

# flux



*A magazine of  
libertarian socialism*

*Issue 3  
Autumn 1991  
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Great Art of our Time  
Number 266:

YOU DONT HAVE  
TO  
FUCK PEOPLE  
OVER



TO SURVIVE

S E T H

T O B O C M A N

flux

A Magazine of Libertarian Socialism  
Issue 3  
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# Editorial

Globally, every 2.4 seconds a child dies of poverty...

Meanwhile, international relations are transforming themselves at an extraordinary rate. The already infamous "failed coup" of hardliners has accelerated the Soviet Union's self-dissolution into independence-seeking republics, vying for slices of the political cake (though forty five years of the command economy have made it a mouldy one). Gorbachev, favourite of the West, now anachronistically struggles, against these centrifugal forces, to legitimise his role of central governor.

Arguably, the coup attempt arose from the refusal to send immediate economic aid to the Soviet Union at the "G7" Summit, until it had implemented "substantial economic reforms". A lot of commentators think this is inconsistent with other aid policies. In fact it is entirely consistent with the US aid to contra-backed Nicaragua, to El Salvador, to South Africa; and their continued economic blockade of Cuba and Vietnam. For the issue at stake is not these countries' adherence to any Western ideal of "democracy", but their commitment to the Western definition of free market capitalism. States are never altruistic: as the World Bank and the IMF illustrate, aid is only "given" if it guarantees a high rate of return, and allows the expansion of capitalist markets.

And that is why Bush suddenly announces "huge" nuclear weapons cuts. These are designed to remove the risk of newly formed republics having nuclear weapons and thus having any say against the Western colonisation of their markets. Meanwhile Bush will maintain a huge submarine fleet and be able to divert scarce funds (remember that the U.S. has an enormous budget deficit, and is virtually bankrupt) to other "trouble spots". Needless to say the lessening of nuclear annihilation (in the massively overstated rhetoric of the Cold War) will allow the US, unimpeded, to attack ideological opponents increasingly overtly. After Panama, Iraq. After Iraq...?

More so than ever before, US 'opinion' on other countries' domestic affairs is becoming mandatory, and not just through the covert channels of CIA-backed organisations. It is, of course, hard to know yet what influence the US have over the Arab-Israeli swops of hostages for political prisoners. But they are certainly calling the shots in the proposals for a Middle East Peace Conference, which Israel and the PLO will be reluctantly dragged into. Not surprising, since this political influence is backed up by a dominating military and economic influence in the Gulf region...

It is equally of no surprise to find John Major trying to mimic George Bush's role of corrupt international referee of world affairs, as he continues to sell the racist line of Fortress Europe after 1992, where freedom of movement means freedom for some; and visiting Tiananmen Square to secure a few business deals (perhaps knowing this would guarantee substantial undisclosed donations to the Tory Party by Hong Kong businessmen[sic] - those who are getting British passports in case China extends its human rights abuses).

None of this is surprising. What was more depressing was the way the media were completely complicit with this globetrotting, sinking domestic issues like the poll tax imprisonments, rising unemployment and a worsening recession to the small print. When parliament's on holiday, it seems, so is domestic politics.

But now we get the traditional jump-start to the new term, with the conferences, all exhibiting the narrowing of political differences between parties: the TUC rejecting the repeal of all anti-union laws; the Green Party explicitly taking on a hierarchical power structure "so we can gain power"; the Labour Party expelling more people associated with Militant Tendency; the Liberal Democrats fatuously mouthing the clichés of the other parties whilst claiming they wouldn't be corrupted by power! As we go to print the Tory party conference hasn't happened, but it's easy enough to predict their slogans: "Stop the flood of economic refugees", "More of the same"; "Get your consumers' charter here".

All this is supposed to show the parties' political realism in the face of a changing global context. But this changing global context holds few surprises, however calamitous the details may seem. For the trend remains the same: the perpetual restructuring of capitalism as it further succeeds in homogenising diverse cultures and conditions to the laws of profit and the safeguarding, by whatever means necessary, of elite privileges. And whilst all this is going on, the real horror of a child dying of poverty every 2.4 seconds does not change at all. It is perhaps ironic, though not paradoxical, that the highest infant mortality rate in the West is to be found...in the U.S.A.

The *FLUX* Collective,  
October 1991

# RIGHT TO RIOT

"I utterly condemn this mindless hooliganism and yobbery for which there can be absolutely no excuse. I hope all local people in the areas involved will back the police in the difficult job that has faced them."

John Patten, Home Office Minister on the night of 'disturbances' in Birmingham, Oxford and Cardiff.

"The three disturbances....are the result of lawless behaviour which cannot be excused and must be severely punished. The residents of each area should be grateful to the police for the prompt action which they took and should support them in maintaining the law."

Roy Hattersley, Shadow Home Secretary on night of 'disturbances' in Birmingham, Oxford and Cardiff.

Here spokespeople for the two major political parties in this country give their predictable analyses of the recent riots in Birmingham, Oxford and Cardiff. All actions are lumped together and the persons involved labelled 'hooligan' or 'yob'. And typically there are cries for more power to the police - and more obedience and acquiescence from people like ourselves.

The events of Birmingham, Oxford and Cardiff - and later Tyneside - deserve more thorough analysis than that displayed above. It is not enough to resort to punitive - bring back the Riot Act - cries and child-like name-calling. We would, however, have been naive to have expected otherwise. The media was swamped with interviews and statements from government representatives and chief constables from the varying regions. Visual images on television portrayed mindless acts of violence and devastated victims like the Asian shopkeeper who had "lost everything". In Newcastle a woman was shown explaining how she had been worried for her bairns' safety and described how she had (temporarily) fled the area.

Only some mention was given to unemployment, to social deprivation and to the boredom and hopeless alienation of being a young person in the 1990s. No mention is given to the inevitabilities of all these within capitalism. Comparisons were made to the 'Race riots' in Brixton 1981 and the experts decided that the riots of 1991 did not involve a 'race' element. The prevailing consensus was that the pathological few had got out of hand, the police had acted appropriately and commendably, and that the rest of us can now rest in our beds. If anything comes out of this it will be increased power and resources for the police; extra riot gear and fast cars to chase "joy riders" to their deaths. If the are any sociologists out there studying the machismo involved in stealing cars then please too can you look at the perverse pleasures grown men in uniforms appear to get from running such cars off the road.



Meanwhile residents on the Meadow Well Estate in North Shields can go on battling their way through the endless drudge of low income, social and economic isolation and marginalisation. They will see more of their space and resources destroyed; only recently their community rights centre, which housed a Credit Union and mental health group for local people, was closed own through poll tax capping. The police and other authorities can go on coercing and harassing, whether it be the police stopping a young man because he is wearing a coat which looks too good for him or a D.S.S. visitor taking a young woman's book away because she is allegedly cohabiting. 16 and 17 year olds will continue to be given the "choice" of slave labour in the form of Youth Training Schemes or no benefit. And children will go on relying upon clothing vouchers and free school meals. Cars will still be stolen and ramraiding will continue. As far as their circumstances go, nothing has changed. Similarly those people in Handsworth, Birmingham who raided shops whilst the electricity was down will still take their chance should the opportunity arise.

Looting, rampaging and overt scenes of violence are "unacceptable" in that they are too overt and performed by the 'underclasses'. The violence of the ruling classes is far more covert, pernicious and devious. That is acceptable!

The state and the capitalist class do not need to use such methods - everything else is stitched up in their favour (which relies heavily upon the old myth that if you want things changed then you must go through the proper channels - their channels). Going through proper channels is a weak palliative and one which is designed to ensure conformity and servitude. Riots are but one expression of disenchantment with such facile activity.

Carolyne Willow

# WE WANT IT ALL - RIOT NOW!!

When Meadow Hill and Blackbird Leys hit the headlines they confirmed that 'riots' have indeed become part of the urban scene. In the wake of the 1981 and 1985 confrontations and last year's Battle of Trafalgar Square, they are a promise of many more to come.

Establishment voices have responded in two ways. Regressives like Kenneth Baker and Roy Hattersley have gone down the law and order track calling for more police. Progressive voices, however, have suggested a more 'sympathetic' approach. They know that despite the massive investment in policing over the last ten years this has not and cannot provide a solution to the unemployment, bad housing and 'education for nowhere' that is the lot of the riotous youth on these estates. They know that the police cannot arrest the alienation, boredom and frustration out of which riots flare.

But if the regressive and progressive voices of the establishment disagree over how to respond to these events their aims are identical: to protect the institutions of British capitalist 'democracy'. In that sense their rhetoric is not contradictory but complementary. An example of Sergeant Nasty and Inspector Nice!!

What the progressives cannot possibly see - or if they do see, acknowledge it - is that it is the very nature of capitalist society that causes urban explosions. As boring and old-fashioned as that might sound. Instead they mourn the 'collapse of authority and respect', the 'decline of family' and the evaporation of 'that sense of cohesion' which kept working class communities together even in times of direst poverty. And they call for investment in training and education, youth projects and pilot schemes; and resources to NACRO rehabilitators and other social work intermediaries.

