly unsustainable, and must be changed fundamentally, nay, replaced, if there is to be a future worth living.

Thus the stark choice once posed by Rosa Luxemburg returns: Socialism or Barbarism, where the face of the latter now reflects the imprint of the intervening century and assumes the countenance of ecocatastrophe, terror counterterror, and their fascist degeneration.

But why socialism, why revive this word seemingly consigned to the rubbish-heap of history by the failings of its twentieth century interpretations? For this reason only: that however beaten down and unrealized, the notion of socialism still stands for the supersession of capital. If capital is to be overcome, a task now given the urgency of the survival of civilization itself, the outcome will perforce be *socialist*, for that is the term which signifies the breakthrough into a post-capitalist society. If we say that capital is radically unsustainable and breaks down into the barbarism outlined above, then we are also saying that we need to build a *socialism* capable of overcoming the crises capital has set going.

And if *socialisms* past have failed to do so, then it is our obligation, if we choose against submitting to a barbarous end, to struggle for one that succeeds. And just as barbarism has changed in a manner reflective of the century since Luxemburg enunciated her fateful alternative, so too, must the name, and the reality, of a *socialism* become adequate for this time.

It is for these reasons that we choose to name our interpretation of *socialism* as an ecosocialism, and dedicate ourselves to its realization.

Why Ecosocialism?

We see ecosocialism not as the denial but as the realization of the *first-epoch* socialisms of the twentieth century, in the context of the ecological crisis. Like them, it builds on the insight that capital is objectified past labor, and grounds itself in the free development of all producers, or to use another way of saying this, an undoing of the separation of the producers from the means of production. We understand that this goal was not able to be implemented by first-epoch socialism, for reasons too complex to take up here, except to summarize as various effects of underdevelopment in the context of hostility by existing capitalist powers. This conjuncture had numerous deleterious effects on existing socialisms, chiefly, the denial of internal democracy along with an emulation of capitalist productivism, and led eventually to the collapse of these societies and the ruin of their natural environments.

Ecosocialism retains the emancipatory goals of first-epoch socialism, and rejects both the attenuated, reformist aims of social democracy and the productivist structures of the bureaucratic variations of socialism. It insists, rather, upon redefining both the path and the goal of socialist production in an ecological framework. It does so specifically in respect to the *limits on growth* essential for the sustainability of society. These are embraced, not however, in the sense of imposing scarcity, hardship and repression. The goal, rather, is a transformation of needs, and a profound shift toward the qualitative dimension and away from the quantitative. From the standpoint of commodity production, this translates into a valorization of use-values over exchange-values - a project of far-reaching significance grounded in immediate economic activity.
The generalization of ecological production under socialist conditions can provide the ground for the overcoming of the present crises. A society of freely associated producers does not stop at its own democratization. It must, rather, insist on the freeing of all beings as its ground and goal. It overcomes thereby the imperialist impulse both subjectively and objectively.

In realizing such a goal, it struggles to overcome all forms of domination, including, especially, those of gender and race. And it surpasses the conditions leading to fundamentalist distortions and their terrorist manifestations. In sum, a world society is posited in a degree of ecological harmony with nature unthinkable under present conditions. A practical outcome of these tendencies would be expressed, for example, in a withering away of the dependency upon fossil fuels integral to industrial capitalism.

And this in turn can provide the material point of release of the lands subjudgeted by oil imperialism, while enabling the containment of global warming, along with other afflictions of the ecological crisis. No one can read these prescriptions without thinking, first, of how many practical and theoretical questions they raise, and second and more dishearteningly, of how remote they are from the present configuration of the world, both as this is anchored in institutions and as it is registered in consciousness. We need not elaborate these points, which should be instantly recognizable to all. But we would insist that they be taken in their proper perspective. Our project is neither to lay out every step of this way nor to yield to the adversary because of the preponderance of power he holds. It is, rather, to develop the logic of a sufficient and necessary transformation of the current order, and to begin developing the intermediate steps towards this goal. We do so in order to think more deeply into these possibilities, and at the same moment, begin the work of drawing together with all those of like mind. If there is any merit in these arguments, then it must be the case that similar thoughts, and practices to realize these thoughts, will be coordinatively germinating at innumerable points around the world. Ecosocialism will be international, and universal, or it will be nothing. The crises of our time ‘can and must’ be seen as revolutionary opportunities, which it is our obligation to affirm and bring into existence.