Following the disturbances in the early 80's the state responded with an array of cosmetic interventions which changed not one iota the lives of life chances of the people living on the estates of the inner cities. There were community policing initiatives, training schemes, urban aid programmes. Heseltine parachuted into Liverpool with a flower basket and LEA's pushed 'multicultural education' as a sop to black youth. At the same time the police geared themselves up for the next time; collected new weapons, discussing tactics, liaised via the national computer and the Association of Chief Constables.

As urban youth again threatens the comfort of the status quo, regressives and progressives will champion their complementary strategies. The House of Commons, the quality press, late night TV will all sound to the drums of a non-debate.

But what scope is there for intervention? Certainly heavier police tactics will be justified on the grounds of stemming the rise of criminality and lawlessness. We will see CS gas and rubber bullets - the policing armoury tried and tested on the streets of Northern Ireland - before too long. And the trend towards centralised co-ordination and control of policing will gather pace (if only because poll-axed authorities won't be able to afford the cost of policing).

But as for the soft approach, the scope seems decidedly limited. Training schemes and the 'new vocational' education have been central to 'youth policy' for the last ten years; but it is these schemes and this so-called education that young people are so

vehemently rejecting. They know that they are onto a hiding for nothing. But to introduce 'real' training would be to encourage aspirations and expectations that the state is in no position to meet. Frustrated aspirations are a very dangerous thing.

There might of course be a state sanctioned 'ram-raider' park set up in Oxford say, run by the local community copper (as an intelligence gathering exercise). Or there might be some money put into shop front projects in the hope that glossy brochures and a lick of paint might generate, at least for the moment, an impression of hope and change.

But what neither riot police nor community can deal with, however, is that Britain's ruling class has no need of vast sections of the working class and that this 'reserve army of the unemployed' (the 'never employed' as Sivanandan calls them) are going to get out of hand.

It would be good to be able to leave it there, looking at a not too distant future where inner city youth confronted the police - the visible face of state oppression - with petrol bombs at every opportunity. Where, in the estates in and around the inner cities, 'law and order' collapsed in confrontation and the class oppressive nature of the 'democracy' became clear to all. It would be wrong to be so sanguine.

Riots are not uniform phenomena. They combine different ingredients. Some might be highly politicised, others might be simple explosions of frustration. But where riots lead is an open question - and not every blow against the system is a blow for 'revolution'. There is common ground between Brixton, St. Paul's and Toxteth and Meadow Hill and Blackbird Leys. They share in common a defence from police incursions into territory and lifestyle (be it dealing dope or racing stolen motorcars). They both involved groups of people who are fundamentally disenfranchised. But there are differences too. In Brixton a class unity was catalysed by state racism and black and white youth fought together against a common enemy in a police uniform. But the riots of last month were riots of white youth on white estates and were provoked not by racism, or the poll tax, but by heavy handed police disapproval of car theft: the ingredients are different. This youth will be looking for answers. And these answers will depend not only on the conclusions it draws for itself, but also on what possibilities are being offered to it. Fascist organisations are well aware of the potential that exists amongst the frustrated never-employed white youth and are making efforts to turn their anger and disaffection down frightening channels. It is a small step between petrol bombing a police van and petrol bombing an Asian shop!

Whether those petrol bombs remain targetted at the police and the anger beomes 'class conscious' depends very much on what contribution the revolutionary left can make. And making that contribution means first of all recognising that urban youth are not only alienated from 'official society' but from the left as well. Whether the paper selling preachers of the revolutionary left have it within them to stop preaching and start communicating remains to be seen.

*John French*

# VOTE LABOUR AND STILL DIE HORRIBLY

As another general election looms, the same old moralising about one's "Duty" to vote will be bandied about. As someone who has yet to see any merit in "electing" MPs of any brand name, I'm getting pretty tired of the predictable objections to my abstentionism. Below I list the most common of them, and try to reply as directly as I can, in the (misplaced) hope of seeing the back of them forever.

## 1. "What right have you to criticise a government if you didn't vote against it?"

The argument here is that non-participation in an election is not a political act. This has two levels. First, it equates political activity with parliamentary politics. But as anyone who has engaged in grassroots politics (anti-poll tax campaign, housing co-ops, strikes) knows, this is nonsense. Every significant choice I make has a political component, from my choice of union to my choice of pub; and this includes the choices you cannot make, like staying home because you can't afford a babysitter.

Second, not voting is seen as being resigned to your fate. But on the contrary, not voting can be active, more so now than perhaps ever before. Today people are increasingly cynical about parliamentary politics, left or right. This will be manifested in probably the lowest ever turnout in the general election. The role of the abstentionist is to radicalise this tacit rejection of the system, showing how widespread disinterest in party politics is already part of a progressive social and political struggle.

## 2. "Working class men, and later women, had to fight for the right to vote. By not voting you're letting down your comrades."

But there is no contradiction between supporting these autonomous struggles and not voting. For example, the Women's Suffragette movement was historically and politically justified, because it provided a focus to mobilise and radicalise the struggle for equal rights with men. And to gain suffrage was essential, for without it you are not in any position to meaningfully abstain from it. Universal suffrage has certainly not, in itself, improved the material conditions of women or workers.

It is also still the case that the most marginalised people in society still don't have the chance to vote: 16 and 17 year olds who are forced onto YTS schemes; prisoners; those in mental hospitals; people who have not registered because they cannot afford the Poll Tax. At the same time, ex-patriots who have not lived in the country for years still have voting rights, and are constantly informed of this right. So one could justifiably argue that, by voting, you are legitimising those exclusions and those privileges.

## 3. "Isn't it better to have a Labour government than a Tory one?"

This objection takes two forms. The first is the Trotskyist assertion that when we get a Labour government everyone will realise how crap it is and will join the revolutionary vanguard to overthrow the state(!). As usual with such speculations, this is a totally unsubstantiated claim, and you could just as convincingly argue the opposite. And it misses the contemporary context - that more and more people already know that

Labour is crap, and don't need a government to prove it. As usual, the vanguardists are happy to sacrifice other people's self-determination for a future tactical advantage, selling the lie of voting making any difference.

The second form to this objection is that, however slightly, it would improve the worse off in society if Labour were in power. Therefore, we have a moral duty to vote them in. The recent riots have shown how the poorest in society can articulate their own frustration at systematic state deprivation of their basic needs - they don't need the misplaced piety vote of guilt-laden middle-class liberals. Also, the extent of social improvement possibly found under Labour is absolutely marginal compared with the social inequalities that will remain in place. Kinnock and his cohorts are publicly and arrogantly committed to the maintenance of capitalism, and sometimes sound more right-wing than Thatcherites. For example, out of 67 poll tax prisoners in England and Wales, 40 have been sent down by Labour councils. And private discussions are being held over the usefulness of the US 'Workfare' scheme, in which the unemployed are forced onto work projects for no extra benefit. It is in Labour's interest (and they will fanatically pursue it) to sustain the huge gap between rich and poor, to suppress autonomous struggles with truncheon and plastic bullet, to consolidate the power of the MOD and Whitehall, to appease the managers at the expense of the managed. The official Labour response to the recent riots, just like the Poll Tax Riot, is just one graphic example of how implicated they are in the repressive state apparatus - even as the Opposition, where you'd think they'd want to score political points by opposing Tory hysteria and paranoia (see the Gulf War), they toe the Government line. And all this isn't even to begin to talk of what they did when they were in power: their sell-out of workers in the Winter of Discontent; massively increasing punitive powers of the police; tightening immigration criteria to debar many people; introduction of the the Prevention of Terrorism Act; blithely causing social and economic chaos. And this was a Labour party much further left than it is today.

4. *"Such a response to the parliamentary system is purely individualistic."*

There is some truth in this objection, but only when it assumes that the abstentionist position does not involve any collective mobilisation. Now, I cannot be held personally responsible for the absence of such a movement, especially when we recognise that abstentionism is barely thinkable within the dominant discourse on democratic politics. Party political broadcasts are awarded according to how many seats you are contesting at the next election, thereby debarring any media coverage of abstentionism. Collective action is a necessary goal: I seek to make it more possible by my public stance on the issue, to encourage others to do the same.

But at the same time, it is also true that voting, as it is now formulated, is almost completely individualistic. We are encouraged to give our opinion once every five years, but do nothing in between. Voting is an isolated act for isolated people, giving them the impression that they are part of a great collective exercise when in fact it is only an exercise in propoganda. It hardly needs adding that one vote will never make a difference to the final result...

5. *"Not voting is a puritanical rejection of the system which is hopelessly idealistic and ignores political realities."*

I hope the above responses show that abstentionism is not idealistic. Rather, it is voting which is idealistic, if not downright dishonest, by promoting the illusion of participation in how the state runs. Voting gives no genuine participation - polls only matter once every five years - and by not voting I am refusing to pretend otherwise, refusing to collaborate in the whole sick charade. Real decisions in the state apparatus are made by obscure civil servants and corporate-financed lobby groups (non-accountable even by the state's political standards), and implemented by all the repressive forces of law and order and economic sanctions. Direct participation is impossible in such a system. What abstentionists are pointing out is that a great deal of people are already acting on this knowledge.



Simon Scott

# Understanding the Irrational

In 1973 the libertarian socialist group "Solidarity" produced a pamphlet called "The Irrational in Politics", which explained how the psychological theories of Wilhelm Reich might help us to understand both the dynamics of class struggle and the actions of the Leninist left. Since then, psychological theory has moved on a long way. This article, the first of series, offers a critique of Reichian (and other) theories, and paves the way for an understanding of how an explicitly SOCIAL psychology may be useful to revolutionaries

## 1. Why Psychology?

An understanding of psychology is useful to political activists because politics, both in theory and in practice, has a large dose of psychology buried inside it.