(from p. 21)

MacIntosh’s thinking is similar to that of Sander. In an essay that combines a historical overview of unionism with his thoughts on appropriate activity by revolutionaries in the present era, he expresses the view that capitalist unions are obstacles to the emancipation of our class and also rejects the standard revolutionary recipes of organizing revolutionary unions, pro-union solidarity campaigns, and the like. Interestingly, in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary—union busting drives, declining union membership, anti-union legislation, and explicit capitalist hostility—MacIntosh argues that capitalism recognizes its reliance on unions for maintaining control of its workers.

The discussion on unions in intahisnet has continued intermittently since 9-23, and DB117 will carry some additional postings as well as articles on the subject from other sources.

Next Louis Prisco raises questions about my comment on his article in DB114. My reply to his complaint is a plea for understanding and forgiveness as well as a defense of some aspects of my comment. Although Alan Bradford’s discussion paper was submitted to the New Union Party for use at its recent conference, time constraints prevented its discussion there. It struck me that he raises points that will interest readers of the DB.

Earl Gilman writes to correct some misinformation in an article on Argentina that appeared in DB113, most notably the extent of anarchist influence and the chances for a positive outcome of the current rebellion. Rado Mijanovich went to an unimpeachable source for his information on the number of slaves in Athens during the classical era. Apparently the sources Engels used when writing The Origin of the Family... are now out of date.

(to p. 29)
WHY SHOULD I JOIN WORKERS DEMOCRACY NETWORK?

You should join to help create a movement of the whole working class that makes decisions democratically. This movement does not yet exist. The labor movement—the AFL-CIO—that claims to represent working people is not democratic and excludes many types of workers including day laborers, welfare recipients, Workfare workers and temporary workers. We welcome these workers to WDN. The AFL-CIO is not willing to challenge the anti-worker laws that keep us divided up. WDN is building a movement that brings together all the different groups of people within the working class.

WHO IS THE WORKING CLASS?

Everyone who sells their labor for a living are members of the working class. This includes students, the unemployed, the disabled, retired workers, full-time parents and workers who are self-employed as well as wage earners in schools, hospitals, offices and factories. It includes native-born and immigrants from all over the world, women and men of all ethnic backgrounds. We are different in thousands of ways but one thing we have in common is that we are all members of the working class, we all depend on our labor and that of our families.

The real enemies of the working class are not other workers, but the capitalists—a tiny group of people who get their income mainly from stocks, bonds and real estate and who control the political parties and the government with their wealth. These people make their money from investment, not from work. The more profit they make, the less there is left for all of us.

The working class also does not include small employers or supervisors and managers who control workers. However, sometimes these people stand together with the working class against the capitalists. Workers are 90% the population. If we unite we are much stronger than the capitalists.

WHY ISN'T THERE ALREADY A WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT?

The labor movement that has historically organized workers can't do it anymore. Today unions operate as businesses that try to control workers and prevent protests. They are run undemocratically from the top down. They represent only a small fraction of workers and are getting smaller all the time. The trade unions divide workers based on the type of work people do or along arbitrary lines, weakening their unity. Most important, the unions are committed to staying within the boundaries of repressive laws such as the Taft-Hartley law that prevent workers' solidarity. This law makes it illegal to have mass pickets, sit-down and solidarity strikes where different kinds of workers help each other. Because the union won’t fight back against employers by organizing in pickets, sit-down and solidarity strikes workers have been forced to work longer and longer hours for less real pay. Today workers remain divided and weak.

The WDN invites rank and file workers building caucuses in their unions who want a genuinely working movement to affiliate to WDN. The AFL-CIO is committed to labor management cooperation. WDN is committed to workers power!

We need a new way to organize that will bring together the working class. Many groups are organizing outside the trade unions, such as the global justice and immigrant workers' movements. These forces have brought tens of thousands into the streets. We need to bring together the movements that now exist—students, global-justice activists, immigrant workers, rank-and-file trade unionists, African-Americans and women—into a single powerful movement of the whole working class.

THE OBSTACLES TO UNITY

Forming working class unity is difficult because the corporations and the government work so hard to split us up into national, racial, ethnic, gender and a dozen other lines. The common theme of all bigotry is
that the enemy is other workers who are fighting you for a piece of the pie. The more they get, the less you do. Workers Democracy Network opposes all nationalism and racism, all bigotry of any kind that turns workers against one another. We know that it is a lie that workers have to fight each other for a fixed amount of goods and jobs. When parts of the working class are oppressed and discriminated against, their low wages and conditions of work drive down everyone's standards. The only solution for workers is to fight against any form of discrimination, be it religion, race, nationality, condition of immigration or gender. We must fight to bring all workers up to the same level. The only way to overcome bigotry and oppression is by all members of the working class fighting together against our real enemies the capitalists and their corporations.