On the most everyday level, whenever we write a leaflet or go out flyposting our immediate concern is with psychology because we are interested in other people's thoughts: what do they think now, and how might we encourage them to see things differently? Whilst political considerations determine the analysis and strategy that we offer, attempts to enhance its impact have more to do with psychology than politics

At the level of political strategy, questions of psychology are even more important. In 1946 the renegade psychoanalyst and Marxist Wilhelm Reich said that the political problem which psychology tackles:

*"...is not why the starving individual steals or why the exploited individual strikes, but why the majority of starving individuals do not steal, and the majority of exploited individuals do not strike"<sup>(1)</sup>*

Today, it seems that we are nearing the end of twelve years of the most openly right-wing government this century. Twelve years of cuts in local council services, welfare benefits, the health service and education, and a series of monetary and fiscal strategies designed to redistribute wealth in favour of the already-rich, have left the vast majority of people in this country worse off. Alongside these material changes we have seen less tangible but significant changes in the law. The enforcement of secret strike ballots on unions, the continuing legislative onslaught on lesbians and gays, attempts to further reduce the already limited access to essential services such as free contraception and abortion, and the continued use of discriminatory immigration policies in order to prevent

black people from settling in this country, and racist policing to further harass those already living here.

Yet these changes were accompanied, not by a rise in class struggle, but by a crisis of confidence in most sections of the organised Left. The Labour Party purged itself of radical rhetoric and "came out" as the party of caring capitalism, whilst much of the extra-parliamentary Left spent the decade blaming other tiny sectarian groupings (themselves engrossed in the finer points of Rizla Origami) for the lack of organised class action, or bickering over the "right-on-ness" of male knitting as a strategy to effect nuclear disarmament and dismantle patriarchy.

Given all of this, the question that Reich posed in 1946 is more relevant than ever before. It highlights the existence of a gap in existing political strategy which psychological theories just might help us to fill.

Looking very briefly at political theory, it is obvious that concepts such as alienation and class consciousness include large elements of psychology. And ultimately all political theories have at their core an implicit psychology, since they make assumptions about what people are like and how those people should relate to their society (for the same reason all psychology, despite the protestations of timid liberals and mindless right-wingers, is profoundly political). Although the political content and interpretation of concepts such as alienation are forever being debated and re-interpreted, it is rare to find any real discussion of the implicit psychology buried within them. But worse still, when psychological ideas are discussed in political circles it is almost always a particular type of psychology - the set of ideas known as psychodynamic psychology. Psychodynamic psychology is far from being the dominant tradition in modern psychology. There are many, many other psychologies, which for now we will roughly categorise as being *behavioural, humanistic, cognitive or social*. Except in clinical practice and therapy, psychology today relies almost exclusively on theories drawn from these four categories. Yet only psychodynamic psychology has had any real impact on revolutionary thought and practice.

## 2. Psychodynamic Psychology & Socialism

Revolutionary socialism has been influenced by many different types of



psychodynamic psychology. Although there are crucial differences between them, they all share some common features. Most importantly, they all begin by inventing some kind of structure for our minds that goes a long way toward explaining our feelings, our thoughts, and the ways that we act. Freudian psychology is probably the best known of all psychological theories, as well as being the first and most fundamental theory of psychodynamic psychology.

According to Freud, we should think of our psychological selves as having three parts: the Id, or the unconscious part of the self that contains our primitive instincts; the Ego, or conscious self; and the Super-Ego, a kind of internalised social self that we usually think of as our conscience. In any situation, people will act as they do according to how these three parts of the self interact - sometimes the Super-Ego "wins", sometimes the Id <sup>(2)</sup>.

In Freudian theory, the relative power and influence of each of these parts of the self depends on how the person has coped with a whole series of crises and transitions whilst growing up. Notoriously, these include his ideas on the Oedipus Complex and women's penis envy, and the claim that mature sexuality (whatever *that* is) is centred exclusively in the penis and the vagina. Freudian theory, despite the undoubted good intentions held by many of its practitioners, is in practice both patriarchal and reactionary. For example, it easily leads us to view anything other than conventional heterosexual relationships as deviant, and encourages us to understand them purely in terms of the psychological illnesses of individuals. Freudian theory is also based upon a demeaning idea of what it is to be human. A critic once caricatured Freud's view of the self as being like *"a fight in a dark cellar between a sex-crazed monkey and a self-righteous nun, refereed by a nervous bank clerk"* <sup>(3)</sup>

Freud has had many followers, some of whom have tried to modify his ideas and make them more useful for revolutionaries. The most influential of these include Fromm, Marcuse, Lacan and Reich. Fromm and Marcuse are both associated with the "Frankfurt School" of



Critical Theory, a kind of sophisticated Marxism popular with academics. Reich made the first thorough attempt to integrate psychodynamic theory with a class analysis, whilst Lacan's re-interpretation of Freud has had more of an influence on feminist theorising. The works of these theorists are not even close to being as male-centred and reactionary as much of Freudian theory. However, their relative merits are not the issue here. The real problem is with psychodynamic psychology itself, which includes Reich, Lacan, Marcuse and Fromm along with Freud.

## 3. The Irrational Left

Although there are many other types of psychology, only psychodynamic theories have had any major influence on revolutionary politics. Why is this?

### Its "true"

Freudian theory, especially, has permeated our popular culture over the last 100 years. Terms which originally had precise meanings in the context of therapy - such as repression, guilt complex, denial, "Freudian slip" - are now used by people everyday when they try to understand and explain the actions of themselves and others. Because of this, psychodynamic "truth" can be found on every street corner. In the same way that many people come to view the world through capitalism's rose-tinted spectacles, and in so doing maintain the legitimacy of capitalist ideology by re-producing it in their own lives, so most of us resort at times to psychodynamic explanations because they have legitimacy in our culture. This doesn't make psychodynamic theory any more "correct" than it does

capitalist ideology - it simply makes it seem "natural" <sup>(4)</sup>.

As part of this culture, Left activists grew up learning how to understand themselves in psychodynamic terms, and so perhaps it isn't surprising that they use the same formulations in their political theorising.

#### Its accessible

Psychodynamic theory may be more accessible than other psychologies because it is relatively easy to trace its evolution and major ideas back to the ideas of a few "great men" (and men they almost invariably were). Its ideas thus tend to be easier to gather together and access. By contrast, other psychological theories that might better explain the world have evolved bit-by-bit. They need to be sifted, sorted and collated to be used by revolutionaries.

#### Demarcation disputes

There seems to be a feeling around on the Left that absolutely *everything* should be understood in political terms. At the same time, it is clear that the contents of people's heads are not easily reducible to the straight lines of any political theory, and so must be explained by other means.

Given this, a psychological theory that focuses on events within the individual may stand more chance of being accepted than others which base their analysis upon more *social* factors. Such social psychological explanations may be seen as trespassing on ground that is more properly political, and hence may not be so readily accepted.

If this seems hard upon political activists, it must be said that psychology, shaped by liberalism and used extensively (especially in clinical practice and occupational psychology) to maintain the status quo and make exploitation more acceptable, must itself bear a lot of the responsibility for this situation.

#### Keeping the Personal.. personal

The slogan "The Personal is Political, the Political is Personal" has been with us for many years now, yet the insights which it summarises have failed to reach many activists.

One reason may be that many people within the activist milieu, and perhaps especially those individuals who are most influential, cannot afford to acknowledge it.

Many activists first fling themselves into political life as a way of avoiding problems in their personal lives: what

better way to regain your sense of self-worth than working tirelessly on behalf of the oppressed and down-trodden?

But even those who *start* relatively healthy are unlikely to stay that way for long: political activity demands dedication and discipline, and makes it easy for people to push their own real needs into the background. Some even turn this into a virtue - witness the note of admiration from Trotsky's biographer who remarked that "I never saw upon his face any mark of enjoyment for anything that he ate or drank"<sup>(5)</sup>. Even in less formally disciplined circles, the political activist may face pressures not experienced by most people: victimisation at work, criticism by and alienation from family and non-activist friends, and additional stress upon loving relationships caused by attempts to conduct them in a "right-on" fashion - and the ensuing guilt when, inevitably, these attempts fail.

Given all of this, a psychological theory which restricts itself to events within the individual is attractive. It keeps a comfortable distance between us as people and the work we do as activists. Also, it helps us avoid confronting contradictions between our beliefs and the ways we live our own lives (so preventing us learning from them).

For all these reasons, and perhaps for many more, revolutionaries have until now relied upon psychodynamic psychology. Considering the problems inherent in all psychodynamic theories, including those of Reich, Lacan, Marcuse and Fromm, this is quite remarkable.

## 4. The Problems of Psychodynamic Psychology

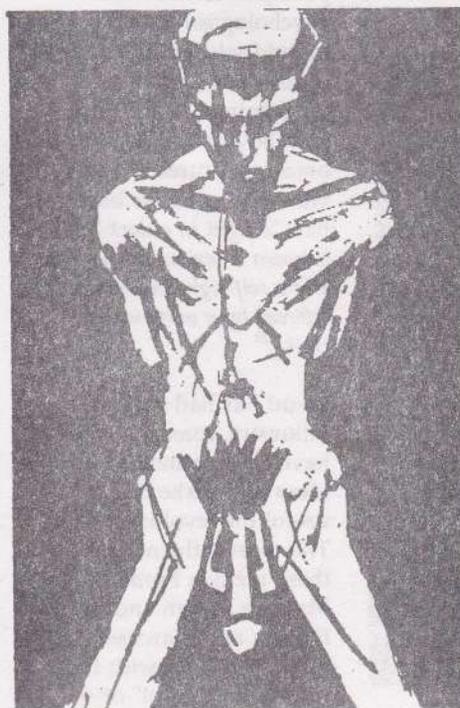
### Unprovable and Irrational

Psychodynamic theories are both unprovable and irrational. They are unprovable because there is no way of showing that such things as the Ego and the Id actually exist. Some people argue that we can prove their existence because they explain how people act, but this is a circular argument - the existence of God can be "proved" by the same means. They are also irrational, because entirely contradictory observations could be taken as "proof" for the same psychodynamic theory. So, if I don't shoot the policeman on the barricades its because the father-figure internalised in my Super-Ego prevented me; if I do shoot him its because I over-reacted to this symbol of authority, which I identified with the father-figure internalised in my Super-Ego. Socialist theory always strives to be rational and "scientific". Although as libertarian socialists we recognise that rationality alone is not enough where people are concerned (Leninism is a rational answer to the problem of bringing about a revolution - morally bankrupt, unworkable and dangerous, but completely rational), and so to avoid the descent into unprincipled pragmatism our rationality must be informed by a-rational *socialist values*, we should still strive for rationality in our theorising<sup>(6)</sup>. But if we are then to keep our political theory and our psychology consistent, we must reject irrational psychodynamic explanations for human action.

### Individualistic

All psychodynamic theories focus our attention upon the individual. Whilst the social world is acknowledged to varying degrees in each, we always see it in and through its influence upon single people. In psychodynamic theory people's actions are, ultimately, explained by reference to the invented structure of their selves.

This often leads us to ignore good social explanations for the things that people do. It also makes it easier for us to view those people who don't conform to the expected morals and behaviour of conventional bourgeois society - people who break the law, or the so called "mentally ill" as deviant or sick individuals. Doing this makes it easy for us to lose sight of the real social problems which these people



were grappling with. As socialists, our aim is to create a better *society*. Our starting point, our focus, is always society, and we are critical of strategies which seem to offer only the potential for individual change. So there seems to be little point in using psychological theories which focus on the individual, theories that do not point to any strategy for social change, that, because of their individualistic nature, never could.

### Elitist

The psychodynamic theories which have influenced socialist thought contain some uncomfortably elitist elements. This is most clearly illustrated by Reichian theory, which understands people's politically irrational behaviour (i.e. their refusal to act in the best interests of their own class) in terms of a conditioning process where sexual repression leads each of us to form "character armour", a defence mechanism which makes us susceptible to authoritarian influences. But this explanation assumes a frightening degree of sexual unhealthiness in the general population, and by contrast confers upon the Reichian activist a libido almost godlike in its wholesomeness.

In truth, human sexuality is not so easily weighed and measured, and its many varieties cannot easily be reduced to simple dimensions of repression and health. But even if this was possible, would we as libertarians want to engage in such an exercise?

### Wider Influences

The acceptance by the revolutionary left of psychodynamic theories, and their penetration into popular culture, encourages people to see such phenomena as "Thatcherism" in terms of one woman's warped personality, rather than as a sustained attack on the quality of our lives by sections of the ruling class. Likewise, it makes more credible the idea that "Kinnockism" is an aberration born in the Welsh valleys, one that could be eradicated simply by putting Tony or Dennis at the helm. A psychological theory which gives support to the idea that a simple change of leaders can solve our problems for us must be criticised by libertarian socialists.

### Failure in Practice

Finally, psychodynamic theories can be shown in practice to have failed to create any real change, or to predict

successfully the course of events. This isn't to criticise them for not succeeding at things they never set out to do: none of the theorists mentioned above believed that psychological change alone could make a revolution, and we don't criticise their contributions because this hasn't happened.

However, in the 1960's the political culture and "counter-culture" were heavily influenced by the ideas of Reich and Marcuse. Their theories of sexual repression and the links between individual and social change were common currency in revolutionary circles, and "free love" became a symbol of the times.

Yet, as feminists documented in the years that followed, the position of women in the movement was (and is) still very much prone. This is barely surprising since the practice of "free love" within the framework of a patriarchal society will inevitably be exploitative of women. But the concept of "free love", by its a-historical and individualistic nature, worked to conceal the enduring power imbalances between men and women and so helped to create the illusion of change. Another failure of psychodynamic theory is in its analysis of the nuclear family. Both Freud (and thus Lacan) and Reich saw the family as a major channel for imposing the dominant cultural pattern upon the growing child. Since the early 1970's, feminists in this country and elsewhere have relied heavily upon Lacan to build a critique of the nuclear family and its effects. But today it is estimated that only 15% of the population live in such a nuclear family - yet submission to arbitrary authority (in both sexes), racism, sexism, and homophobia are still prevalent, and do not seem to be declining.

Clearly, then, the existence of the nuclear family alone cannot account for the situation. Whilst there are many valid critiques of the nuclear family as an arrangement for shared living and child-rearing, it is overly simplistic to include amongst them the assertion that in itself it automatically produces damaged people.

## 5. Other Psychologies

What's even more strange about the Left's pre-occupation with psychodynamic theories is that, within psychology, many of the most progressive theorists abandoned individualistic psychodynamic approaches long ago, to concentrate



upon a more explicitly *social* psychology of the person.

As long ago as 1934 the American G.H. Mead laid down an essentially materialist and dialectical theory of how the self is formed in social interaction. Earlier still the Russian developmental psychologist Vygotskii studied child development and education, and described how each of us is the product of our society, intimately shaped by its ideas, morals and values (although his work, suppressed by Stalin because of its profound implications for child education and society in general, didn't become widely known until the late 1960's).

And most recently, a movement within psychology known as *social constructionism* has integrated ideas from sociology, semiotics, anthropology and linguistics to mount a sustained attack on bourgeois notions of the self and society. Social constructionism mounts this attack by showing how even the emotions we feel are shaped by social factors.

As far as most revolutionaries are concerned, though, all this might never have happened. This article, and the ones that will follow it, are an attempt to begin redressing this imbalance.

## 6. Levels of Explanation

It was mentioned earlier that non-psychodynamic theories aren't generally as accessible to revolutionaries, due in part to their more piecemeal evolution.

So, before they can be successfully applied, we need a framework to put them all into. This framework is provided by the idea that all these theories operate on different *levels of explanation*<sup>(7)</sup>.

What this means is best explained by analogy. If you're trying to fix a car engine, you're unlikely to use the ideas of particle physics or quantum mechanics to help you. Instead, you'd use ideas drawn from engineering, mechanics and hydraulics. This doesn't mean that particle physics or quantum mechanics are wrong - just that they aren't particularly helpful to us when we're trying to understand car engines. Similarly, the failure of mechanical engineering to explain the processes involved in a nuclear explosion doesn't mean that it isn't useful for building bridges and dams. Each of these theories simply operate on different levels of explanation.

Psychological theories, similarly, work on different levels. Here is the framework that future articles in this series will adopt when psychological theories are discussed:

#### Level 1 - Ideological

Someone famous once said that "the dominant ideas of an epoch are those of its ruling class". It is in this sense (rather than in the sense of ideology as contrasted with "fact") that there is an ideological level of explanation for human behaviour. At this level we see how deeply held and often implicit assumptions and value judgements are continually being manufactured and used to mold "public opinion" in favour of compliance with the overall pattern of capitalist social relations. This includes ideologies of racism, sexism and homophobia, as well as many more forms of oppression that haven't yet gained the prestige of being called an "ism", but are nevertheless powerful - an example is the prejudice and discrimination suffered by many people who are visibly "overweight".

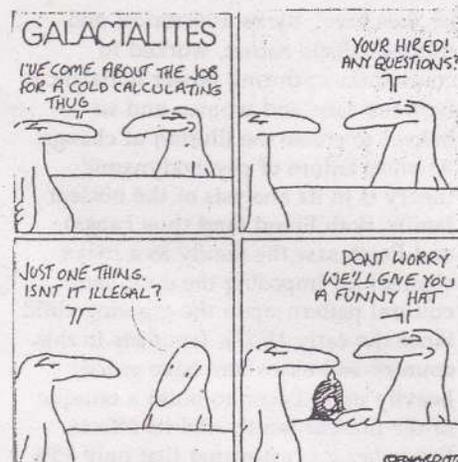
#### Level 2 - Positional

People see themselves in certain ways, and are seen by others too, sometimes as a result of the social roles they fill. The riot cop with a truncheon may well be a caring sort of bloke when at home with his family and kids - but on the picket line he'll be a total bastard and a prime candidate for the nearest bacon slicer. "Its nothing personal," said one officer a few years ago as he arrested me - and in a sense he was right. If it was only coppers that had their

perceptions distorted in this way by the influences of power relationships and group membership then there would be little of interest here - but it isn't. The same processes operate, for example, within political meetings when sectarian faction fights take place. A better understanding of how they work might make us libertarians (traditionally bad at "winning the argument") better able to tackle the forked-tongued reformists.