A NEW WAY OF UNITING THE WORKING CLASS

Since our founding in 1999 our aim has been to bring together all workers around their common interests in a democratic network. Without democracy we cannot succeed. Of course, many groups say they want to unify the working class. But WDN differs sharply in its methods and organization from these groups. In other groups decision making is concentrated in a very small number of individuals-a central committee or executive committee. The membership does not have control over their decisions as a power is preserved through slate voting and secret membership lists. Often, these groups dictate that members with minority opinions must conceal their views and support the majority. Finally, these groups are founded with a detailed program that covers everything from A to Z. Such organizations require members to agree to the entire platform. But since disagreements with some part of the program are common, the results are endless splits and tiny splinter groups. Lack of internal democracy leads to lack of real unity.

We are something different. This is a network of those who agree in principle, not in detail. We all agree to Statement of Agreement. Within that agreement in principle, we can disagree about everything else and democratically decide what we have to do. Equally important, we do not place all power in a steering committee. The steering committee can be overruled by the voting members (those who pay dues) and in fact this has already happened. Nor do minority views have to be suppressed once a vote is taken.

We recognize that those who oppose a certain action may not want to participate in it, but may willing to work within the Network on other campaigns they do agree with. In this way we arrive at as much unity as possible at any time, without pushing out those who disagree.

Democracy leads to unity. At the same time, democracy is the only guarantee that our organization will represent the interests of workers.

WHAT DO WE DO?

We are building a movement that brings us all together to fight for better lives - better workplaces, schools, communities and homes. We use the strategies of the unemployed movement in the 1930s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s. These social movements unified the working-class with community- and workplace-based actions demanding justice and equality. These movements used mass picketing and solidarity strikes to change peoples lives for the better. The unemployed movement built community organizations that brought together employed and unemployed workers. They demanded a public works program where the government provided jobs for the unemployed. Then the unemployed movement demanded racial equality, better pay and working conditions on the public works jobs. The civil rights movement organized mass picketing and solidarity actions between African-American and white workers to demand equality for everyone. These tactics have built unified movements in the past and they can work again today!

Workers Democracy is not willing to cut deals with the employers or accept the limitations of unjust laws. We want an independent political movement of working people that will not give in to the
corruption of the political parties of big business - the Democrats and the Republicans. This movement involves on-the-ground campaigns that bring together all members of the working class together to confront injustice. We put forward alternatives both through workplace-community organizing and electoral campaigns tied to this organizing. The purpose of these projects is not only to win local victories. It is as well to draw people from many different groups in the working class into an unified, democratic movement

But how can a small group like WDN work to unify the entire working class? We build class-wide organization and coalitions, either temporary or long-lived, by bringing existing groups together around their common interests. We put forward ideas that build a greater unity of the working class in opposition to the capitalists. We have to start on a small scale within our local communities. Workers Democracy has affiliated groups in New York City, New Orleans and San Francisco and we are setting up more. We link together our local activities with Internet discussion, through our national newspaper, Workers Democracy, and through regional and national meetings.

WHAT IS THE LONG TERM GOAL?

The goal of this local work is to build larger and larger organizations that will unite the whole working class. – example of the type of organization that we aim for are the People's Assemblies (Asamblea Popular) in Argentina. The Assemblies unite workers from all industries, unemployed, students and retirees in the neighborhoods, cities and nationally. The neighborhood assemblies, made up all residents and workers in the neighborhood, meet weekly in a public place. Neighborhood assemblies elect delegates to city-wide and national assemblies so there is permanent leadership. The People's Assemblies have adopted an anti-capitalist program that includes nationalizing the banks and rebuilding the country for the working people.

If we can succeed in uniting the working class in a democratic manner, then we can transform society into a Workers Democracy, a society without capitalism where workers run society democratically.

WE ARE MANY, THEY ARE FEW

It is only because of the divisions in the working class that a few capitalists can remain in power and that their capitalist system can continue to cripple and destroy our lives. If they remain in power, society will continue to decay and our living standards will continue to decline. The only way to stop this from happening is to overcome all the divisions we face and UNIFY!