#### Level 3 - Interpersonal

This is the level where most forms of oppression are played out in everyday life. Racial and sexual prejudice, the clashes between class and gender analyses, the strain of being "right on" - all make themselves felt on this psychological level of explanation. They also become enmeshed with personal histories and relationships, and it is



perhaps here that the contradictions between political theory and everyday practice are both most obvious and most contentious. A better understanding of how the person is socially constructed might help us pick our way through this minefield.

#### Level 4 - Individual

After all that, we're back at the individual - but from a very different perspective. Whilst social factors on each of the three levels above are important, of course there are also individual differences in perception and temperament to be taken into account. But such explanations are relegated to fourth place in this framework, in order to reverse the hierarchy of explanation which psychology in general, and psychodynamic theory in particular, has tended to adopt. So, we look first at the social reasons for people's actions,

reasons derived from psychological theories that operate on levels 1,2 or 3. Only then do we proceed to explanations based upon Level 4. However, just because we are now focusing upon the individual does not mean that we must be as asocial as the psychodynamic theories would lead us to be. There are other theories of the person that are much more useful for our purposes, since they easily allow explicit links to be drawn between explanations on each of these levels.

The single aim of slotting psychological theories into this framework is to help us avoid the mistake of misusing them by trying to make them explain things they never claimed to address. Of course, the framework is neither rigid nor precise: in reality the levels are not distinct but blur one into the other, and many psychological theories do straddle two or more levels. Nevertheless, it does highlight the inadequacy of trying to use (for example) psychodynamic theories which operate primarily on levels 3 and 4, to understand social revolution - a change which needs to take place on levels 1 and 2 as well. Further articles in this series will explore the relevance of psychological theories on each of these levels for the development of the libertarian socialist project.

John

#### Notes

1. In "The Mass Psychology of Fascism" by Wilhelm Reich (1946). Also see the original Solidarity pamphlet "The Irrational In Politics" by Maurice Brinton - still available.
2. This is a vastly simplified sketch of Freudian theory. Considerations of space prevented a more detailed exposition. It should be noted that this simplistic outline is in no way the basis for the critique of psychodynamic psychology offered in section 4 of the article, which in fact would have gained considerable force if there had been enough space to elaborate further what psychodynamic theory looks like in practice. The non-psychologist interested in reading more should refer to Paul Kline's book "Psychology and Freudian Theory" (Methuen, 1986) for a basic account of Freudian psychodynamic theory, before attempting to read Lacan etc.
3. This quote is attributed to the late Don Bannister, a CPGB member and miner who later in life became a clinical psychologist.
4. In their book "Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia" (1984) Deleuze and Guattari suggest that psychodynamic theory is a set of social myths constructed precisely to legitimate social practices which would otherwise seem indefensible.
5. "The Assassination of Trotsky" by Nicholas Mosley (Michael Joseph, London, 1972). This book is also unintentionally revealing for its descriptions of the family life and relationships of Trotsky.
6. See "Critical Social Science" by Brian Fay (Polity Press, Cambridge 1987) for an accessible discussion of the essential a-rationality of values, and their importance to the libertarian socialist project.
7. This framework was suggested by Willem Doise in the 1986 translation of his book "Levels of Explanation in Social Psychology" (Cambridge University Press)

# OUTING AND ABOUTING

This summer an organisation called 'Frocs' - Faggots Rooting Out Closeted Sexuality - enticed the media machine into believing they were going to forcibly pull out of the closet (no doubt kicking and screaming) 200 prominent politicians and celebrities. This provoked a wave of moral indignation, particularly but not exclusively in the tabloid press, about the invasion of privacy this would cause. At a nevertheless packed press conference at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre on August 1st, it was revealed to be a hoax, intended to expose the hypocrisy and homophobia of the media. In this it certainly succeeded. But the issues the strategy brings up aren't likely to go away, as we see a resurgence in lesbian and gay militancy (*Outrage* and *Queer Nation*).

In trying to decide how I, as a bisexual libertarian socialist, feel about outing, I shall try and wade through those arguments, for and against, which don't seem good enough.

One of the main arguments against outing is that it increases fear and prejudice, making it more difficult for others to come out themselves. For example, if a Tory M.P. is 'outed', he or she will probably be deselected by the local constituency party, increasing the enforced non-visibility of gay men and lesbians. Such was the fate of Labour MP Maureen Colquhoun.

But it is surely untrue that a strategy which reveals the *extent* of homophobia, practised on a daily level but kept away from public attention because so many public figures dare not speak their sexuality, is contributing to that homophobia. I think that outing is a strategy which polarises the issues, and this is sometimes necessary and positive. Whether or not the time is right is another matter, but at least a parallel can be drawn with the militancy of the British Suffragette movement: by breaking the law they risked an entrenchment of misogyny and sexism, but succeeded in polarising the lines of sympathy and antipathy towards their cause.

The other major objection is a moral position about the right to privacy. Whether or not such absolute rights can exist is another matter, but it should first be pointed out that outing, as envisaged in the UK and undertaken in the US, only targeted figures in positions of power and/or influence. This is not to argue, as some have, that being in the public gaze is the price you pay for loss of rights to privacy - this is the rationale of the worst muck-raking journalism. Rather, I follow John Scagliotti (director of *Before Stonewall*), who makes a distinction between a *passive closet*, who tries to survive as best as possible in an environment unsympathetic to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, and an *active closet*, who not only puts on a heterosexual mask, but who promotes compulsory heterosexuality by word or deed. Examples would include MP's who vote through homophobic legislation, celebrities who insist on their sexual "normality", and the recent case in America, of a high-ranking Pentagon official in the defence department virulent in its repression and persecution of homosexuality in the US military.

Libertarian socialists recognise that institutions are not abstract, but are peopled. In this case, those homophobic institutions, such as the pop industry and local/national government, are peopled by those who, if gay, lesbian or bisexual, have at least an ambiguous relation to the power thus conferred on them, and who are always complicit with the privileges they enjoy. I am talking about people who are not simply where they are by hiding their sexuality (after all, we are all constantly living and working through contradictions in the way we survive), but about people who are actively sustaining



the hostile atmosphere which makes coming out so costly, emotionally and materially.

Admittedly, other "outers" consider more "closets" to be valid targets, but at the moment this does not seem acceptable. First, it plunges people into a malevolent environment they may not be ready to deal with - an abrogation of the choices they make for living their life. Second, coming out itself is still, I think, caught up in notions of the confessional: you purge yourself of heterosexuality to join the gay community (this also partially explains the antagonism felt towards bisexuals from lesbians and gay men, though there are other factors). Outing, as the flip side of coming out, has the element of the denunciation, even (though only symbolically) of the inquisition. If you are outed, you are not only exposed to abusive straights and heterosexist institutions, but separated from the support of the gay communities. So you are also denied the chance of making a *political* choice, of open commitment to gay and lesbian politics. There is also the danger, parallel with the fixation on coming out, of rigid demarcations pitting heterosexuality against homosexuality, with no room for anything in between. Again, this may be tactically justified in the face of the homophobic backlash, but not when it adds to the ostracisation of bisexuals within the gay communities.

This tendency within the *rationale* for outing has led to an overemphasis on the importance of individuals: the outing of celebrities comes close to an unthinking fetishisation of "stars" which loses touch with the self-conscious irony of camp. For these reasons I think outing should be reserved for those who are actually damaging to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, for these are people who have no part to play in lesbian, gay and bisexual politics. But as a libertarian socialist I have to be wary of the claims set up for this tactic. For whilst I would accept the outing of a judge who supported the imprisoning of seven men for enjoying consensual s/m sex in private, it is not along the lines that this will help liberalise the judiciary system: the latter will always be controlled by the ruling social forces, which will always be directly and indirectly oppressive to one social group or another. My support for outing needs to contain this recognition, to prevent the slippage into single issue politics. Outing may be seen as a transitional phase of gay and lesbian militancy, symptomatic of a stronger, more confident young generation of lesbians and gay men who want to radically politicise their own movement. In this lies its potential, and its danger.

Simon Scott

# Is Public Medicine Compatible with Private Medicine?

The re-assessment of public utilities throughout Europe and the acceptance of an expanding private sphere by the socialist parties calls for a serious assessment of the claims made on behalf of private medicine. The case for private medicine is frequently presented in terms of pragmatic reform against a doctrinaire attachment to state-funded health-care. As an ethical principle, it is argued, any society should promote the highest quality of medical health-care. It follows that if the private sphere can provide additional benefits the prohibition of its further expansion is unjust. Why surrender the potential goods of private medicine merely because of an outmoded ideological commitment to public ownership? In any case, libertarian socialists have never supported a highly centralised state-run bureaucracy. Is there, perhaps, an alternative to both privatisation and state-controlled health sector?

The answer to these questions requires a re-statement of the basic premises underlying public medicine: society should provide its citizens with the best health-care available, with access and quality of health-care equal to all. Although never fully realised this ideal once lay at the theoretical roots of the British NHS and, whatever assurances Tory Health Ministers give, is fundamentally at odds with the Government's commitment to a market-oriented society.

Private hospitals necessarily introduce inequalities because in order to compete with free services in the free sector they must offer additional services for which their patients are prepared to pay. This might involve more luxurious accommodation, better food, and more attentive personnel. These minor inequalities simply mirror those in the community in general: staff canteens, executive travel, and other perks for the elite are grudgingly tolerated by the majority of the population. A public health-system could quite easily cope with a demand to offer a few extra privileges to the wealthy, as British Rail have done. But a few extra frills in a private hospital is not the key issue. Of fundamental importance is the question of access to health-care.

Defenders of private medicine claim that an expansion of the private sector would improve access for all. A sound strategy in an expanding private sphere would be to target health provisions precisely at therapies for which waiting lists are longer in the public sector. It could then

be argued that patients who can pay could leave the public sector and consequently reduce waiting time for those who cannot. Pushing the case further, it could be argued that the wealthy have a social duty to do this, leaving better access to resources for the lower paid. Opponents of private medicine, so it would seem, stand accused of perpetuating a system with unnecessary waiting lists.

In theory this might be the case, but inequality of access is nevertheless inevitable if expansion of the private sector coincides with underfunding in the public sector, thus creating a situation where certain services can only be provided in private hospitals. If major new technologies, new screening programmes, are only provided by private medicine then the lower paid will inevitably lose out. Further inequalities may also arise in relation to the quality of care; if the best doctors and nurses are lured away from the public sector. It is, admittedly, hard to predict whether this would actually happen. Despite the current low morale the majority of personnel remain committed to the NHS. Moreover, many of the best doctors are likely to seek appointment to public-sector hospitals which are attached to universities equipped with adequate research facilities. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the greatest problems in British health-care are presently found in low quality private institutions.

The argument that private medicine offers further scope for patient autonomy and choice is frequently employed. This seems to be an important issue among libertarian circles. The strength of the argument from autonomy lies in the possibility of an exit from the public sector for those who, for whatever reason, (maybe a preference for alternative medicine) wish to 'vote with their feet'. A monolithic system, wherein doctors exercise almost absolute sovereignty, might not easily respond to internal criticism whereas an alternative private sector might function as a kind of measuring device for public opinion. If enough leave the public sector then pressure to reform the former will increase. However, if this progressive function is to be performed by the private sector it would



have to abandon its fundamental objective of profit maximisation, captured in the principle of access through ability to pay. For the value of an alternative health-system as a measure of public opinion is minimal if a large section of the public cannot afford to use it. Moreover, deliberate Government underfunding of the public sector with the intention of driving people into the private sector, simply robs the appeal to free choice of any meaning. Far better would be a system where scope to express greater choice was built into the public sector.

Among the other inequities of private medicine are its parasitic nature; its tendency to dump patients on to the public sector when they cannot pay or need resources or access to specialised units only available in large public hospitals. And should the public be asked to donate blood, bone-marrow, or organs in order to increase profits for the private sector?

As we drift towards greater endorsement of private medicine led by a Government, despite the departure of Thatcher, hostile to public provision, it is important that libertarian socialists initiate a broad discussion on the subject of access to health-care, its quality and administration; not just in the spirit of a knee-jerk 'defend our NHS' as it currently stands, but facing up to the problem of its waiting lists, a male dominated profession, and bureaucracy. An expansion of private medicine is not a solution to the short-comings of the public sector; for its underlying premises are incompatible with the principles of justice and equality of access.

It is unlikely that a future Labour Government will prohibit private medicine, but it is important that its growth is curtailed and that wherever it is practised it is subject to strict regulations or popular control compatible with egalitarian principles.

David Lamb

David Lamb is author of *Death, Brain Death and Ethics*, Routledge, 1985; *Down the Slippery Slope*, Routledge 1989; *Ethics and Organ Transplants*, Routledge, 1990.

# flux appeal

Flux has been in crisis for the last six months. In particular, collective members leaving for exotic corners of the globe (well, Manchester and Wales), and the tragedy of our user-friendly printers being closed down by the unkind hand of the official receiver, have created between them a crisis of production which the capitalists themselves would envy.

We need all the help we can get if flux is to continue. Most urgently we need more money, to cover the increased printing bills we will face for future issues. We also need more contributors. We welcome well-written articles on any aspect of libertarian socialism. We're especially keen to have interviews - not with famous people, but simply with people whose experiences illustrate some of the possibilities and problems inherent in the libertarian socialist project. For the same reasons, balanced yet critical accounts of local political events would also be appropriate.

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# FASCISM

The collapse of the so-called communist Eastern Bloc regimes, and the consequent rise of nationalism, have given new impetus to fascist parties in this country and elsewhere. There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, regional cultural identities that were swamped, obscured and in many cases deliberately suppressed by the Stalinist regimes (by such measures as the outlawing of books and languages and the selective teaching of history) are becoming the focal points for popular dissent. This dissent comes to fuel nationalism by the spurious and manufactured linking of people's genuine interest in their own communities with the concept of the nation-state, an ideological manoeuvre which allows genuine and positive anger to be appropriated into reformist and reactionary aims. Nationalism has always been an integral part of fascist ideology.

Secondly, racism, with its close links to nationalism, is also increasing in many parts of Europe, Western capitalist states are still, in subtle and less subtle ways, using the tactic of making ethnic minorities into scapegoats for economic problems that they are fundamentally unable to resolve. Immigrant workers, in the worst paid and least secure jobs, and often living in the poorest housing, have become the target of vicious attacks by alienated white youth.

Racism, too, is integral to fascist ideology, because of its central emphasis on a mythical identification between the individual, who possess biologically inherited racial characteristics; the race which contains the total of these supposedly biological qualities; and the state, which is the political expression of that race and has a quasi-personal relationship with its subjects via its leader - "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer". The phenomena of racism has also been deliberately exploited in recent years by fascist parties, in this country and elsewhere, in their attempts to gain broad-based popular support for their policies.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, fascism is gaining ground because in the wake of recent events capitalism itself is consolidating its global dominance. The right wing as a whole have benefitted from recent events, both materially - in the access they allow to previously restricted markets and labour pools - and ideologically - in the implied vindication of the "free" market and "democracy" which accompanies them. Whilst fascism is not simply reducible to capitalism, it can be thought of as being like capitalism taken to its logical conclusion: the concentration camps were super efficient factories such that even the bodies of exhausted workers became part of the production process - soap from flesh, glue from bones and, more conspicuously, lampshades from human skin.

In this country, fascism is re-emerging onto the streets as Thatcher's removal heralds a potential return to the politics of consensus that characterised the 1970's. By 1979, most popular support for fascist parties like the National Front had collapsed, as Thatcher had stolen all their ammunition and was busy using it to fire shots in the election war. The links that already existed between the Tory Party and the fascist right facilitated the process of absorption amongst the rich power brokers: bodies such as the "Halt Immigration Now Campaign", the National Association for Freedom (now the Freedom Association) and "Aims of Industry", overlapped with groups within the mainstream Tory party such as the



Monday Club and its more secretive successor, "Tory Action". More than 30 Tory Mp's are alleged to be, or have been members of the openly racist and anti-semitic "Tory Action" group - including George Young, Timothy Renton, John Biffen, Nicholas Winterton, Peter Brooks, John Carlisle, and the sorely-missed Harvey Proctor. The success of the Tories in recruiting hard right activists is also illustrated by the appointment in Autumn 1986 of Anna Bramwell as Director of Studies at the Centre for Policy Studies - Thatcher's own "independent" research body (set up with Keith Joseph and Alfred Sherman in 1974), which still provides the Tory Party with many of its speechwriters and policy advisers. As well as being a Professor of History at Oxford, Bramwell was also an active neo-Nazi with links to current and former members of the National Front.

Now, in the post-Thatcher vacuum and with events in Eastern Europe forming an ominous backdrop, fascists seem to be stepping up their efforts at organisation. They benefit as the revolutionary Left does, from the obvious inability of the parliamentary parties to provide ideological direction. The recession and rising unemployment create bitterness and poverty, which the fascists use to garner support for their policies of racial segregation and involuntary repatriation - so

as to get "our" jobs back from the "immigrants". The major fascist organisation involved in public campaigning at the moment is the British National Party, led by long-standing Nazi activist John Tyndall. They seem to be concentrating their efforts on three areas - London, the north-east of England, and Scotland. The National Front are now a far smaller organisation, having suffered a series of damaging splits in the early 1980's. They still maintain a relatively inactive presence in some areas, including here in Nottingham. One of the NF's splinter groups, "Blood and Honour" - based around the "Oi" band Skrewdriver and their lead singer Ian Stuart Donaldson - are also active in the Midlands since Donaldson now lives just north of Nottingham, in the mining town of Ilkeston. The BNP seem to have a deliberate (and by now well tried) strategy to gather publicity. They will provoke whole communities by announcing their intention to march through areas predominantly populated by people of Asian or Afro-Caribbean origin. At the same time, BNP members will embark on a series of vicious and clearly racist attacks, such as beating black people at random in the street - hoping to provoke a violent response, which the racist media can be relied upon to present out of context as a "black" problem. Either way, the publicity which ensues is likely to benefit the BNP.

However, there is plenty of opposition to the fascists. Anti-Fascist Action groups exist in many large cities, and are extremely effective at carrying out the necessary work to monitor local fascists and prevent them gaining popular support. Information is co-ordinated on a nationwide basis, largely through "Searchlight" magazine.