This is why we need a WORKERS DEMOCRACY! JOIN NOW!

WORKERS DEMOCRACY NETWORK AFFILIATED GROUPS

New Jersey  (608) 406-7857  eierner@igc.org

New Orleans  (504) 314-6218 jarena@tulane.edu

New York  (212) 496-7452

San Francisco  (415) 285-9564  giltpia@igc.org
WORKERS DEMOCRACY STATEMENT OF AGREEMENT

The goal of the Workers Democracy Network is to organize a democratic workers movement that unites all workers, on an equal basis, around our common interests. We oppose business unionism and all cooperation with the corporate elite. We will build city-wide and regional organizations that unite the entire working class: union and non-union workers; students; employed, self-employed and unemployed; immigrant and native-born; men and women of all ethnic backgrounds. We stand in solidarity with workers all over the world who oppose all nationalism, oppression and bigotry, which pit one group of workers against another.

In the process of building this movement, we will create politics independent of the corporations, breaking with all parties of the bosses, and seeking to run independent worker candidates as soon as possible.

The network will be truly democratic with the power in the hands of the members. We will have no permanent division into leaders and led.

By building a democratic, unified workers movement, we will lay the basis for a new world, free of capitalism, where workers will democratically run society and control their own lives.

http://www.workersdemocracy.org

Workers Democracy Network, POB 5585 Trenton, NJ 08638-9998

(from p. 25)

This issue contains information on two new ideas for an updated socialism. Ecosocialism "...insists...on redefining both the path and goal of socialism in an ecological framework." The flier for the Workers Democracy Network arrived here a few weeks ago. Its name reminded me that when it comes to names of revolutionary organizations, not very much is new. Workers Democracy was a journal and a group of dissident and expelled SLPers centered in St. Louis twenty years ago. This WD differs from other revolutionary socialist groups in advocating the sort of spontaneous "People’s Assemblies" we see being formed in Argentina.

"Two-Class Society" was sent to the DB by a West Coast reader who was apparently tired of reading the confusions on the subject written by academic sociologists.

As usual we end this issue with some notes, announcements and short reviews.

Finances

Two months ago the report of DB finances began, "So far as the DB is concerned the recession is over. We have seen two successive months of improved business and that would seem to confirm this view." Well, the past two months force the DB to change its economic forecast. Income here ratchets up and down like the Dow. The good news is that we are still in the black unlike a few years ago when we spent over a year in the red.

Contributions: Harriet Machado $12; Fast Walkin $2; Joe Tupper $20; Alan Bradshaw $20; Martin Connac $2; Anonymous $10; Phillip Colligan $12. Total $78. Thank you, comrades.

BALANCE August 21, 2002 $318.48
(to p. 31)
If you ask a modern sociologist how many classes there are, they will answer six, or maybe three, or twelve, or any other number that takes their fancy. Many definitions of 'class' are offered. They are usually spurious and unhelpful.

A More Helpful Answer

Our society is split up into two classes. There is one Working Class and one Capitalist Class. The Working Class has to work in order to earn a living, the Capitalist Class has enough wealth to live off. If you wonder what class you are in, just ask yourself whether you could live off your investments if you stopped work tomorrow. There is no question that capitalist society can be split up in this way. There are some people in each class. Of course, most people are in the working class and the capitalist class is only a tiny proportion of the population. Yet, from the point of view of understanding capitalism, they are a very important proportion.

Why This Definition Is Helpful

So what is the reason for there being only two classes? The answer is simple, that's all you need to understand the way capitalism works. Class explains how we got into the state we are in. It explains how society has developed and changed from slave-society, through feudalism into capitalism. One class with a particular economic interest has taken control over the economic base of society from another class.

But class does not only explain how we got into the mess of capitalism - it also explains how capitalism works. The main fact of most peoples lives is work - work in the home to support a wage-slave or paid work in order to live. Why? It hasn't always been true. In feudal society serfs spent their time working on the land, producing food that they could then eat. Of course, if produce had to be given to the lord, the feudal serf had big problems, though these were very different problems from the modern wage slave.

Class also explains capitalism's disasters: war is when we have to fight to protect the interests of the capitalist class, famine is when the capitalist class can't make profit from feeding us, unemployment is when the capitalist class gets more from leaving us out of work to keep wages down than from giving us jobs, and so on. So there are now two classes because that's what is needed to explain how we arrived at capitalism and also how capitalism evolved.