## CONTACTS

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W1M 8JR

**Campaign Against Racism & Fascism**  
BM Box 8784  
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WC1N 3XX

# Lady Birdwood, 78, denies race hate charges over distribution of 'anti-Semitic' leaflets

THE GUARDIAN  
Tuesday October 15 1991

Duncan Campbell  
Crime Correspondent

**T**HE Dowager Lady Birdwood intended to stir up hatred against Jewish people by distributing anti-Semitic literature, an Old Bailey jury was told yesterday.

Lady Birdwood, aged 78, of Acton, west London, pleads not guilty to 10 charges under the 1985 Public Order Act of distributing or possessing "threatening, abusive or insulting leaflets" between April and December last year.

She is defending herself with the assistance of a legal adviser. The packed public gallery was warned by Judge

Brian Capstick after an outburst of jeering.

David Paget, prosecuting, told the court that Lady Birdwood had distributed leaflets entitled *The Snides of March* and *The Ultimate Blasphemy* in the Westminster area of London. Local residents had complained after finding them put through letter-boxes and under windscreen wipers.

John Maxton, the Labour MP for Glasgow Cathcart, had also complained.

Mr Paget said: "This case is to do with race hatred. It concerns the distribution by Lady Birdwood last year of anti-Jewish leaflets and of her possession of further anti-Jewish leaflets in quantities consistent with intent

to distribute." He said that it was the intention of Lady Birdwood in distributing them, and of the people who wrote them, to stir up hatred against Jews. It was not suggested that Lady Birdwood had written them.

The court heard that Lady Birdwood told police she believed a Zionist element of the Jewish people was planning a multiracial takeover of Britain. She told them that Zionists had a stranglehold on the media. She helped to run two organisations, Choice and English Solidarity. A news-sheet promoting their views was also distributed.

The *Snides of March* leaflet, which was sent to MPs and senior church figures in

April 1990, contained a photocopy of an article in the *Guardian*, which described how Christians and Jews in York were to hold a commemorative service in memory of 150 Jews who had been murdered there by a Christian mob 800 years previously.

The leaflet attacked this "Christian self-abasement" and listed alleged massacres by Jews of other races. It described the second world war Holocaust as the "Holohoax", and urged readers to complain to the Archbishop of York about the service.

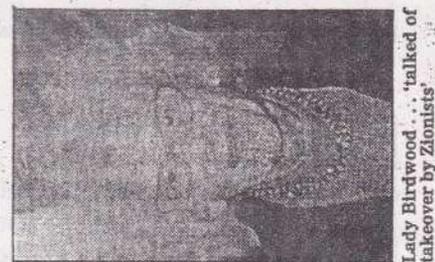
The leaflets suggested that it was no coincidence that police should have been searching last year for the body of a murdered child in

the car park of a synagogue. They said that "exposure of ritual Jewish murder would let all hell loose." They also suggested that Jack the Ripper was a Polish Jew who had benefited from a cover-up.

Judge Brian Capstick warned people in the public gallery after a loud interruption when Mr Paget said that freedom of speech existed in Britain, but "as with all freedoms, there are limits."

Sheila Conway, a social worker, of Westminster, told the court that she was angered by the leaflets. "It was obvious from a few sentences that they were anti-Semitic. I lived through the war and know what happened to Jewish people."

The case continues.



Lady Birdwood... 'talked of takeover by Zionists'

# REVIEWS

*Against Redistributing Poverty: a pamphlet on the State's plans for child maintenance by the Wages for Housework Campaign and Payday Men's Network*

Hackles should instinctively start to rise as soon as the State, particularly under the Tories, begins to murmur about wanting to help us out. But publicity, particularly

adverse publicity, about the Child Support Bill currently slinking through Parliament, has been minimal.

The public face of this legislation has been that it is designed to alleviate the poverty of children by tracing absent fathers and forcing them to pay maintenance. Most people's gut reaction to this is that it's all fair enough. But, predictably, behind the smiley face comes the grim and devious trooper that is the reality of State social intervention. This pamphlet is a look behind that mask. The two groups involved carefully examine the State's real motivations and base their resistance on a perspective far removed from the liberal collaboration of the Poverty Industry.

The most important thing to realise is that the money collected from absent fathers will not go to the women or children. All of it will be deducted from the mother's Income Support (and the proposed Child Support Agency will essentially only be interested in mothers on I.S.). The only beneficiary will be the Treasury.

The only proposal in the Bill which

has proved newsworthy has been the threat to cut single mothers' I.S. by 20% if they refuse to name the father. Indeed DSS interviewers have already been threatening women in this way, illegally. To go by previous tactics, while the State would be only too glad to implement such a policy it may also be willing to sacrifice it as a "compromise", creating the illusion that the legislation is then acceptable. The only dissent raised by an otherwise supportive scab Poverty Industry has centred on this aspect of the Bill, and in fact it has now been defeated in the Lords. It is therefore all the more important not to confine our attentions to this proposal alone. It is also dangerously simplistic to think that the Bill is only an attempt to save Benefit money.

Its major purpose is an attack on women's economic independence from men which Income Support provides. The family has always been recognised by the State as an important instrument of Social Control and there has been vocal political alarm at its increasing self-destruction and abandonment in the UK as everywhere else.

"The financial independence of Income Support has helped women to break away from the traditional division of labour in the family: women as the dependent carers, men as breadwinning tyrants. By breaking away, women have made space for and strengthened the efforts of every member of the family - young people, men and other women - to reconsider what kind of relationships we want to be part of."

*Against Redistributing Poverty, p.4.*

By forcing women back into economic dependency on men it is forcing them back into the family, in contact with and under the economic influence of ex-partners. These men may well feel that they thus have continued "rights" to a relationship - increasing the risks of rape, violence and general abuse. "The State upholds men's power over women in order to uphold its power over everyone."

The only alternative to enforced contact with and dependency on an ex-partner will be to take up waged work on top of the unwaged work of caring for children. This "option" is heartily and explicitly encouraged in the White Paper, "Children Come First" (Oct 90) that preceded the Bill:

"If maintenance were to be received in addition to Income Support payments then the custodial parent would have to earn a higher salary to be as well off in work. It would act as a disincentive to going to work and further frustrate the ambitions which the parents have for themselves."

Quoted from *Redistributing Poverty*, p.12

This idea that single mothers are somehow a) not working, b) desire above all else a job outside the home (in effect a second job), and c) that this is the best route out of poverty, is supported by the Poverty Industry, who consequently come in for some well deserved criticism here. The facts constantly belie this myth: forcing single mothers into the worst paid work by increasing their poverty fulfils only the employers ambitions of hiring workers for less. It should be obvious to all that forcing women

onto the extreme bottom end of the labour markets affects not just the individuals involved but the bargaining position of all of us who have to sell our labour.

This attack and the posing of the two "options" of family hell or low waged work on top of unwaged work is the attack on Income Support as a wage for the work that all mothers do as carers.

It is of course an attack on the poorest men as it extorts a larger proportion of their income. It is also an attack on the Black community especially. Of Afro-Caribbean families in the UK 43% are one-parent/woman-headed and 47% of Afro-Caribbean children are born outside marriage. Therefore Black families and social networks would be proportionally more vulnerable than White families, even though Black families are a minority of those attacked by the maintenance proposals.

It is an attack on us all, not only with the bureaucracies sweeping powers of surveillance as the State intrudes its policing of our sexual and social relations, but in its reinforcing divisions between men and women, forcing us back into relations which long struggles have rejected.

This pamphlet is readable, well-researched and a vital explanation of the motivations behind State action. It is unique in its definition of Income Support and clear in its explanation of the importance of women's economic independence for us all.

"Let us be clear. We are against the maintenance proposals not because we are being asked for money on behalf of children, but because the money is not going to children, it is going almost entirely to the State...which deprives women and children in particular of cash and services they are entitled to, only to further tighten its grip over all our lives."

Payday men's network, *Against Redistributing Poverty*, p.35

"The principle underlying this publication is: single mothers' Income Support is a wage, not charity, for the unwaged work which government and industry could not function without and which they must pay for."  
*Wages For Housework, Against Redistributing Poverty*, p.3

*Against Redistributing Poverty* is available for £1.20 (post paid) from King's Cross Women's Centre, PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU. Cheques should be payable to "King's Cross Women's Centre".

*Open Eye*,  
Issue 1 £1.40  
inc p&tp

*Open Eye* describes itself as "a new magazine challenging media

and censorship", and this it does. The first issue is a special covering issues raised by the Gulf War, and includes the incredible (true?) story of the missing logbook from the HMS Challenger - the British submarine which sank the Belgrano. Other articles look at Bush's promised "new world order" and Amerika's habitual use of covert (the CIA in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Western Europe etc. etc.) and overt (the military in Vietnam, Panama, Grenada, Iraq) force, both to protect Amerikan imperialist interests abroad, and assist in domestic manipulations such as pushing increased defence budgets through Congress.

Also included is "The Cancer Business", an excellent article that is promised to be the first in a series on medical myths and the politics of health. There's stuff on the Economic League, permaculture

and green politics, and even a few poems.