The most important reason, however, why there are only two classes is neither of these two reasons. It is the fact that it can explain how we can get out of the mess of capitalism. We the, working class, have an interest in getting rid of the sick capitalist system that we are forced to live in. By recognizing that only class conscious activity can establish a classless society, we see the way in which socialism can be established. By combining together as a class we can transform society. Unless we do we will be stuck with capitalism.
Politicians' claims that we have a 'classless' society are obviously misleading and if they were honest they would admit it. The sociologists are wrong because they treat capitalism as if it were here forever and will continue forever. The socialist case, that there are only two classes, remains as correct and important as ever because it shows there is no other way in which we can stop war, famine, poverty and unemployment. We need class consciousness and for that we need to be aware that we are the working class and they are the capitalist class. When it gets right down to it, these are the only two classes.

(from p. 29)

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BALANCE

October 30, 2002

$ 287.81

Fraternally submitted

Frank Girard

NOTES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHORT REVIEWS

Socialist Policies and Principles: Setting the Record Straight is the most recent pamphlet of the "reconstituted" Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB). These dissenters also known as the Ashbourne Court SPGB were expelled from the main party headquartered in Clapham High Street London about ten years. Much of this 41-page pamphlet deals with their differences with the Clapham SPGB, hence the phrase "setting the record straight" in the title. The events that led to the split followed a scenario that has been played out many times in revolutionary groups. The dissenters find that the parent organization is compromising the principles of the party and after an intramural battle either resign or are expelled. This particular story begins ten years before the expulsion in 1991 and details the events and principal players in the drama. Among the factors causing dissension was a group of members who concluded that the Party's decline at the time was the result of flaws in its principles that led it into sectarian stances that alienated potential recruits. Having attained positions of influence in the party, some newer members were in a position to slowly make changes that, according to the dissenters, violated the party's principles.

The pamphlet briefly discusses these changes and the members who advanced them in seven chapters: "The Split: The Whys and Wherefores," "Early Days - De Leon or Marx?" "For Socialism - for Democratic Rights?" "Soviet Russia and Capitalism," "Waiting for Capitalism to Collapse!" "Scientific Socialism or Utopian Speculation?" "In Conclusion - the Class Struggle." Readers in the UK can obtain the pamphlet for L1 from The Socialist Party of Great Britain, 71 Ashbourne Court, London N12 8SB; the price in North America is $2 postpaid.
I hope readers will forgive the following excursion into the past, but the parallels to a drama that played itself out twelve years earlier in the SPGB’s closest American ideological relative compel me to tell the story. In the seventies the Socialist Labor Party, as it had been for nearly a century, was headquartered in New York City, the home of some of its oldest, most influential and respected party members. The resignation of the editor of the *Weekly People*, the party’s journal, forced the national secretary to bring in a group of young members to take over the paper. With his acquiescence they proceeded to abandon existing party positions against supporting capitalist unionism, working with reformist groups on single-issue projects, and demonstrating against the Vietnam War— all policies developed during the 55-year administration of his predecessor, Arnold Petersen. The ongoing decline in party membership was blamed on AP and “the failed policies of the past.” The old timers in New York resisted the change and were defeated at the 1978 National Convention. Unlike the “reconstituted” SPGB, they were not expelled but resigned in disgust. Later they formed a splinter organization, the De Leonist Societies of Canada and the U.S.; They also published a journal, the *De Leonist Society Bulletin*. Because they were nearly all quite advanced in age and did not gain recruits, they have pretty much disappeared except for a small group in Canada.

Redline Publications is a new British source of revolutionary literature. A recent posting on the WSM site speaks of its having “just issued a catalogue of Socialist Literature. Titles include many works by Marx and Engels, and also classics by, among others, Daniel De Leon, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Paul Lafargue. Also many pamphlets on such topics as war, race prejudice, Marxist economics, reform and revolution, etc. Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* is also listed. A number of SPGB publications are also listed, including *Marxism Revisited.*” This last is described as “a pamphlet with five transcripts of talks given at the SPGB’s 1998 Summer School, among them “Was Marx a Leninist (Did Lenin really distort Marx?)” “Is the Socialist Party Marxist?” and “The Fetishism of Commodities (Or is Nike Cooler than Adidas?)” Readers can get the catalogue by e-mailing James Plant at <soliterature@btopenworld.com> or writing to Redline Publications, PO Box 6700, Sawbridgeworth CM21 0WA, England.