There's a strong emphasis throughout this first issue on the "secret state" and its activities - a direction they look set to maintain, since the second issue promises an interview with *Lobster* magazine about the attempts of MI5 to destabilise the Wilson Government. Not surprising then (given Debord's latest efforts, reviewed in *Flux* #2), that there seems to be an undercurrent of post- and recent Situationist theory in the mag: in fact, they also offer by post a document called "The S.I.: its Art, its Theory, its Practice", as well as an essay by Chomsky "Explaining American Foreign Policy".

So, despite the contact address this magazine is clearly not the work of the SWP. In fact, it's so well produced and tightly written that I couldn't help but wonder exactly whose work it is...but that always happens when I read well-researched stuff on the machinations of the state and the security forces; even my best friends become suspect.

*Open Eye* isn't (on the evidence of the first issue) a mag of heavy theoretical analysis and dogma: they declare in the editorial a desire to avoid political stances which "create more enemies and offer nothing but further conflict and polarisation". Unfortunately they don't elaborate on their own political perspectives, and at this point I could make some criticisms. But that would be carping (and anyway, there's the old saying about people in glass houses...). *Open Eye* is a broad based, informative and entertaining read - definitely a *Flux* "best buy!"

John

*Open Eye* is available for £1.40 from *Open Eye*, c/o Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE.

bell hooks  
*Yearning: race,  
gender and cultural  
politics*.  
Turnaround 1991  
239pp. Price £8.99

"I sat in classes in the integrated white high school where there was mostly contempt for us, a long tradition of hatred and I wept. I wept throughout my high school years. I wept and longed for what we had lost and wondered why the grown black folks had acted as though they didn't know we would be surrendering so much for so little, that we would be leaving behind a history" (34).

bell hooks has a wonderful knack of speaking personally, and with intimacy. This personalism is always linked with wider comment and political critique. Basically she is very skilled at making the personal political; subjectivity is important to her.

This is hooks' fourth book. It is a collection of works focused around postmodernism and its effects upon black experience, resistance and struggle. The above quotation is taken from a chapter which talks about the "Chitlin Circuit". Chitlin is a word which in southern black America refers to the networking and reciprocity present in the small segregated towns. hooks speaks fondly and with pride about where she comes from. She compares the comfortableness, the sense of belonging and collectivity of her growing-up years with that of her grown-up years, where the latter equals disruption, disarray and disorientation. This difference was first made explicit to her upon reaching Stanford University where she met black nationalists and 'black capitalism'. Both of these offered little, especially the latter. Her abhorrence of capitalism needs no justification or exploration (not in this review). With black nationalism her objections centre around the widely held belief that such nationalism will solve the

riddle of history (to borrow a phrase) for black people. She states, "Reinvoking black nationalism is not an adequate response to the situation of crisis we are facing as a people" (36). Her response is to call for the building of "radical black subjectivities" and the subversive engagement of such subjects with popular culture.

hooks has a profound spirituality (involving a belief in God) which runs throughout her writing. Her usage of the works of Paulo Freire comes as no surprise, particularly with the oft-quoted "We cannot enter the struggle as objects in order to later become subjects" (15). She is very concerned about the reclamation of the black self which inevitably involves internal resistance to white-supremacist ideology.

bell hooks is an academic whose work has become 'known' in spite of the system. Ample detail is given to how her white colleagues have typically attempted to pigeon-hole and categorise her. She similarly talks of how the misappropriation of black experience has recently become commonplace in academic circles. Thus it is now chic to have courses on black women writers, to have lengthy debates about "ethnicity" and "difference". Critical and cultural studies courses are positively thriving. She points out, "Words like Other and difference are taking the place of commonly known words deemed uncool or too simplistic, words like oppression, exploitation and domination" (52). She continues, "...Too often, it seems, the point is to promote the appearance of difference within intellectual discourse, a "celebration" that fails to ask who is sponsoring the party and who is extending the invitations. For who is controlling this new discourse? Who is getting hired to teach it? Who is getting paid to write about it?" (54). The simple answer to this is not black people.

Needless to say, hooks appears to be a thorn in the side of her academic peers. She speaks her

mind and does not always speak the way others want her to. hooks wishes to communicate to her own folks which is enough to cause high-browed intellectuals everywhere to raise their arms in the air. Knowledge is for some, not everyone - especially when we begin to talk about "critical consciousness".

Despite this, this book is clearly for those who have already met the jargon of critical theory (this is not typical of all of her writings). Her flowing and talkative style do, however, make easier reading. hooks knows - and feels - what she is talking about. One chapter gives us her recollections of "going home" and of her sisters mocking her for her fancy language and new ways. This made me smile. When her grandmother, Baba, asked her, "How can you live so far away from your people?" (90) the seriousness of what she is saying hits hard.

Feminists everywhere have scorned bell hooks. She is not afraid to criticise our (white feminists) racism and our - up until recently - disregard for black women's experience. In a similar vein, she complains about the in-fighting between black women. This divisiveness inevitably plays into the hands of white onlookers.

The common themes of this book are struggle, resistance, and liberation. New ways of seeing regarding struggle are necessary. If one grips to the equation struggle = organised class action against capital (though hooks recognises the necessity of this element) then this book will not make happy reading.

This is not a book which tries to give "the answer" to all of our ills. It is a postmodernist critique, a radical analysis. hooks argues that black resistance has to be different given the changes in society at large: the circumstances which allowed for the civil rights and black power movements of the 1960's are no longer there - new organisation is necessary. And links

must be made. "Radical postmodernism calls attention to those shared sensibilities which cross the boundaries of class, gender, race, etc..., that could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy - ties that would promote recognition of common commitments, and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition" (27). Anything less can only serve to sabotage and weaken our struggle.

The title of this book is *Yearning*. "Yearning is the word that best describes a common psychological state shared by many of us, cutting across boundaries of race, class, gender and sexual practice" (27). Basically we all want something better.

hooks speaks a lot of sense. Her writing portrays - and evokes - depth of feeling and gives a definite role to the subjective in politics. This book is worth reading.

Carolyne Willow

It was possibly inevitable that this pamphlet should stir up

reminders

of old, well rehearsed and drawn out battles between capitalism and patriarchy. I was prepared for something different. The introduction had promised an "alternative socialist feminism" and talked of "revitalising and re-orientating women's politics". More like hammering the circular shaped peg (patriarchy) into the square shaped receptacle (capitalism). It WILL fit.

The pamphlet begins with an examination of where women's oppression comes from. It traces the development of male domination from "primitive times" through to

*The Case for Socialist Feminism, a Woman's Fightback* pamphlet. 64pp. Price £1.00.

advance capitalism. At this stage all of the right questions appear to be asked - that is, why did sexual divisions of labour develop; why then did men's labour come to be viewed as superior to women's; why did people organise into kin groups; why did marriage/monogamous relationships develop. (Interestingly there are no questions asked about heterosexuality - it is presumed that all women and all men went along with the idea of heterosexual pairing and kinship groupings.) The answers, however, appear to ignore the complexities of the questions. And, indeed the almost impossibility of an absolute analysis. (How far back can we go?) Briefly they (the contributors to the pamphlet) put it (women's oppression) down to production (capitalism extenuating the inequalities already evident between women and men in primitive societies; inequalities born of wo/man's basic needs for survival and man's apparent inability to provide for such needs.) So with this quite simple overview the solution is easy - a proletarian revolution which will "make use of" all us women.

The pamphlet states that for the Workers' Movement not to engage women in the proletarian struggle is a waste. We are to be ushered in, the justification is all very tactical and rational: we make up 50% of the working class (actually there are more of us than they think). Frankly I find all of this a bit distasteful, calculating and lacking in anything "feeling".

The writers would not apologise for this. Indeed they are quite scathing of anything emotive. Again this is predictable.

So is their critique of "Wages for Housework". They view this movement as irrelevant and unhelpful to revolutionary socialism. They dismiss the work of Selma James and the Italian feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa, stating that they falsely locate the private domain (the home and the immediate community) as a place

to organise and fightback as opposed to the public domain (the workplace). Anything other than trade unionism and collective workplace fightbacks are displayed as naive and useless. This explains why they misrepresent this movement and the strong community politics which Dalla Costa advocated. Their critique is bland and distorting and fails to get to grips with the very real problems which the Campaign for Wages for Housework presents.

It is when discussing "Wages for Housework" that women's oppression in the home is touched upon. The drudgery of housework and the isolation and pressures of child-caring are examined but no suggestions given for alternative living arrangements. At one point it is remarked that no-one should have to engage in caring and housework full-time. No-one? The post-revolutionary state-of-affairs is left to one's imagination. Are we to conclude that housework will become a thing of the (capitalist)past? This kind of statement misses the point. Housework and the care of children are oppressive to women because they are seen to be wholly female tasks and are bound up with patriarchal notions of women's inferiority. Women have to look after their men and children. The ideology of marriage supports women's slavery to men and to patriarchy. In a non-patriarchal and socialist society, dinner will still need to be cooked and children will still need to be cared for. What will change is that such activities will not be left to one gender group. In short, cooking, cleaning and washing the dishes will be features of a socialist society - the difference being that we will all be at it.

This pamphlet raises many relevant issues for socialist and for feminists who are also socialists. However, it's tone is predictably narrow and rigid. There is little room for transgression from the "party line" and vanguardism is the order of the day. Feminism in all of it's forms is continually attacked and the intricacies of male-female

